

Lesson 3 – 15 November 2009

"Earnestly Contend for the Faith"

Lesson Scope: Jude

Lesson Focus

Jude, the author of this epistle, identifies himself as the brother of James. Both of them were probably half brothers to Jesus, yet Jude humbly refers to himself as the servant of Jesus Christ.

At the time of Jude's writing the inroads of error were causing alarm. Apparently his intention of writing a treatise on salvation was shaped by the threat the church currently faced from false teachers. He writes to encourage them to preserve the faith. His writing is one of the most severe denunciations of apostasy ever written.

This book presents a survival message for the believers. Though false teachers successfully deceive many, salvation is possible only through Jesus Christ if we love our salvation and the Lord who saves us we will contend earnestly for the faith.

The subject of this lesson is a life-or-death matter. The threat of apostasy is not one from without; it is a real possibility for every church member. It is a personal responsibility that rests on each believer. Note that the people Jude describes change their position so gradually that it is not easily noticed (v. 4). This increases the danger of their influence.

It is possible for outward threats to pressure us (v. 18). No matter what the threat, apostasy can be avoided by tenaciously clinging to the faith, keeping watch for our Lord's return.

Deceivers and apostates threaten to undermine the faith of the saints. But as believers counteract those threats and keep themselves in God's love, God will keep them from falling.

Lesson Aim: To present principles related to contending for the faith.

Theme Verses:

Jude 20-21. But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

Lesson Text

Denunciation of the Apostates

Jude 3-4

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort *you* that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. ⁴For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jude 8-16

Likewise also these *filthy* dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities. ⁹Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee. ¹⁰But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves. ¹¹Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core. ¹²These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds *they are* without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; ¹³Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever. ¹⁴And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, ¹⁵To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard *speeches* which ungodly sinners have spoken against him. ¹⁶These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling *words*, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage.

Preservation of the Saints

Jude 17-25

But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; ¹⁸How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.

¹⁹These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit. ²⁰But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, ²¹Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. ²²And of some have compassion, making a difference: ²³And others save with fear, pulling *them* out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

²⁴Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present *you* faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, ²⁵To the only wise God our Saviour, *be* glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

Questions for Study

Denunciation of the Apostates

1. In what sense is salvation "common" (v. 3)?
2. Why is it important that the faith was "once delivered"?
3. What traits identify apostates?
4. How do the errors in verse 11 threaten us?
5. What safeguards will prevent false teachers from settling in our midst?

Preservation of the Saints

6. How can we build ourselves on our faith (v. 20)?
7. What attitudes should direct our relations with the erring?
8. What resources make it possible to be presented faultless?

Analyzing the Passage

The faith was once delivered (v. 31), it is conclusive and unchanging. False teachers can never amend it to fit their own ideas. It will stand for eternity. Some of the false teachers who were infiltrating the church were Gnostics, who believed that their special knowledge was superior to faith. Gnostics taught that matter is inherently evil. They denied the true humanity of Christ: His body was only an apparition. Some believed one is not under moral law; others abused the body to promote spirituality.

Jude gives examples of unbelief and how God judged it (vv. 5-7). He skillfully portrays the apostates for what they are—church polluters full of false claims, travelling a downward course to perdition. Jude contrasts them with Michael in their relationship to authority. Michael refused to rebuke even the devil, these openly degrade those in authority. They approach God on their own willful terms (v. 11). In spite of their wrongs, they attempt to

maintain a spiritual conformity (v. 12).

Enoch's prophecy of their judgment (v. 14) is the first recorded prophecy of Jesus' Second Coming. It tells something about the times in which he lived.

Jude reminded his readers of their responsibility to those who were affected by false teachers. Christian compassion moves the saints to pull them out of danger, being careful to maintain abhorrence for sin (vv. 22-23).

Spiritual threats need not intimidate anyone. God has provided ample resources for victory (vv. 24-25). It is possible to live in purity and to be presented without fault to the holy God.

Principles and Applications

Denunciation of the Apostates

1. *Contending for the faith is necessary to maintain salvation (v.3).*

We face a cunning enemy who will flee only if actively resisted (James 4:7). Neutrality is impossible: if we are careless or indifferent, we will surely be ensnared. To contend effectively, we must value our salvation so highly that we are willing to sacrifice life itself rather than give up the faith.

2. *False teachers and their doctrine must be identified (v. 4).*

Like the noble Bereans, we must use the Scriptures to verify the teaching we receive (Acts 17:11). If we do so, false teaching will become apparent whether it weakens God's authority, makes room for the flesh, or uses humanistic reasoning. We must take issue with such influences, lest they wreak havoc in the church.

3. *Contenders for the faith decisively eliminate natural man's reasoning (vv. 11-13).*

Man's fall corrupted him thoroughly. The apostle Paul said, "I know that ... (in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing" (Romans 7:18). God's ways are not our ways; His thoughts are far above ours (Isaiah 55:9). God's Word to us on the issues of nonresistance or separation calls for a simple response of faith, regardless how foolish it might seem to our human thinking.

4. *Contending for the faith exposes sin and commits sinners to the sure judgments of God (vv.14-16).*

We must call sin what God calls it. To minimize sin in order to avoid hurting someone's feelings is surely doing him a disfavor. By living right-

ously, we expose the sin around us and remind sinners of coming judgment.

Preservation of the Saints

5. *Scriptural teaching must be central in contending for the faith* (vv. 17-19).

Apostates have been redefining many Bible doctrines, explaining away the Christian woman's veiling, nonresistance, and separation from the world. Each one of us must have a good understanding of the Word. It is authoritative and relevant, our source of appeal on every issue of life. Someday we will be judged on the basis of what we did with it.

6. *We exercise our faith through prayer* (v. 20). In ourselves, we are not capable of facing down our enemy-, neither are we wise enough to avoid his deception. We cannot stop the flood of apostasy. It is our expression of helplessness and dependence on God that allows us access to His resources—all that we need to keep the faith.

7. *Contenders for the faith keep themselves in God's love* (v. 21). There we find the security and assurance that will minimize the appeal of earthly attractions. Unwavering commitment to God inspires a vibrant devotional life. His love flows through us to others.

8. *Taking keen interest in others spiritual welfare is a part of contending for the faith* (vv. 22-23).

What is your response to expressions of apostasy in your brother or sister? Is your concern for him or her stronger than your fear of being misunderstood or rejected? Does the doom of the lost motivate efforts in evangelism? Ignoring the needs of others endangers the survival of our own soul.

9. *We contend for the faith by appropriating the boundless resources of Christ*. (vv. 24-25).

The danger we face is real, our eternal destiny is at stake. God alone can preserve us completely, and He is more than willing to do so. His wisdom, grace and power are ours for the asking.

Answers to Questions

1. *In what sense is salvation "common"* (v. 3)?

The common salvation is not partial to race, gender, or status; it is shared by all.

2. *Why is it important that the faith was "once delivered"*?

Jesus is the author and finisher of salvation; it is available only through

Him. Jesus came to this earth to live as a man, revealing God's will through His life and teachings. He finished His work; it is complete and conclusive. It will not be modified or amended.

3. What traits identify apostates?

They slowly, almost imperceptibly, change their position. They presume upon the grace of God. They rebel against authority. To the apostate, human reasoning is sufficient authority for his beliefs and actions. They live selfishly, concerned more about reputation and position than about truth.

4. How do the errors in verse 11 threaten us?

Cain dared to approach God on His own terms. We must know what the Scriptures require and carefully live according to God's terms. Balaam valued earthly rewards more than the will of God. We must guard our separation vigilantly. We must avoid using our gifts for personal advantage. Korah blamed God-ordained leaders for assuming too much responsibility. We must carefully guard our attitudes toward church authority; to challenge that authority is a serious matter.

5. What safeguards will prevent false teachers from settling in our midst?

First, we must teach the full scope of truth in our public worship services as well as privately in our homes. Majoring in certain subjects while neglecting others creates an imbalance that leaves our people vulnerable to false teaching. Second, we must, like the Bereans, take the teaching that we hear and verify it with the Scriptures. Third, we must maintain an atmosphere of love in church life that allows us to give or receive correction in our understanding of the Word without taking offense. Fourth, we must identify false teaching and remove it to prevent a leavening effect.

6. How can we build ourselves on our faith (v. 20)?

To build on our faith is to walk in the Spirit, relying on God to supply our needs in the changing circumstances of life. We must maintain a meaningful relationship with God through prayer.

7. What attitudes should direct our relations with the erring?

As we see people heading for judgment, our hearts should be moved with compassion. We fear God's wrath and desire to spare them from it. We identify with God's love for their souls, while maintaining a hatred for their sin.

8. *What resources make it possible to be presented faultless?*

God's grace delivers us from the guilt and power of sin. Jesus' blood washes away the stain of sin. The Holy Spirit regenerates us and guides us into all truth.

Important Teachings

1. Contending for the faith is necessary to maintain salvation (v. 3).
2. False teachers and their doctrine must be identified (v. 4).
3. Contenders for the faith decisively eliminate natural man's reasoning (vv. 11-13).
4. Contending for the faith exposes sin and commits sinners to the sure judgments of God (vv. 14-16).
5. Scriptural teaching must be central in contending for the faith (vv.17-19).
6. We exercise our faith through prayer (v. 20).
7. Contenders for the faith keep themselves in God's love (v. 21).
8. Taking keen interest in others' spiritual welfare is a part of contending for the faith (vv. 22-23).
9. We contend for the faith by appropriating the boundless resources of Christ (vv. 24-25).
10. Evil imagination and rebellion against legitimate authority are earmarks of false teachers (vv. 8).

Summarizing the Lesson

We live in the perilous end times, when seducers wax worse and worse. Contending for the faith is a life-or-death matter. We can resist the pressure of apostasy by keeping our love for God vibrant, by praying fervently. and by developing strong church loyalty. This situation is not hopeless, the resources are endless, and we can be more than conquerors. "To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power both now and ever."

Research Guide

1. Read 2 Peter 2 and 3, noting similarities to Jude's message.
2. Review the accounts of Cain, Balaam, and Korah. What errors ruined them? These threats are real for us.