

Contend for the one true faith

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[0 : 0 0] The reading this morning is the book of Jude, which is the book just before Revelation, the last book of the Bible, and you'll find it on page 1233. Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those who are called beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ, may mercy, peace and love be multiplied to you.

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.

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.

Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterwards destroyed those who did not believe.

And the angels, who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains, under gloomy darkness, until the judgment of the great day.

[1 : 2 3] Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.

Yet in like manner, these people also relying on their dreams defile the flesh, reject authority, and blaspheme the glorious ones.

But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he didn't presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, The Lord rebuke you.

It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, Behold, the Lord came with ten thousands of his holy ones to execute judgment on all, and to convict all of the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires. They are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage.

[3 : 2 6] But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, 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 Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority,

Before all time, and now, and forever. Amen. Well, it's wonderful to be with you this morning. I'm going to lead us in prayer as we begin.

Father, we thank you for this letter of Jude. We thank you for its realness in how it speaks to us about the severity of false teaching, And the severity of what happens to those who fall under it.

Father, please, in your great mercy, would we be reassured by your keeping, saving love. And from that reassurance, would we be willing to contend for the faith, once for all, delivered to the saints.

Amen. Amen. Now, there are many ways to deny the gospel. There are many different teachings that you could use to deny it. And some of them we'll be more familiar with than others.

[5 : 28] Prosperity gospel, we know that is a denial of the one true faith. The Catholic doctrine of assimilating other saints' merits, we know that is a denial of the one true faith.

Claims that anyone else other than the Lord Jesus Christ is the way in which we get to know God. We know that is a denial of the one true faith. But there is more than one way to deny the gospel.

In fact, there is a much more subtle and potentially much more dangerous way to deny the gospel. Why subtle?

Have a look down with me at verse 4. For certain people have crept in unnoticed. They've crept in unnoticed.

It's dangerous because it isn't immediately easy to spot. And why isn't it easy to spot? Well, because there are many ways to deny the gospel.

[6 : 26] But these teachers deny the gospel by their behavior. By their behavior. Verse 4 again. 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. In other words, they might teach things that we on a Sunday would hear and we would nod along to.

They would say God is love and we would say amen. They would say God is merciful and we would say yes. And they might say very similar things to us at a Christmas sermon or about the character of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But then after a while we would see how they live. And we would see that they use grace as a license to live how they please. And that's what Jude is referring to when he says who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality.

And deny our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ. They do not realize or they do not want to accept the fact that grace leads to lordship. Salvation leads to adoration.

[7 : 38] Forgiveness should lead to submission. Or to put it another way, our salvation and grace has a purpose. It is to submit to the one true God and worship him as such.

And they deny him not with their words but with their lives. And so what are we supposed to do in response? What are we supposed to do?

And of course this is deeply appropriate at the moment when the leaders in our denomination say so many things that we might agree with.

And yet deny the Lord with their lives. What are we supposed to do? Now we're getting ahead of ourselves. We are in the letter of Jude. And this did we notice in the reading is the letter that Jude did not want to write.

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 that was once for all delivered to the saints.

[8 : 44] Now that is striking, isn't it? Because Jude was written about 30 years after the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. And already within 30 years, within one generation, the faith, the faith that has once for all been delivered to the saints is under threat.

It's under threat within 30 years. And so in one sense that's very reassuring that when we see leaders openly denying the Lord Jesus Christ, claiming to be Christian yet denying him with their lives.

This is normal.

But this is heaven and hell. This is judgment and eternal life kind of threat. And it's difficult to spot they have crept in unnoticed.

Crept in unnoticed. And so Jude wants them and Jude wants us to be ready to contend for that faith. We have three points this morning, which is basically one sentence, three clauses, three, a chain of logic with three steps.

[10 : 15] So we will be going through the first two where we'll be spending most of our time. So if you're worried that we're kind of coming up on 25 minutes and we haven't reached the third point yet, do not fear. I promise we will stick to time.

But the first point is that there is one God, one Lord. One God and one Lord. And this is the first thing that Jude wants to make absolutely clear.

That there is one God and he is Lord. Period. End of story. He has the authority. That is all. And that therefore we are under his authority.

In fact, there is a very good case to make that authority is the key idea in Jude. It's all over this letter. Verse one. Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James.

Verse four. 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.

[11 : 16] Verse six. And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority. Verse eight. Yet in like manner, these people also relying on their dreams, defiled the flesh, reject authority.

Verse 11. Woe to them for they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error and perished in Korah's rebellion. Korah's rebellion was against Moses' authority.

Verse 21 across the page. Verse 21. But keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

And finally, verse 25. Wonderful to have these two verses read in our prayers. Verse 25. To the only God our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord be glory, majesty, dominion and authority before all time, now and forever.

Jude is making abundantly clear in a letter of only 25 verses. There is one God, he is Lord. There is one God, he is Lord. We are under his authority. In fact, Jude makes that clear.

[12 : 23] I wonder if we notice this right from the very first clause. Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ. That word servant, it could also be translated as slave.

Jude, a slave of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what Jude wants to make absolutely clear. And it's striking when we realize that Jude is a half-brother of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, I don't know how many brothers and sisters are in the room currently.

The brothers and sisters in the room, there are, I think. I want you to look at your sibling. And I want you to imagine turning to your sibling and saying, Lord, I am your servant.

We wouldn't, I would hope. But that is what Jude is saying. He doesn't identify as brother. No, I am a slave. I'm a slave of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I won't stand on the fact that he is my brother. I'm a man under authority. Which is in stark contrast to verse 4. The false teachers who deny our only master and Lord Jesus Christ.

[13 : 25] Jude wants to make clear, I'm a man under authority. There's one God, one Lord. His name is Jesus. Jesus, I'm his servant. And these false teachers deny him. My wife put me on to a chap called Pastor Chris.

I had to write down his bio because it was so long. Pastor Chris runs a megachurch in South Africa that also has many, many churches all over the UK. This is what Pastor Chris wrote about himself on his website.

Pastor Chris, the Reverend Dr. Dr. DSCDSCDD. I don't know what those stand for. Multi-faceted teacher, healing minister, television host, best-selling author of the world's number one selling devotional, Rhapsody of Realities, distributed in, can you believe this, 7,858 languages.

Therefore, the most translated piece of literature in history. His teaching ministry has reached over 7 billion people. So if you haven't heard of him, you're in the absolute minority, where he releases the healing power of Jesus on the sick, sending healing to tens of thousands, the testimonies of which are never ending.

There's Pastor Chris. There's his biography. Jude, brother of the Lord Jesus Christ, I'm a slave. The contrast is striking, isn't it?

[14 : 47] Of all the things Jude could have said, I've played for it with the creator of the universe. My brother is God. No, I'm a slave. That's all you need to know about me.

Recently, I was at a conference about this time last year for young ministers. And it was great because they were older ministers there. And it was a sort of mentorship-based conference. And it was wonderful. But there was one moment that was particularly uncomfortable where the speaker was introduced.

And the chap running it, he's about my age, brought the speaker up. And he said, this is X minister, the greatest Bible teacher of our generation. I just want to say, no.

What are you saying? We do not identify that way. The only thing we need to know about this speaker, minister X, slave of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that is how Jude wants to identify. And that is what he makes abundantly clear. There is one God, one Lord. I'm under his authority. I am his servant.

[15 : 51] Which leads us on to our second point. There is one God, one Lord. And one faith under attack. We've seen that lordship and authority is key.

But Jesus' lordship is being denied. And this is where we need to really concentrate. Because it is not a denial by teaching. It is not a denial through words. We've said already in the introduction, it is a denial through how they are living.

They are denying the faith. The one true faith. Have a look down with me at 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 that was once for all delivered to the saints.

Now that phrase, the word the faith, there is unbelievably important for us to get our head around. Jude is not saying my faith, do we see, is under threat.

He's not saying your faith is under threat. He is saying the faith, capital F. The faith delivered once and for all to the saints is under threat. In other words, the deposited in history, static, unchanging gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ that does not change and will not change is under threat.

[17 : 13] Past tense. Once for all, delivered. And if we pause to think about that for a second, we must realize that that is obviously true of the gospel.

If you are a Christian here this morning, you don't believe in something esoteric and spiritual sort of weirdly outside of yourself. We believe that if you had been there 2,023 years ago, if you'd stood on the Lake of Galilee and you'd kind of rubbed the sand between your toes and you'd looked up and you saw the Lord Jesus Christ standing on a boat preaching to the crowds, that you would have seen him in just the way you would have seen me here this morning.

That if you'd been there that first Christmas and you'd walked into the barn and you'd seen Mary lifting a baby out of a manger, you would have seen Mary holding the creator of the universe. And if you'd been there and walked up the hill, up onto the top of Calvary, and you would have looked up and you would have seen that the sky turned dark for three hours, and you would have seen a man naked, nailed to a piece of wood in between two thieves, and you would have seen him cry out, it is finished.

And if you had been there three days later, you would have gone and you would have seen an empty tomb. You would have felt the cold air of the grave on your face as you looked in to see that it is empty because he has risen.

And if you had been there with Thomas, you would have been able to reach out with your hands and touch his side and touch the holes, the nail marks in his hands and in his feet. And because he has risen, he is alive.

[18 : 43] In other words, we believe in a historical, static, once-for-all delivered faith that the Lord Jesus Christ really came, he really died, he really rose.

And so, of course, therefore, any denial of that, either through teaching or through a way of life, is a denial of the one true faith that has been once-for-all delivered.

Why this emphasis? Well, there is a popular trend at the moment of something called progressive revelation. And many of you in the younger generation might have come across a chap called Brendan Robertson.

He is a TikTok preacher. Always nervous if you have the word TikTok before a profession. And he has a very large following. He has a very large following. He's a very engaging speaker.

And he says that because the Lord, the Spirit, has led us into truth, like the patriarchy and like critical race theory, we can take parts of the Bible where Jesus speaks to Gentiles and we can see that Jesus was a racist, that Jesus was a misogynist, but that women spoke back to Jesus.

[19 : 54] Jesus repented. Did you know this? That Jesus was a racist and that he repented? And that the woman spoke back to power because the Spirit has guided us into this new truth. And it's fascinating, isn't it, that you can turn the gospel, Lord Jesus Christ, there is one God and he is Lord, and somehow that can turn, because of the Spirit's work, to Jesus is a racist who needed to apologize.

And this is exactly the same logic that Mormons use. It's exactly the same logic that Jehovah's Witnesses use. It's exactly the same logic that Catholics and Orthodox use to talk about progressive revelation of the Spirit.

But Jude is at absolute pains to make clear here that we are not at liberty ever to do that. There is one faith that the Lord has given, the faith, and it does not change.

And this is the bit of logic that Jude is really, really keen for us to understand this morning, that if you deny his faith, you deny him. If you deny the faith, you deny him.

And you can deny him through your actions. Now, I wonder if we've ever paused to think about that. If we were, for example, to come across a church that said, we believe in prayer, and yet there was never a prayer meeting.

[21 : 13] Do they believe it? If we came across a Christian who says, I believe in purity, and they're addicted to pornography, would we believe it? If there was a Christian who came along to us and said, I submit to the Lordship of Jesus, yet they teach things that Jesus explicitly says you should never teach, do they believe it?

And so we see 44 bishops signing a declaration saying that the safe place for sex is no longer between one man and one woman in marriage, and that if you have sex with a member of the same sex, that that is not a sin.

And yet they profess that they believe the Lord Jesus Christ, even though the Lord says that such people deserve judgment if they are not repentant. Do they believe it? And what Jude wants to make absolutely clear is that people can say everything that they want to say, but if their lives do not line up with their teaching, they deny our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ.

And there is one God, there is one faith, under attack through ungodly living. And so finally, what are we supposed to do? Contend.

This is final point. Contend. Now we would have noticed in the reading that there is not a lot in verse 3 and 4 on what contending looks like. And that will be in two weeks' time.

[22 : 35] We'll get to that in verses 17 to 25. But the word we want to draw our attention to this morning is that word contend. It is the word that we get agony from.

It's the word we get to agonize from. It's a military word. In other words, whatever Jude is about to make clear about what being a Christian means and contending for the faith means, it means it's going to be hard.

It means it's going to be a fight. It means it's going to involve sweat and effort and perseverance. And we must remember that Jude didn't want to write this letter.

Jude is not thrilled and triumphalist, having to write encouraging them to contend. And it would be very, very easy for this series in Jude and for in our conversations afterwards for this to descend into a mudslinging match at the Church of England.

It would be very easy for us to do that. But we must remember that this is serious in the salvation sense. This is not about being right. This is not about kind of claiming that we are the victim that is being suppressed by the big bad liberals in the Church of England.

[23 : 51] No, we are talking about the fact that there is one God and he is being denied and people go to hell if they follow them. And that is what we are concerned with.

So whatever contending looks like, whatever it's going to look like for us as Grace Church Dulwich to contend in the years to come, it will be difficult. But it is because we believe that the Lord Jesus Christ really is who he says he is.

He is Lord. As we conclude, to think about application, the application for this morning is actually going to be much more about our thinking than it is about something that we may or may not do.

And that is to understand that the way that we live can deny the gospel just as much as what we say. The way that we live can deny the gospel just as much as what we say.

They will sound, therefore, false teachers. They can sound just like us. They can wear purple shirts with dog collars and a lovely staff and a huge cross around their neck.

[25 : 01] And they can preach about grace and mercy and love and acceptance and tolerance. And we can say, Amen. And then we see their lives.

And they say, Sin is not sin. And God is not a judge. And there is no eternity. And they deny God with how they live. And Jude wants to make absolutely clear that the faith once for all given is unchanging.

It is under threat from ungodly living. And so, therefore, for us, and wonderfully, this is not directed to faithful Christians. So, we must hear that.

Jude is not a letter that is to beat us up. So, if we leave this thinking, oh, is this me? No, that is not what Jude wants us to take away from this. In fact, Jude uses the term beloved so many times.

We are beloved in God the Father, verse 1. Kept by Jesus Christ, verse 1. He does not want us to go away beaten up. But what is it that we are supposed to take away from this? Because I think there is a secondary application that if we return to the example and we thought about earlier.

[26 : 11] At that conference where the young chap stood up to introduce the minister and said, Here is ex-minister, the greatest Bible handler of our generation. What is he saying about what is significant about this person?

He is saying, isn't he, that his intellect and his oratory skill and his intellectualism, that is what is impressive about him. That is why you should listen to him. And us who are rightly to value faithful teaching, we can fall into the danger of caring more about people saying orthodox things and saying them persuasively than we can about whether or not our leaders live godly lives.

And so, a question for our own hearts is, do we care more when we speak about the preachers and teachers and leaders that we admire? Do we care more about their oratory skill or their godliness?

One of the things that I am so sad to no longer get to benefit from with Simon, our previous pastor, is that Simon absolutely, not to a fault, but anyway, lived out exactly what he said publicly, privately.

He had complete integrity. I knew if he asked me to do something, he was doing it. And I saw examples of that over and over again. Quietly, Simon had utter integrity.

[27 : 38] And that was far more significant for faithful ministry than the fact that he could teach the Bible engagingly. Far more so. And so, for us, as we embark on this letter in Jude, and I would encourage you, please read Jude in your quiet times.

It is a wonderful little book. You can read it in about 10 minutes all the way through. As we embark in the next two weeks after this, in this book of Jude, to remember that the Lord cares far more about teachers' godliness than he does about whether or not his three points alliterate or it was engaging and you can remember it.

Why don't I lead us in a final prayer? Lord, we thank you so much for this letter and its realism. Father, we thank you that the Lord Jesus Christ has delivered the faith once and for all.

Father, please, as we get ready to spend more time in Jude, would you prepare us to contend for the one faith that brings salvation under the one Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Amen.