

# Contending for the Faith in the Last Times

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[ 0 : 01 ] We continue on in Jude this morning. This is our second to last Sunday in Jude. There's something really remarkable, remarkably powerful about a hard deadline.

For those of us who are, I mean, type A people, for lack of a better term, they thrive with planning and organization and creating systems.

So deadlines can be as exciting as Christmas Eve. I'm not one of those people, by the way. I find that very bizarre. My wonderful wife, Christine, she loves deadlines and planning and all of that stuff.

For those of us who do not thrive with planning in such a way, we may struggle to perform tasks unless there's a deadline. So we need the pressure that deadlines bring.

And we find deadlines, on one hand, very stressful, but highly motivating. We need to feel the pressure for that motivation to kick into overdrive our ability to get tasks finished.

[ 1 : 10 ] But for most of us, we're a combination of somewhere in the middle. We're a combination of type A, type B. The reality is that in all such cases, knowing the end has a way of bringing the whole picture into focus and helping us feel the urgency of the task at hand.

Whether you love to plan or whether you need that pressure to help you, there's something remarkable about knowing the end from the beginning. As we enter into the second half of Jude, our attention is drawn to a key question.

And this is the question, how are we to live and contend for the faith in the last times or in the last days? So you'll remember that Jude is very concerned with us contending for the faith.

It is a key part of his letter. And here he's going to talk about the last times or the last days.

So as with working with deadlines, knowing that we are living in the last times helps us as God's people to be clear about who we are and to be urgent about what we are to do.

[ 2 : 30 ] We know that the end is on its way. It helps us to focus in the here and the now, in the present.

But first, you must understand what the last times mean, at least in Jude's letter here. I would wonder, many of us come from different Christian traditions.

For many of us, we might have a well-formed and coherent eschatology. That is the doctrine of the end times. We might be sure that this is exactly how it's going down.

For some of us, we haven't really thought about it. For some of us, you don't want to think about it because of whatever church background you've had. So whether this is an exciting doctrine or topic for you or not, Jude here, as well as elsewhere in the New Testament, we'll talk about the end times referring to the period of time between the first and the second coming of Jesus.

So whatever else the book of Revelation says or the book of Daniel says or other parts of what Jesus says in the Gospels, for us this morning, the end times refers to this period of time after Jesus dies on the cross, is buried, rises again, and then ascends to when he will come again in glory to take his own and judge the world.

[ 4 : 04 ] So this is where it's a bit difficult because when we talk about the last times or the last days, this is like a 2,000 year plus an ongoing period of time.

It's like this is the last days, but like it's the last days. Throw a few more A's in there. Like you don't talk about the last days being the last millennia, but nevertheless, this is what every Christian has experienced since the church was born.

That we are all living, every generation of believers, we are living in the last days. All Christians at all times are living in the last days until the Messiah, Jesus, returns and are therefore called to faithful and obedient waiting.

We do not know if our Lord and Savior will come back today, tonight, tomorrow, next week. We don't know. I think that's the point. And the Holy Spirit, through the gospel writers, is communicating to us this morning that we ought to live as people in the last days.

And when we know the end, it helps us to know who we are and what we are to do. So with that in mind, let me ask the question once again. How are we to live and contend for the faith as God's people in the last times?

[ 5 : 34 ] Four ways in verses 17 to 23 that Jude will help us to understand how to live and contend for the faith in the last days. The first is that we ought to remember why we need to contend in the first place.

The second is that we ought to strive for personal and communal growth in the gospel. The third, that we, by faithfully waiting for the coming salvation of the Lord, we are to live a life of obedience before the Lord.

And finally, and this is interesting, and we'll get to why it's interesting in a bit, in light of Jude's letter, we are called to help those who are falling into doubt and error and are on the way not to glory, but to hell.

So if you have a Bible, turn with me to verse 17. We'll be in verses 17 and 19, and we'll look at how to contend for the faith by remembering why we need to contend in the first place.

Look with me at verse 17 to 19. But you must remember, beloved. And I'll pause really quickly.

[ 6 : 49 ] Jude opens his letter by calling the church God's beloved. And here, as he gets to the tail end of the church, he reaffirms that. We are beloved of God. And that means something.

That is a deep, wonderful truth. And Jude is hammering that home at the beginning and at the end. But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.

They said to you, in the last time, there it is, there will be scoffers following their own ungodly passions. It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.

Once again, Jude tells the church to remember, in this case, to remember both what the apostles prophesied and taught. He says here, the predictions of the apostles and what they said.

To remember both what they prophesied and taught. That the church would always, God's people would always have to contend for the faith against scoffers who are slaves to their passions and as a result, divide the church.

[ 8 : 03 ] It is important to understand that the scoffers aren't simply people who are sarcastic or mean-spirited. And that's a very important point.

They are people in the church. They are people sitting beside us. They could be yourself. They are people who are overly skeptical of the faith or aspects of the faith that was given to us, delivered to us, the saints, once and for all.

Their minds are made up against God's Word and they influence others to doubt. By the way, this is different than some of us who are genuinely wrestling with God over how to handle thorny issues with the faith.

How to reconcile miracle claims of the Bible that can't be explained through natural means. Some serious roadblocks to faith.

Or some of us who have friends or family that identify as gay or lesbian or transgender that we deeply love, but at the same time are struggling with how do I love them well and yet not compromise on the biblical vision of marriage and God creating male and female.

[ 9 : 33 ] It's a struggle. So, this is not what scoffers are referring to here, just to be clear. There are some serious, hard wrestlings that need to happen as we embrace our faith and go deeper in the faith and are confronted with very difficult things that oppose the faith or oppose our ability to trust in God's Word.

And oftentimes, that wrestling isn't an overnight thing. Sometimes it takes months. Sometimes it takes years. But this isn't who Jude has in mind when he refers to the scoffers.

No. Scoffers are those who have abandoned the faith. They've abandoned the authority of Scripture. They've abandoned the lordship of Jesus Christ.

And they have come up with their own version of Christianity. A pseudo-Christianity. A pseudo-faith. There is an irony here because Jude has told us, and we've looked at it in previous weeks, that oftentimes the scoffers are the people that are the real spiritual people in the church.

They're the ones that have the Spirit. These are the ones that really know what the Bible has to say and they really know God's will and God's heart. But Jude here, ironically, says, actually, they don't

have God's Spirit at all.

[10:52] They're devoid of the Spirit. They claim to be spiritual, but they couldn't be any farther from having the Holy Spirit reside in them.

An example, and it is an egregious example, but so you kind of get the point. I've mentioned this a number of times that I and our church stands on the shoulders of some brave men and women who left the Anglican Church of Canada for this very thing, for leaving the faith once delivered to the saints, the authority of the Scriptures, the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

And it wasn't just in Canada. It was in the States as well. And 10 years ago, the now former head of the Episcopal Church, that's the American version of the Anglican Church, the head of the church, not like a sub, not like a vice president or something, like the very top, the primate, as they're called, of the Episcopal Church, preached a sermon on Acts 16 and claimed that the Apostle Paul was extremely, extremely in the wrong for robbing a woman who had spiritual insight.

And now if you know Acts 16, you'll know that what actually happened was Paul the Apostle casted out a demon of a fortune teller and freed her from possession.

It is so interesting that this woman who claims to, this leader that claims to have the Spirit couldn't be farther from the truth.

[12:31] Now that is an egregious example, but we know people, we might even be very close to people, we might even be people in the past or right now that will deny aspects of God's Word and claim that we are the spiritual ones.

But there is nothing spiritual about departing from God's Word. God's Word, this is bread, this is life, this is real food for us. Scoffers are people that are not intellectually honest and transparent.

They manipulate and they bend Christianity to fit an existing worldview rather than struggle with the difficulties in the Bible and in the faith.

But God welcomes that wrestling, that struggle. In fact, Israel, Jacob, had his name changed.

He struggled with God. It's a beautiful picture in Genesis of Jacob wrestling with God. The implications are that God can be wrestled with.

[13:39] You don't have to hide the struggles that you may be going through, the difficult questions you may be asking, because if you voice them, God will damn you. No!

He will listen. He welcomes it. And as patient as the most patient person is that you've ever met, God is far more patient.

And he has time for you to struggle through some of this stuff. Scoffers are not struggling. They have the appearance, maybe, of intellectual honesty and transparency, but they're not honest.

They are not transparent. The scoffers hold, ultimately, God in contempt. They are not honest to us and even to themselves about their struggle or lack thereof.

Jude reminds us that we must assume such people will be in the church. And he provides criteria for us to discern and recognize them so that we may contend for the faith.

[14:49] And this will bring us to our second point. But to properly contend for the faith, we must be people who are secure in our identities as believers, as Christians, as those that have submitted our lives to the Lord Jesus Christ, that are growing in our faith and are growing in our faith together with others.

We must not grow complacent, especially in the last time. So Jude tells us, reminds us, why we're contending for the faith. And now he says, hey, listen, this is how you contend for the faith.

Get your own life right. Take a look with me at verse 22 and the first part of verse 21. But you, beloved, again, there we have it, but you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God.

building ourselves up in the most holy faith. That holy faith is to say that this faith is received, not created, by us.

We're not holy in and of ourselves. We are made holy by God. God is the only one who is holy. He gives us faith. He gives us his faith. So Jude, by saying, building yourself up in the most holy faith, we don't pretend that we have the corner on what biblical, godly faith is.

[16:20] We inherit it from God himself. And it is holy because it is from God. Building ourself up in the most holy faith means we are engaged in the ongoing submission of our lives to the will of God in conformity to his word.

This is both an individual and communal endeavor. It is not enough to be concerned only with our own spirituality. I've said it in the past, but I think it's always a good reminder.

We come into the Christian faith, into faith in God through Jesus Christ, one by one. It's a very personal faith, but we walk it out together. There is no such thing as a lone ranger Christian, as a Christian by themselves.

You can't live as a Christian the way God wants you to live by yourself, apart from other believers, apart from going to church. Many of us have Christian friends and families that may go to other churches, and that's good, and we fellowship with them.

But, especially around Holy Communion, and just before I pronounce the benediction, take a minute to look around you when the kids are back from children's ministry, when the helpers are back.

[ 17 : 41 ] Look around you and take a look at the people and understand that God has gathered us together, not to hang out on Sunday mornings and eat cupcakes or muffins or to see a baptism.

It's fantastic. It's beautiful. But to live out this faith with one another. Now that takes time because I'm not letting anybody into my life just on a moment's notice.

It takes time to gain trust and to lower guards down if you're more of an introvert, to feel more comfortable, to come up to somebody or whatever it may be, to develop relationships, to let somebody into your life.

But that is what we're called to. This is how we live out our faith together. We come in one by one but we live this thing out together. And this is what we have been doing for these past two and a half years.

By God's grace, unless he returns, we will do it until our youngest person is our oldest person in the congregation and all of us are gone.

[ 18 : 46 ] Now, we can do this with God's help. This is where praying in the Holy Spirit comes in.

It comes into play. Which is to say that we are to live as God's children with God's help. And what does the Holy Spirit do? The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sins.

The Holy Spirit leads us to have soft and repentant hearts. The Holy Spirit helps us to genuinely love others by showing concern and mercy.

and the Holy Spirit helps us to pray. Leads us to Christ. And as we grow in our trust and faith, we enjoy Christ's love all the more.

This is what it means to remain in God's love. I wish I could have more time to explore this and maybe I'll put it in the Wednesday email that I send out.

[ 19 : 45 ] But there's a bit of a tension here because on one hand, it's very clear in the opening verses of Jude's letter to those who are called beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ that we have been called by God.

We have this faith as a gift. It is grace that we are called Christians, that we can even know God. And yet, in our text here, it says to remain in God's love as if we could fall out of God's love.

There's a bit of a tension here. And I'll double-click on that, I think, later on. But all that to say is that what this means is to abide in the love of God.

That Jesus says, if you love me, you will keep my commands. That is to say, the heart that is transformed by the gospel, that is saved by Christ, is the heart that seeks to obey him.

So continue to obey the Lord. This leads to the third point. It also means keeping Christ's return in view, remembering that we are people deeply concerned with the present, but whose ultimate destiny is the new heavens and the new earth.

[ 21 : 02 ] Excuse me. Look at verse 21 and the second part of verse 21 with me. Well, actually, I'll read the first. The whole verse 21.

Keep yourselves in the love of God, and here it is, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. It would seem that the modern church falls into two errors, either talking too much about the last times, the end times, eschatology, deciphering when Jesus will come back, what will happen, what this represents, what that represents.

Often times, scripture is silent. Or, and this is probably for a church like ours, the error we fall into, and it is an error.

We don't talk about it enough. We don't have in view the second coming at all about in any kind of rhythm of our of our church life.

verse 21 helps us to see that the second coming of Jesus is very important and will inform the way we live in the present. And that goes back to what I opened with.

[ 22 : 13 ] If you know the end, it helps us to live in the present. And how are we to live in the present? We are told here that we are to patiently obey, to, to, to have a patient faithfulness in what Christians, in, in how we are to live as Christians.

We are people that lean on a prayer book. It's not much different than how Christianity and how the faith of the Bible has, has operated throughout the centuries and millennia.

And we have something called Even, Even Song or Evening Prayer. And Evening Prayer, it's a beautiful service, it's fairly short. We have an adaptation of it in our daily offices, but if you have a book of common prayer, you can see it.

But Evening Prayer ends with the prayer of Simeon from Luke chapter 2. If you remember Simeon from Luke chapter 2, Jesus is presented at the temple and this elderly man who has been waiting for the coming of the Messiah patiently, faithfully, day in, day out, month in, month out, decade in, decade out, finally, gets to see Jesus, the Messiah in the flesh.

And this is what we pray in Even Song every evening. It's beautiful. It says, Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word.

[ 23 : 45 ] For my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

That is the posture we ought to have. Patiently waiting and obeying, looking to the coming of our Lord in the same way that Simeon looked for the first coming of the Messiah.

The point is this. As we wait for the return of Christ, we will begin to long for the return of Christ. to see Him and be with Him, to touch Him and to know His love in greater and greater measures for all of eternity so that we will never come to the bottom of the well of God's love sometime in the 10,000th year we are in the new heavens and the new earth because His love is infinite.

So we can, for eternity, search for and plumb the depths of God's love. And as we think about that, I think I do not experience that love in this life.

The love that I experience is a wonderful love with family and friends and church community but it is not a perfect love. It is a shadow, it is a picture of what the love of God looks like but one day when He comes we will know that perfect love and it will be unending.

[ 25 : 17 ] the point is this, when we wait for the return of Christ we begin to long for the return of Christ. We long for it. The things that we enjoy, the good, the true and the beautiful of this life will point us to that life to come where we will enjoy the glory of God forever and ever.

our priorities will change. Our thinking will change. Our obedience will not necessarily be any less costly but there will be a greater degree of joy as we obey.

And this will lead us to our final point. It will also help us to be Christ-like and show mercy to those who we would otherwise despise or cancel or hope to God that they would be eliminated.

How are we to live and contend for the faith in the last times? We are also called to help those who are falling into doubt and error. Look with me at verses 22 to 23.

And have mercy on those who doubt save others by snatching them out of the fire to those show mercy with fear hating even the garments stained by the flesh.

[ 26 : 45 ] Very quickly we are going to look at the three groups of people in view here. Each group is a harder case than the last. So let's look at the first group.

It says here in verse 22 And have mercy on those who doubt. Now we have talked about the doubters. And these people we are to show mercy to. They are the ones that are struggling and wrestling with the difficult aspects of the faith and may have begun to lose steam in their wrestling. Now I mentioned wrestling with some of these hard doctrines it's not an overnight thing. I'll share a personal story. I struggled with the legitimacy of especially the Gospels for eight years after my undergrad.

I went to Carleton thinking puffed out chest I'm 21 I know everything there is to know about the Bible. Idiots over there. And then I get to my third year seminar fourth year seminar on the life and teachings of Jesus.

Breeze no problem. And all of a sudden all of these questions about the inconsistencies between the Gospels start getting exposed. and my foundation starts to crack.

[ 28 : 00 ] Now by God's kindness and grace I didn't abandon the faith but it was an eight year process. It wasn't until I was in seminary which is crazy to think that I realized through other materials that I encountered that the Gospels are totally trustworthy.

that was an eight year process. How about if in year three somebody was not merciful to me? Daniel you have to trust in this or you're not a Christian.

I'm sorry but you need to trust in the Bible or else you can't be around us or you know you can't serve in the church or you can't participate in the life of the covenant community.

Or maybe it's on year seven and ten months I got two months to go I don't know the future so you know eight months eight and a half months you get the point. I'm on the verge of dealing with my doubts and mercy was not extended to me.

Friends we show mercy to people because we are people who receive God's mercy. Struggling through difficult things they're real and doubting here we go through seasons of it.

[ 29 : 18 ] If you know somebody who is doubting or if you're doubting yourself do not be afraid to share that and then to walk with people. Here Jude says listen have mercy on those people.

Does he give does he give does he give a time frame? Five years? Six years? Seven years? No because we've seen in previous a previous part of Jude when we say that they're hopeless when we say in a sense pronouncing judgment on somebody that they're so far gone we sit in the judgment seat of God.

Jude calls that blasphemy. We continue to show mercy to those who are struggling through this.

The second group they're a bit further down the path of doubt.

This is what it says save others by snatching them out of the fire. these people are at risk of apostasy.

They're playing with fire and it is not it truly is a hellfire. They have been courted by false teachings and have begun to pervert the gospel of grace.

[ 30 : 29 ] We saw that in verse 3. This is the the MO of false teachers that they pervert the gospel of grace. They may be our friends or family who have begun to have deconstructed their faith.

They're on their way to apostasy but they again are not too far gone for God can use us his church by his Holy Spirit to save them as their lives begin to burn.

Again we aren't the people to pronounce judgment we are just called to be faithful in showing mercy understanding that we are living in the last days. The third and final group are those immersed in false doctrines and they quite possibly could be the false teachers themselves.

Look at what it says here in verse 23. To others show mercy with fear hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

To these Jude tells us to have mercy but be resolute in our commitment to the faith. There's great danger that when we spend time with people that have abandoned the faith but in a very real way are still one foot into the church.

[ 31 : 50 ] They still have influence. They still teach and live in such a way that encourages apostasy. We need to be careful and honest with ourselves that we could be influenced as well.

This is a very wise way that Jude is telling us to just be on guard. To fear God more than you fear man.

To trust in God more than you trust in man. And this bit here that Jude talks about of hating even the garment stained by the flesh is a way to simply say we need to hate sin.

It is to have such compassion and love extending mercy to somebody that is living a sinful life but to not fall into the temptation of justifying what they do.

Hate it. Hate what they do. Love them. And this isn't just a love the sinner or hate the sin because that can lose the gravity of what we are called to do here.

[ 32 : 59 ] We are to hate sin. God hates sin but to extend mercy. Why? Because we have been extended mercy. The whole picture of filthy garments we see it in Amos chapter 4 and Zechariah chapter 3.

It is this beautiful picture of God taking this dirty person dirty representing sin and stripping them of the dirty garments and instead clothing them in garments of white.

It is a picture of forgiveness and only God can do such things. It also once again means that nobody is so far gone.

We do not get to pronounce judgment do we? Only to extend mercy. So in all three cases we are to show mercy as those who have been shown mercy.

So what does it mean to be Christ-like? Well what does our Savior do? He extends mercy to those that don't deserve it. So what do we do? We extend mercy to those who don't deserve it.

[ 34 : 10 ] We are to be Christ-like. This is really the point of how to contend and live as God's people in the last days. To be people marked by the grace of God.

People who cling to the gospel and grow in our love and obedience for Christ as we await his ultimate final salvation when he will come again to judge the living and the dead where we will spend eternity in glory with him in the new heavens and the new earth.

We will be marked with a Trinitarian hope in this life. And we see it right here as we pray in the Holy Spirit, keeping ourselves in the love of God the Father, and as we await the mercy of Christ that leads to eternal life as God's beloved, this is how we contend for the faith, faithfully, obediently, in the last days.

friends. This is the antidote for false teaching. And it is also the source for spiritual strength for us to live faithfully and patiently with gospel centered lives.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you so much for these reminders from Jude. Lord, we need reminding because we are people who forget.

[ 35 : 40 ] So help us to be people that remember. Help us to be people that come to your word often and always. Help us to never think we are above your word. Help us to never think that your word, your gospel is old hat.

Instead, help us to live faithfully, contending for the faith in these last days. Whether they come in our generation or not, Lord, let us live knowing who we are in you and living by your strength with urgency in this life.

We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.