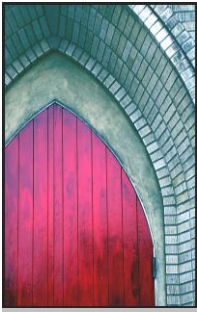


# Contend for the Faith, Pt. 3

TEXT: JUDE 20-25 (ESV)



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## WHAT DID HE SAY?

There is an underlying thought to the book of Jude that we have assumed, but haven't articulated. It is the uniqueness of the triune God of the Bible. In the words of Isaiah, this uniqueness is God saying: "I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God."<sup>Is 45.5, cf. 42.8, 45.18, 46.9, 48.11</sup>

In the context of Jude's letter, this means that God is the one true Judge of all humanity, and therefore the One who gives life and the One who condemns. Though He has enemies, He has no rivals. For Jude, and other writers of Scripture,

judgment is a natural conclusion of God's uniqueness because He alone has the authority to judge, and His uniqueness rejects any challenges to this authority.

We can summarize the specific content of this letter in three statements that also highlight for us why Jude is important for us. **1. What we believe matters.** How we understand who God is and what He is doing in this world has everything to do with our response to Him. The lifestyles Jude describes flow out of a distorted understanding of God and grace. **2. How we live matters.** The decisions each of us makes with regard to how we live—how we treat other people, how we define (and therefore live) morality, etc.—have eternal consequences. **3. How we respond to our sin and the sin of others matters.** Jude wrote to a church full of sinners. But that wasn't their biggest challenge. Sin running rampant—sin that was more than ignored, but encouraged. A group had made its way into this believing community and had distorted God's grace to serve their own ends. And this set the course for their judgment, and for the judgment of any who would follow. The final verses of this letter, help us answer the question, based on this insight, "how do we then contend for the faith?"

## JUDE 20-25

<sup>20</sup>But you, beloved, build yourselves up in your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; <sup>21</sup>keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. <sup>22</sup>And have mercy on those who doubt; <sup>23</sup>save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

<sup>24</sup>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, <sup>25</sup>to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

## INFECTED BUT HEALING

A number of years ago, there was a movie about the fictional small California town of Cedar Creek, in which a deadly virus is spreading. The virus, it turns out, came from a monkey that had made its way from an African jungle to a local pet-store. The

man responsible for bringing the monkey to the U.S., the man responsible for bringing the monkey to Cedar Creek, and the pet store owner, each became sick from contact with the monkey, and eventually died. Somewhere along the way the virus mutates to become airborne—it passed through the air, instead of by direct contact with someone who is exposed. People in this small town begin to get sick, but they think it's just a bad version of the flu. Eventually a team of experts make their way to the town in order to understand what's happening and to stop the spread.

The suspense of the movie builds when the team of experts is unsuccessful in their attempts to stop the virus. We learn that the government has known about the virus for 30 years and had been keeping it a secret while hoping to weaponize it. The anti-serum the government has in stock is unable to stop the virus, and it continues to spread throughout the small town. So more and more people get sick. Most of the public buildings in town become temporary hospitals. The town is ruled by martial law and quarantined—strict curfews, and no one is allowed in or out. Even the experts seem powerless against this virus. The bad guy in the movie, in an effort to preserve his biological weapon, is working hard to convince the government to bomb the town in order to stop the spreading virus. Before the end of the movie, of course, some of the experts there to fight the virus get infected.

As Jude describes a distortion of the Gospel, and goes into great detail regarding the destructive nature of sin. We see sin something like that virus. The story-arc of the Bible is that God created everything, and then this virus—sin—entered the world through the first two humans. They have passed the virus along to everyone who follows them; none are immune. And therefore all face the out-working of this virus: death. Christians are like doctors who have been infected with the deadly virus, but who have received the serum made from the anti-bodies, and therefore have the confident hope of getting better. Our bodies bear the marks of having been sick, but we know that we have found the cure and therefore we have hope, and even look for the opportunity to help those around us who are infected but haven't yet received the cure. The end of this letter is the 'how' of this call to Christians to contend for the faith, as sinners in need of the Gospel themselves.

## "IN THE LOVE OF GOD"

The initial step Jude urges us to take is to fight for the truth of God's love in our lives. He says in the main clause of verses 20-21: "Keep yourselves in the love of God." This idea of 'keeping' started the book, and in fact shows up repeatedly in this work.<sup>1, 6, 13, 24</sup> Of the five other times this idea shows up, 4 of them focus on God as the 'keeper.' Here, we are called to 'keep ourselves' not in the sense ensuring God's love for us by good behavior (something Scripture rejects<sup>Dt 7.6-11; Mal 1.1-5; Rom 8.31-39</sup>), but rather in the sense of living our lives knowing this to be true in such a way that it marks who we are as God's beloved. We must live as those loved by God. This also becomes clear as we hear the direction given in verses 20 and 21 as to what this

involves. We can summarize this in three words: learn, pray, and wait.

Jude instructs us to keep ourselves in God's love by learning: "build yourselves up in your most holy faith"<sup>20</sup> It's not splitting hairs to notice that he does not say "get stronger faith" or "believe more." He's talking about the content of what we believe to be true, it's "the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints."<sup>23</sup> This is growing in our understanding of what we believe to be true. Next he calls us to pray: "pray in the Holy Spirit."<sup>20</sup> This idea, shows up elsewhere,<sup>Eph 6.18</sup> but it speaks generally of praying based on the guidance of God's spirit and rooted in His will.<sup>Rom 8.26-27</sup> Pastor Jack Miller once wrote "But still to pray effectively is more than any human being can work up. I am convinced that prayer . . . is a divine gift that comes while praying." Thirdly, Jude instructs us to wait: "waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ." This says explicitly what the other two ideas assume: we are not enough. We need more than help; we need God's mercy. We keep God's love before us, we mark our lives with God's love, by learning, praying, and waiting.

Learn. Pray. Wait. More than simply a call to read your Bibles more, pray more, and be patient, there is a huge community aspect to this. These are all things we can do by ourselves, and yet in the context of a letter written to a church(es), and knowing the habits of 1<sup>st</sup> century believers<sup>Ac 2.42-47, 4.23-31, 17.10-15</sup> we can't overlook the power of living these together.

## "HAVE MERCY"

Contending for the in this world by fighting for the truth of God's love in our lives must include the outward movement of that love towards whomever is in our path. Jude calls us to fight for the truth of God's love in others' lives as well. Given the context, Jude most likely has in mind those within the church who are in various stages of embracing the distortion of the Gospel that is being presented to them, and yet there is no need to limit the scope of his instruction.

First, he addresses those with questions—"those who doubt."<sup>22</sup> These are people wrestling with honest inner conflict, unsure of what to believe, arguing with themselves. The simple instruction is to "have mercy" on them. Take time to listen and even to understand their questions. Speak humbly when necessary. But don't dismiss or discount. Many people inside and outside of the church have very real questions. We must be careful to do this well, because many see Christians as intellectually weak or dishonest, and therefore as those who circle the wagons out of fear, and don't face honest questions. Jude then addresses those in danger, and describes "snatching out of the fire."<sup>23</sup> "Saving" here speaks of preserving and protecting them from immediate danger that left unchecked, would lead to their destruction. This is a call to intervene where we can. If it helps, picture taking hold of someone heading on a path of chaos and doing what you can to pull them off-course. The third aspect of this progression is moving toward those trapped in sin. We must "show mercy with fear,"<sup>23</sup> knowing the danger of sin that Jude has already articulated for us. We must hate sin—the image he gives us reflects Old Testament ritual law in which even clothing or a house may be affected by uncleanness and therefore keep someone from worship.<sup>cf. Lev 13-15</sup> We cannot take lightly the sin we profess to oppose, nor can we underestimate the reality of temptation even as we help.<sup>Gal 6.1-3</sup>

This letter is a sobering reminder that every ounce of mercy we show to others comes from our own need for that same mercy. We are all in desperate need. As much as Jude has used strong language throughout this letter, we must hear in these words an implicit call to repent ourselves as we move toward others in need. Jude is writing to people about people. The brokenness that we see each others' lives only the surface; it always has a 'spiritual' component—it has everything to do with how they and we see God and understand the Gospel. We cannot forget the need we all have for the Gospel. For those who are questioning, in danger, and trapped in sin, we must approach them with mercy.

## "NOW TO HIM"

These final words of this letter fit into the 'don't read too quickly' category, because they focus the ministry to which we are called on worship. They are directed to God Himself, responding to His Grace and Truth by reflecting knowledge of Him back to Him. In particular, Jude speaks of the saving work of God as the one who is "able to keep you from stumbling" and "to present you blameless."<sup>24</sup> Salvation is God's care for His people, and his changing them into His image. God is working in us the increasing ability to put sin to death and to live according to His will. At the same time, Jude's worship helps us find comfort in God's sovereign ruling over all things. As he does throughout this letter, Jude piles up his thoughts—"glory, majesty, dominion, authority."<sup>25</sup> This is God's beauty, His holiness, His power and His right to rule over what He has made. This knows no boundaries.

The other aspect of God that calls for the worship with which Jude concludes this letter is that of eternity. Two phrases stand out: "before the presence of his glory"<sup>24</sup> and "before all time and now and forever."<sup>25</sup> This frames everything for us. We are called to contend for the faith, because eternity is at stake. The hope we have in keeping ourselves in the love of God and in showing mercy to those in need is that one day, we will be in the presence of God, transformed into His likeness.<sup>1 Jn 3.2</sup> And our confidence rests not in ourselves, but in God whose salvation was planned from eternity<sup>Eph 1.3-10</sup> and His authority to accomplish this salvation has no boundary.

Contending for the faith, and the ministry involved, is not about us. And it is not about people in need. It is about God. Contending for the faith isn't winning an argument. It is not improving our behavior. It is not winning souls. It is an act of worship of the only God, our Savior.

## CONTEND FOR THE FAITH

Beloved, the call to contend for the faith reaches even to Oak Hills Presbyterian church. Study. Pray. Wait. Build into your lives opportunities to spur your own growth in order that you might know the Grace of God and Lordship of Jesus in new ways. Extend mercy to those with questions, to those in danger, and even to those enslaved in sin. Build into your lives opportunities to see and hear those around you who are in need of the Gospel. Strive to know more of God in order that you might show faithfully the mercy He has shown you. And allow your desire to show mercy direct your path to know Him more. As we contend, we do so as doctors infected with the same virus that's killing our patients; we show mercy because we have received mercy we desperately needed. Those who are called, loved, and kept: contend for the faith.