

Contending For The Faith (1)

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[0 : 00] If you please turn with me to Jude, and this morning we're looking at verses 3 and 4. Letter of Jude, verses 3 and 4.

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.

I'd like to look at these verses this morning and then this evening, God willing, we'll also be looking at verses further on in this letter, especially verses 20 and 21, which set out for us the main thrust of Jude's letter.

Jude addressed, as indeed all the New Testament writers did, a live situation. He wasn't writing theoretically, he wasn't writing about a potential situation that might arise, he was writing about something that was live at the time that he felt moved to write this letter.

[1 : 24] He tells us indeed that it had been his intention to write a different type of letter, or a different type of discourse, because you can see there that he says, I found it necessary to write, although I was eager to write to you about your common salvation.

In other words, he had it in mind to write certain things that were necessary doctrinally to know, that's I think what he means, but for some reason, whether news reached him as he was about to do that, nevertheless he found it necessary to write an appeal to them instead of what you might call an essay, he's now writing an appeal to them.

And it's an appeal that has a very definite urgency about it, because he's appealing to them to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints, to God's people.

In other words, he's saying, instead of writing to you the kind of essay about doctrinal issues that I was intending, I'm writing this appeal because it is absolutely crucially saying that you contend, that you actually engage with all earnestness for this faith, the faith, the gospel that was delivered once for all to the saints.

And that reminds us that we live in a situation that we have to address as it is. We, of course, refer to works in the past that were drawn up by men of God and women of God, the Puritans, for example, or even earlier than that, the time of the Reformation, or right back to the church fathers who left all of these writings that we benefit from.

[3 : 08] But we always have to remember that however much we value these great works, they are to be applied to the exact situation that we face today.

We don't live in the 16th century. We don't live in the 1900s. We live here and now in 2019. And it's the situation that we find around us, that we find in the church of today, that we find around the church of today, that we need to address.

And I hope we'll see from our brief look at Jude today that there are issues here that we ourselves can very much apply to our own circumstances today.

And therefore the things that Jude is urging us to do are very applicable to our situation. He was addressing a spiritual and moral situation for which the truth of God was, of course, most fitting.

And that's the kind of situation that we find ourselves in. Jude was really writing essentially against what he knew to be a false gospel.

[4 : 18] A counterfeit Christianity. And that's what we're going to call our study today in two parts. This counterfeit Christianity, which as we'll see, has to do not only with what people believe, but also how people behave.

Because the believing and the behaving in the apostles' letters that you find in the New Testament, including Jude, are always items which remain together.

The believing and the behaving go together. What you believe affects how you behave. And how you behave reveals what you believe. And so he's appealing for us to contend for the faith, which includes what you believe and how you behave.

And to set that forth against so much that seeks to undermine it or to displace it indeed in our particular day as well. So let's look at this counterfeit gospel.

And this morning we're just looking at what it is and how it's come about as Jude faces it and how we can take from that things which are applicable to our own situation as well.

[5 : 25] What is this counterfeit gospel? What is this counterfeit Christianity? What is this false teaching that he was facing? Why did he write in such strong terms?

Why is he so withering and so devastating in the main part of the chapter? Why does he use such expressions as these that are so incredibly strong?

Why is there an urgency in what he says? Well, he tells us first of all that this counterfeit Christianity was what we can call an inside job.

That's something that happened not from outside the church, although there were influences there. What he's saying is, 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 you can see there he's saying people crept in and having made their way into the church, they then started disseminating this false teaching, this false gospel, which included perverting the grace of God into sensuality.

[6 : 39] By that he means that they were distancing themselves from any sort of legal obligation to keep the law of God, which we are as Christians, though we're not, of course, saved because we keep the law of God, but it still has its place in our thinking and in our actions.

They were perverting that into sensuality, the kind of lifestyle that you're very familiar with in the world of today. As well as that, they were denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Doctrinal issues around the person of Christ were being altered and restructured by them. And therefore, that inside job, the fact that it was an inside job is very important to ourselves.

You can see what he says there in verse 4 and also verse 12 has a similar reference. These are blemishes on your love feasts. The danger to the church is always from something that happens from within.

You can see what's outside. You can actually see the assaults on the gospel from outside far more clearly. But when things begin to grow inside that are dangerous, that are at enmity with the gospel, that are, in fact, a counterfeit Christianity, that's actually much more difficult at times to discern, much more difficult to detect.

[8 : 03] Because it comes about, not all of a sudden, but it comes about almost imperceptibly, it comes about very gradually, very slowly. And then further down the road you realize, well, things are actually not what they used to be.

Now, I'm not intending today just to look at this by suggesting things that are as bad as they were in those days. But you know yourselves that the church of our day, looking at it in the widest sense, is not in a healthy state.

The gospel has been changed into something else. The teaching of the Bible has been sometimes radically adjusted to fit in with people's lifestyles to conform to what you find in the world.

And that's very similar to what Luke, what Jude here was actually dealing with. Notice verse 12 here, the word blemishes. These, he says, these people, they are blemishes on your love feasts.

I think he means by that the times of the Lord's Supper, communion, or similar to that, love feasts, when they were themselves enjoying the provision that God had made for them.

[9 : 12] Well, the word blemishes there literally can be translated reefs. The kind of rocks that you find below the surface of the sea, where there's a very shallow covering of water.

You can know the danger from that, obviously, for those who need to navigate their way through the seas. You have to actually have a chart that shows you where these reefs are, because you can't actually see them often with the naked eye.

Well, that's the word he's using here. These are actually reefs. They are blemishes. They're the kind of danger spots that you cannot see very easily. These people and their teaching and what they're

doing by having crept in unnoticed, that's what Jude was facing.

If you look out today at the church that we know and hear about in the widest sense, you don't have to go very far to realize that people have perverted the grace of God into sensuality.

Where did that begin? That didn't come about all of a sudden. It crept in unnoticed from outside the church. People started actually teaching this.

[10:25] People started commending this. People started saying, this is okay. We'll just change the emphasis in the gospel, in the word of God, because it doesn't really fit with the circumstances as we find them today.

We actually have to change the emphasis so that we don't embarrass people too much or turn them away from the gospel. That's the kind of thinking, and you could have many other things added to that, that you actually find here and now that we need to address in the kind of lives that you and I live, the kind of emphasis that you and I give to our lives, the kind of things that we say and insist on we believe, and the kind of behavior that goes along with that in our personal lives, in our relationships.

If you look at videos, for example, of a leopard, a leopard coming to just focus on its prey, on its victim, wherever that leopard begins the journey towards that victim, most of that distance is covered in stalking.

Not in the open, not in a noticeable way. It's stalking. The victim doesn't see it. The very last part of it, when the leopard all of a sudden uses all its energy and bounds out and leaps upon its victim, that's the smallest part.

Everything before that has been unnoticed. It's been in stalking mode. That's how error works very often in the church. That's how it's been in history.

[12:02] It doesn't show itself all of a sudden. That comes in creeping in us, verse 4 says, have crept in unnoticed the teaching that they actually, and then like the leopard, it comes all of a sudden to be undisguised and brought out into the open.

And very often it's taken over the fellowship or the congregation or the church or denomination into which it's come. And indeed, you don't have to go further than our own history as a church.

You know your history, history of the free church. After 1843, when the free church left the establishment and set out as the free church of Scotland, by 1870, not very long, 30, 40 years, the free church was riddled with heresy.

The free church was riddled with heresy. There were many people who were preaching from its pulpits a view of Scripture that was not reformed.

A view of Scripture that the fathers of 1843 would not have accepted. Why was that? Because the view of Scripture that they brought in came from the theology schools in Germany mostly that began teaching the Bible was something else than the reformers had said it was.

[13:24] And it had a different source to the authors that are mentioned in the Bible. And all sorts of things like that began to actually infiltrate people's thinking. That was in the free church.

And there were trials for heresy on the part of some. And yet, it had spread throughout the church in the late 1800s up to 1900.

That's what was going on. So please don't say here, that could never happen in Stornoway Free Church. That could never happen in the free church of today.

Martin Lloyd-Jones once said, talking there about institutions such as Bible colleges, so on, he said, every institution has the capacity to turn into the opposite of itself.

Every institution has the capacity to turn into the opposite of itself. What it teaches today is not necessarily what it will teach next year if it doesn't maintain the standard it began with.

[14:37] Now that's true of our lives as well. That's true of our congregations. That's true of our church. That's why Jude is speaking in such strong terms. The gradual infiltration of error, the gradual infiltration of an unbiblical lifestyle, it multiplies if it's not checked, if it's not actually dealt with, as he's dealing with it here.

Beloved, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once delivered to the saints. That's the first thing.

It's an inside job. Just like you find a bank robbery. Many times you'll find bank robberies. I've had the help of somebody employed by the bank.

An inside job. Somebody who actually gave the information as to whatever was necessary to open the saints. Well, it's the same with truth.

It's more often than not an inside job that comes to wreak havoc and devastation among God's people. The second thing that's obvious is that this counterfeit gospel, not only is it an inside job, but Jude is saying it is also about doctrine and ethics.

[15 : 58] These are the two main features of Jude's letter. Indeed, they're the two main features of many of the epistles of the New Testament. That's why they're in the kind of language that they use.

If you go to 1 John, for example, you'll find that this is exactly what he's writing about. And remember, it's quite telling, isn't it, that before the time of the apostles themselves had ended, this was what they were wrestling against.

They were actually seeing this in the church of their day. And had to write in these terms addressing these points very pointedly and very specifically.

If you go to 1 John, you can divide what he says there into three categories. He's talking about doctrinal problems. He's talking about problems to do with ethics, lifestyles, and social problems. How people relate to each other. He was writing to Christians, and they had doctrinal problems, they had social problems, and they had ethical problems. You go to the same 2 Peter, for example, 2 Peter, let me just mention that, chapter 2, verse 1.

[17 : 08] Notice what he's saying there. But false prophets also arose among the people. Justice, there will be false teachers among you who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction, and many will follow their sensuality.

And because of them, the way of truth will be blasphemed. That's Peter writing these words in his time. And that's why he goes on in chapter 3 of 2 Peter there to emphasize that scoffers will come in these last days following their own sinful desires, saying, where is the promise of his coming? That's the second coming of Jesus. Then he goes on to appeal to them as well. Therefore, beloved, since you know these things, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

What is the antidote to a false gospel, to a counterfeit Christianity, is to grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. That might sound very old-fashioned to people today, but that's exactly what's taught consistently by the apostles.

That's how you actually counter a counterfeit Christianity. And that's what he's saying, that is what we believe and how we behave. Hence his use of the word, the faith, or these words, the faith.

[18 : 51] In verse 3, you find him using that, I was eager to write to you to contend for the faith that was once delivered to the saints. You find the same then in what we're going to look at tonight, verse 20, build up yourselves in your most holy faith or upon your most holy faith.

Now when he's talking there about faith or most holy faith, it's not our believing that he means by that, but the body of doctrine, the body of teaching, that we find as the core teaching of the scriptures, the core teaching of the gospel, things like the resurrection of Christ, scripture itself, and what it is, how we come to be accepted with God by justification through faith, all of those central fundamental, that's the faith.

The faith is really the essentials of the gospel. We'll have time to specify it just now, but just to alert you to the fact that it's not just Jude that's speaking in this way.

Remember Paul, when he wrote his first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 15, which deals really mainly with the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of believers in relation to that, but this is what he's saying, he's, now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

For I delivered to you, as of first importance, what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scripture, and so on.

[20 : 36] You see what he's saying? I received this, he says, from the Lord, this gospel, and that's what I passed on to you as of first importance, as of fundamental importance, and that's exactly what Jude is doing too.

He's reminding them, he's recalling their minds to the things that are core essentials of the gospel, in contrast to the false teaching that's crept in, in contrast to the, those who pervert that gospel in the way he mentions.

And that's what this false gospel actually attacks, because one of the things you always find in these situations is a denial that these truths are foundational or unadjustable, non-adjustable. Because the moment you start adjusting things to do with the person of Christ, things to do with the death he died, or any aspects of his resurrection as a real physical resurrection from the dead, the moment you start adjusting the fact that we are justified through faith in Christ, that he alone is the saviour, that he himself, as he said, is the way, the truth, and the life, the moment you start adjusting that, you're into a counterfeit gospel.

And when you're into a counterfeit gospel, it's not a gospel which saves. People are left still as they were in their sins as they came into this world.

[22 : 06] That's why it's so important. The things you read in the Bible about the creation, how it came about, that it was by God's word, by God's power, not by a process of evolution, not that it was always there, but God created in the beginning.

God created the heavens and the earth, and everything that follows on from that. And resurrection, rebirth, and it's the same with ethics.

When the Bible says that marriage is a relationship between one man and one woman, that's how God set it. And God set it at the creation, at the time of the creation of human beings.

It wasn't something that the church invented. It wasn't something that came in long years after that when human beings might have thought, let's call it marriage, it's a good idea that men and women should live together.

God set that, God established, it's an ordinance of his creation. That's what he himself willed and wills today. You see, every departure from that is a counterfeit gospel.

[23 : 14] It's not the ethics of the Bible. It's not something that pleases God. It's to do with the wisdom of the world. That's why Jude is saying, I'm writing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

In other words, once for all delivered means that's how God delivered it. He gave us this package of the gospel and he says, this is my gospel, look after it.

Keep it as it is. Don't adjust it. Make it relevant in your presentation of it, of course, in every single generation. But don't adjust its terms.

Don't adjust God's own claims. Don't change what it says about our sinful human condition or the remedy that God has for it. Because if you do, you've got a counterfeit gospel.

You have false teaching. You have something which will be destructive rather than helpful ultimately. That's why Jude refers to the faith then because there's this body of doctrine, this body of the gospel that God has once for all delivered to the saints.

[24 : 29] And that's why Jude also, secondly, this is about doctrine and ethics as well as using the faith. He uses scripture as other gospel writers do as well, as other apostles do as well.

Verse 5, verse 17 as well, you find, but you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 5, you have the same.

Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus who saved a people out of the land of Egypt. In other words, he's pointing to things which were known by them, which were truths that they had received, and he's reminding them, this is what you must hold to.

This is what you must do in relation to what God has given you. You contend for this. You keep this. You promote this. You guard this.

It's a valuable deposit. When you go back in your Bibles, when you go back to the fall of man in the Garden of Eden in Genesis chapter 3, how did Satan, through the serpent, how did he address Eve firstly in these circumstances?

[25 : 51] He posed a question, didn't he? The question was, has God really said? Has God indeed, or actually said?

You could use different words, but that's the thrust of the question. Has God really said this?

Instilling doubt as to God's truthfulness.

That's still the question that Satan keeps throwing at the church, and he will keep throwing that at the church for as long as there is a church on this earth. Has God really said?

Because that's how he gets into our minds by casting some element of doubt on the veracity or the truthfulness of God or indeed that this book is the word of God.

Has God really said this? Is this really God's word? You see, before you actually ask the question, what does the Bible say? You've got to ask a more fundamental question.

