

THE FAITH THAT ONCE FOR ALL DELIVERED TO THE SAINTS

If one will just pay attention to the words used by the writers of the Holy Scriptures, and exercise some discipline at getting beneath the surface meaning of things, some wonderful, life-changing things are there to be learned! I think the book of Jude is a good example.

So many readers of the Word of God know that Jude is the next-to-the-last book in the New Testament. They know that it is but one chapter in length. Beyond that they may not know much about the book, or what it is all about. Hopefully, many of you changed that over the past few days, and as you began to read and study these 25 verses, you discovered something you really needed to know.

For example, think about what Jude wrote there in **verse 1**. After identifying himself as Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ, and a brother of James," he writes: *"To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ."* Now we can read that and give it little thought and then move on, or we can take a moment to reflect on what by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he just said. Jude begins and then ends this little letter with some really encouraging words. Christians are described as those who are called, and those who beloved of God, and we are a people who have been kept for Jesus Christ. Do you see that? All three of those expressions are called passive verbs, that is, the action is something being done to them. They have been called, they are loved, and they are kept. God is the One who calls us, He is the One who loves us, and He is the one who keeps us for Jesus.

Then near the end of this letter, in **verse 24**, notice he says, *"Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord."*

What has he done? He has begun and ended his letter by stressing to Christians throughout the ages that they have a tremendous blessing in being God's children. He called you, He loved you, He has kept you and is able to keep you from stumbling. Furthermore, he is able to present you blameless—I bet you never thought anyone would ever use that word in the same sentence talking about you! But that's what he is able to do. And what about that *"great joy?"* Whose joy is he talking about? God's or yours? Well, of course it could certainly be God's joy, but I suspect in this context it is referring to the joy that we are going to have and know when we are standing blameless in his presence and we are standing there trying to figure out how that happened! I believe we are going to know joy like we have never known in this world!

Makes you want to spend more time on **verse 2**, doesn't it? *"May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you!"*

But I really want to draw your attention to what Jude says in verse 3, because without a doubt, that is the critical point in the letter of Jude.

He has assured them that they are greatly loved, and God has their back, but there is something else that Jude really wants them, and us, to realize. There is a problem that they need to be keenly aware of. Let's read this together.

Verse 3: *"Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."*

Now, I don't want you to take this point for granted, so let's read it again:

"Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."

Notice, he says, I was planning on writing some things to encourage you about our common salvation, but something has altered my purpose in writing. Look at **verse 4**, and you will get some idea of what that something was: He says,

"For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ."

Jude says, I was going to talk about one thing but now I've got to talk about something different. *A problem has arisen*, he says, *that is going to require all hands on deck. The faith that has once for all delivered to the saints is now being threatened.* The threat is so serious that it is going to take all of you to stand up, to contend for that faith. To me, this is an amazing statement, and I submit to you, if Jude's words of warning were needed 2000 years ago, they are needed even more today. Let's take a closer look at what Jude tells us in these verses.

First of all, I want you to think about that word *faith* used in verse 3. Sometimes we use the word faith with reference to the belief and trust we have in God and Christ. That isn't the way Jude is using that word here. He is using the word faith to refer to the teachings and truths made known to us by the apostles. We get a good example of this in **Galatians 1, verse 23**. Paul had been writing about his own conversion to Christianity, and how that some of the Christians were a little reluctant to really trust Paul now. He says, *"They only were hearing it said, 'He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.'"* THE FAITH Paul had been trying to destroy was not just some individual's faith, but the entire system of faith built around the life and teachings of Christ.

Some people want to stress the relational aspect of Christianity, that having a relationship with God and Christ is what it is all about. And that is very true but it is a serious mistake to conclude that because relationship is of primary importance that doctrine doesn't have any importance. When Jude wrote that the faith has been once for all delivered to the saints, he said something very critical! If OUR FAITH is not based upon THE FAITH, we are in trouble. Paul

tells us that our personal faith comes from hearing the Word of God, but if the word of God is tampered with, if it is rewritten, then any faith built on that is in trouble. When the teachings of Christianity get lost and become skewed, people's salvation is in trouble.

Notice Jude did not say "the faiths" that have been once for all delivered to the saints. He spoke about THE FAITH. A lot of people mistakenly believe that it doesn't matter what a person believes or does since we are not saved by what we believe, we are saved by grace. But don't you understand that is what Jude was talking about. People in Jude's day were using grace as an excuse for a sinful lifestyle. People today are using grace as an excuse for believing and teaching false doctrines.

When Paul wrote, as he did in Ephesians 4, that there is "*one body which is the church, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father,*" he didn't mean there were two or three or a hundred and two! There is one, and whatever the Scriptures teach about that one body, which is the church, or that one Spirit, or one Lord, one hope, or one faith, one baptism, or one God, is what people need to know and believe. And, as Jude is telling us, we need to contend for these teachings.

Notice too that Jude wrote about *THE FAITH THAT WAS ONCE FOR ALL DELIVERED TO THE SAINTS*. This is the faith that was given to us by the apostles who had been promised the Holy Spirit by Jesus, and that this Holy Spirit would guide them into all the truth. Thus the apostles received it from the Lord, passed it on to the church, and it became THE FAITH by which souls were saved. And it was that faith that was now being threatened.

Those words, "*Once for all*" mean that it was done and done for all time. It wasn't something that needed to be delivered over and over again. There are a lot of other religions, and faiths that are claiming to be a new word of revelation. In Galatians 1, Paul said we are not to listen to those things, and those who advocate them are accursed. There are a lot of people today, claiming to be Christian who are teaching things and advocating things for which they have no basis in the New Testament.

Second, notice that Jude says this faith that has been once and for all delivered to the saints, must now be contended for by those saints. When its message and truth is being challenged, those who have enjoyed a common salvation from it must stand up and be counted! And I want you to see that this is your responsibility, not just mine, or the elders or a few people around the brotherhood.

The Greek word translated contend here is a compound word that is a strengthened form of a word that is found in a number of other places. The fact that it is strengthened is why some versions like the KJV and NASV translate this verse as "*contend earnestly.*" This is the word which is used in **Luke 13:24**, where Jesus tells his disciples to "*Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.*" The word there is *agonizo*, from which we derive the word *agony*. This same word is translated as "fight" in **John 18:36**, where Jesus says to Pilate, "*My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this*

world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." Paul uses this word in **1 Corinthians 9:25** where he says, *"every athlete who competes exercises self-control in all things."* It is that word "competes." In **1 Timothy 6:12**, Paul tells Timothy to *"fight the good fight of faith."* And it is that same word that he used in **2 Tim. 4:7** when he wrote of himself, *"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, and I have kept the faith."*

Well, who is supposed to be doing this "contending earnestly?" Well, remember who Jude was writing to. *"To those who are called, beloved of God and kept for Jesus Christ."* Does that sound like he is writing to just a few evangelists here and there? No, this is the responsibility that every Christian shares. It is a tragedy that all Christians do not hear these words or step up to their responsibility. I am not sure of all the reasons for that, but for sure it's a problem. There are too many so-called Christians who want to remain neutral, to just be quiet observers of the conflict, take no stand, utter no word, let others do the fighting for them.

Some may have the mistaken notion that it is wrong to strive and engage in debate. And while it is true that there are passages that teach against strife, Jude here urges us here to stand up, to contend for the faith that was once delivered to the saints. We must not love controversy but at the same time we must not shrink back from it when it is the truth of the gospel that is being attacked. Based on what Jude says here, I would say that standing back and doing nothing is not an option for those who are called by the gospel, loved by God and kept for Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, I want you to notice that challenges to the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints almost always come from those who claim to be saints.

Did you notice that, there in **verse 4**, Jude speaks about *"some who have crept in, unnoticed?"* He was talking about this problem arising from some who were counted among the saints. Look at **verse 12**, he says, *"These are blemishes on your love feasts."* Christians of ancient times came together and often shared a meal together just before or after meeting together for worship. That was one way they had of showing their love for one another, by sharing their food. Those who had more and were able became a blessing to those who were poorer and in need. But there were some who showed up at these times that Jude says were *"blemishes."* *"They feast with you without fear."*

Such people are pictured here in not a very favorable light. Look at **verse 12**: *"waterless clouds, swept along by winds, fruitless trees, twice dead, uprooted, wild waves of the sea, casting up foam of their own shame, wandering stars, for who the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever!"*

Notice **verse 16**: *"These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires; they are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage."*

Verse 19: *"It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit."*

Trouble for the church is almost always something that comes from within. In his last message to the elders of the church of Ephesus, in **Acts 20**, Paul warned them that after his departure "*fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them*" (vv. 29–30). The wolves who twist and pervert the faith once for all delivered to the saints are not atheists or skeptics. Most of the time, they are people who profess to be Christians. Often, in fact, they arrogantly think of themselves as being better Christians than anyone else.

Paul said this was going to happen. Peter said this was going to happen. Look at **2 Peter 3:1-3**.

This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, 2) that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, 3) knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires.

I think Jude had seen or read Peter's words. Look at **verse 17**:

"But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. 18) They said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions."

Really when you think about it, almost all of the epistles written by the apostles to the various churches and individuals were written because of problems caused from within. So we shouldn't be so surprised if today we must contend with those who claim to be believers. Too many want to give false teachers and false teaching a pass if it is being espoused by those who claim to be Christians. Well, the record is clear, that is where almost all of our challenges are going to come from, and so, even while we may not like it, we must be prepared to stand up for THE FAITH THAT WAS ONCE FOR ALL DELIVERED TO THE SAINTS.

In closing let me draw your attention to **verses 20-23**:

But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, 21) keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. 22) And have mercy on those who doubt; 23) save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

We need to be a church that is well-built on THE FAITH THAT WAS ONCE FOR ALL DELIVERED TO THE SAINTS. Notice Jude mentions four things here:

- One, build yourselves up in your most holy faith
- Two, praying in the Holy Spirit

- Three, keep yourself in the love of God,
- And Fourth, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

He goes on to say that we are to

- One, have mercy on those who have doubts;
- Two save others by snatching them out of the fire;
- Three, to others, show mercy with fear, hating even the garments stained by flesh.

Remember Jude was writing about those whose specific perversion of the grace of God was that it somehow made it all right to give into the desires of the flesh. They do those things and then seek to find justification for it in God being so graceful. In your contending, you don't deal with everyone in the same way. To those who may be starting to have doubts, you deal with them mercifully. To some who are already caught up in the errors of bad thinking, you may have to take drastic action. To others, you may have to just show mercy, with fear, knowing that because of their veering off into the errors of a perverted faith, they are in great danger.

I am so thankful for this little book we call Jude; thankful that we were given this instruction, this reminder, this warning. *“Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.”*

And with that we bring this year's long study of the New Testament to a close. I hope you have been helped and blessed by it, and that it has helped to revive and nourish your faith. Beginning next Lord's Day we will begin a new curriculum which we are calling Word of Truth Studies. I hope you will get involved and continue to grow with us as we seek to be God's people. [INVITATION]