

The Letter of Jude – Contend for the Faith
Jude 1:1-25

Well brothers and sisters, you know what they say about the best laid plans of mice and men...

I have to tell you this morning that I can relate to Jude's experience of having to change what he was eager to write about. Originally, I had planned and intended to preach this series on One-Chapter books of the bible in May, however last month I was compelled to continue preaching about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, so... we're looking at the one-chapter books of the bible *this* month, in June.

And I did not originally select these particular one-chapter books of the bible, or arrange the focus of the sermons to coincide with the fact that our society takes this particular month to celebrate one of the seven deadly sins... But I've been struck by how well they connect to what's going on in our society and speak to how it influences believers and the Church.

As they say "God moves in mysterious ways... and there are no such things as coincidences!"

So, it is not a coincidence that the letter we're looking at this morning, starts with Jude telling the readers that he had originally planned to write them about something else, but then was compelled to change plans... in order to urge them to contend for the faith that was once and for all entrusted to God's holy people.

Just like we had another sermon series planned, but things changed and the messages from the series that we ended up with this month have urged us to remain faithful to that faith as it has been once and for all revealed to us in the scriptures.

All of the circumstances and events which have impacted the preaching schedule over the past three months have been used by the Holy Spirit to line things up this morning, so that at the close of this sermon series and at the end of this month – we receive this timely and specific exhortation from Jude's letter... that we contend for the faith.

So, I hope to make it clear to you, as it has become clear to me, that what Jude has written in this short letter has a sense of urgency to it, and this is intentional... so that all who read it, or hear it and understand it are compelled by the Holy Spirit to contend for the faith, and that is the message to us this morning. Contend for the faith.

As they say “if good men do nothing, evil prevails...” Or as Jude might say “if godly people do not contend for the faith, then ungodly people will prevail.”

So, pull out your bibles and turn to Jude, or take your scripture insert out of your bulletin and follow along...

let’s take a closer look at why Jude is urging believers to contend for the faith as he describes these ungodly people who are threatening it.

Vs. 4, they are indicted for using God’s grace as a license for immorality which means they only see Jesus as a forgiver, an enabler of their behavior, not as their ruler and Lord who has

the right to command them to change their behavior and actions. Thus they deny his Lordship.

Vs. 8 takes the previous two indictments and expands on them. Firstly, their immorality pollutes their bodies bringing to mind Paul’s words in 1 Cor 6:18 “*whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit!*” Secondly, their denial of Christ makes them reject any and all authority over themselves and causes them to blaspheme angelic beings.

Vs. 12 they are called *blemishes* in the community, presumably because they partake of the Lord’s supper, the meal of grace with no sense of how forgiveness calls for repentance from sin.

Vs. 16 they are grumblers; they complain because they find fault in what the Christian life requires of them, they consider themselves to be hard done by, carrying a heavy burden in Christian obedience and resenting it. Furthermore, their character is lacking, certainly not Christlike – they boast about

themselves, and anything that might look to be building others up is just flattery for their own purposes.

Lastly vs. 19, these people bring division from their involvement in the church, whether it is teaching or leadership or serving in some way it comes from their personal abilities and skills, not their grace gifts, they don't have grace gifts because they do not have the Holy Spirit – and they abuse God's grace... so they do not build up the body they divides it.

Now what's surprising in all this is how Jude states at the beginning, prior to listing these indictments, that these ungodly people had somehow secretly slipped into the church community and become a regular part of it. While Jude calls out their ungodliness and explicitly labels it as sinful, it seems the community of believers couldn't or wouldn't see it as such. For whatever reason it was seen as acceptable behavior.

But in truth it was a danger to the Christian faith and to the body believers, and it was right in their midst. Thus, Jude's sense of urgency that they must contend for the faith – which

speaks to us today as well. Do we recognize ungodliness for what it is? Or has it become normal behavior that we accept from those who should be leading, setting examples for us?

Now a note of caution here brothers and sisters, discernment is needed because there's a fine line between being a church where we can all be honest about our struggles with sin, vs. slipping into being a church where we enable our struggles with sin...

And keep in mind that there's a fine line between being church that gently but firmly holds believers to account, that contends for the faith, vs. being a church that controls for the faith causing people to hide behind false fronts and not be honest about their struggles.

However, the church in Jude's day was enabling sin, they had forgotten there are consequences for misusing Jesus' forgiveness and denying Christ's Lordship, and they had forgotten the examples of what happened to those who did so

in the past. So Jude reminds them... this is what will happen to ungodly people who pursue this path.

Vs. 5 remember those Israelites who were delivered from Egypt, but then grumbled in the desert, put God to the test, refused to believe and trust in Him and enter into the promised land? They were destroyed. Don't presume that belonging exempts you from believing.

Vs. 6 the Angels who abandoned their positions of authority, rebelling against their calling and responsibility to serve God. They are dammed, there is no turning back for them now, they are bound in their disobedience. So, don't abandon your authority as believers, as teachers and preachers by denying the authority of Christ – there is no coming back from that!
(Heb 6:4-6)

Vs 7 And remember what sexual immorality and perversion leads to... the fire and brimstone that rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns. A taste of the eternal fire to come.

Vs 11 Jude gives three more examples of infamous ungodly people to show how ungodliness progresses in those who presume on God's grace and rebel against His authority.

Cain – murdered his brother and was driven out of God's presence. Balaam - who was willing to sell his prophetic authority for money and was very nearly destroyed, and Korah – who challenged Moses and Aaron as the leaders chosen by God to take Israel through the desert and who was destroyed, along with his family and followers...

So all these examples from history should remind them, and us – don't presume on God's grace, don't abandon your position of authority for sexual immorality, it leads to eternal destruction. We can further summarize this by saying that ungodliness leads you out of God's presence like Cain, you start making foolish decisions like Balaam, and eventually you make a fatal decision for yourself and others like Korah.

As they say; "those who do not learn from their history are doomed to repeat it..."

Especially if that history not only provides you with examples but actually predicts that this will happen. That is Jude's next point – this ungodliness is not unexpected, this should not have caught you by surprise, it was foretold.

Vs. 4 the condemnation of ungodly people was written about long ago... vs. 14 Enoch, the 7th from Adam prophesied about them... vs. 17 even the apostles foretold this *"in the last times there will be scoffers who follow their own ungodly desires..."*

I'm sure Jude is thinking of what Paul wrote in 2 Tim 3:1-5 *"In the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people."*

As they say "bad company corrupts good character..." or as Jude knows all too well ungodly people lead godly people

astray to share in their destruction. That's why the bulk of his letter from vs. 4 through vs 19 is devoted to calling out ungodliness as sin and reminding his readers of its consequences and I pray that the Holy Spirit will use it effectively for us as well.

So, to cooperate with the Spirit on that matter it's important that we identify and call out the issues that we struggle to identify as ungodly which are in danger of become normalized within the church.

Things that have snuck in and pose a threat to both the content and the conduct of the Christian faith. And while Jude calls out the ungodly people – I'm going to simply call out the ungodly issues that we need to contend with for the faith – because as I do, you'll be able to identify the people for yourselves...

So here are three areas that have become issues for the Church these days, where we must contend, struggle, strive to go against the flow and avoid being swept along with the

prevailing social current towards a destructive end, and I'm lining them up with the same progression of leaving God's presence, making bad choices, and making fatal decisions, just like Jude does...

So the first area is Sabbath, which if neglected means we end up leaving God's presence. The second area is Marriage and human sexuality where we will make bad choices, and the third area is the Sanctity of Life where the choices are fatal for ourselves and others.

Now contending for the faith in the area of Sabbath means that we are struggling against all the forces and issues that would have us put other things before God. Things like sleeping in, spending time with family, going to work, playing sports, and so on... when we are supposed to be gathering with the Church and worshiping God each week.

And this is the area where its probably most difficult for us to see the ungodliness. Skipping out on worship for believers is so normalized now that we don't even blink at it, and

worshiping once a month is considered to be regular church attendance.

Am I trying to motivate you by making you feel guilty?? Am I wanting you to begin observing worship legalistically? No – I want to motivate you by showing you what breaking Sabbath really is, and where it leads so that you'll struggle against it, you'll contend for weekly worship with follow believers.

That you're making progress and attending more because you're pursuing godliness... and you want to avoid the opposite progression.

You see when we break Sabbath... and the worship of God is no longer central to our week and our schedule – to our daily lives... we end up at the center.

From there it's a short step to no longer recognizing the authority of God as the one who created and designed us as male and female and respecting, obeying His intentions for a man and woman in a marriage covenant.

And just because the ungodliness in this area is rapidly becoming normalized even for believers, let me state God's intentions clearly so we get it. We are created male and female and it was good, we were created to bring children into this world – multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.

The God given vehicle for this purpose is a life-long marriage between one man and one woman characterized by sacrificial love and servant leadership, in which sexual intimacy can take place to enjoy each other as man and woman, and to create a family and raise children in the ways of the Lord.

We don't even need to specify all the deviations which our sin brings about in this area in society today, just stating God's intentions clearly identifies what is godly and what is ungodly. And while God's design and intentions are simple, they are not simplistic – that's not the reality of being a man or a woman or being married and being intimate... And our sinful deviations from God's norms complicate things further, but that is why we must struggle in this area, we must push back against the deviations and contend for God's design and intentions.

Because as we see in the history of God's people sexual immorality always leads to destruction and not just because its symptom of covenant unfaithfulness and disobedience that will be judged. Think about it this way, if we don't obey or acknowledge the intention and design for what God established to create and sustain life... the only path it will lead to is death.

And that's where we find ourselves today on the issue of the sanctity of life brothers and sisters. While people generally agree that it's not right to take a life, we have a growing list of circumstances where we find it more and more acceptable – even in the church...

While I would never condone abortion as a form of birth control or consider it normative, if I was confronted with having another child unexpectedly at this stage of my life, and that it would like be a special needs child – the fact that aborting would be a viable option would present itself to me as a temptation in considering the long and difficult parenting

road ahead in such a situation, and that is disturbing... You may also know such temptation in similar situations.

In the same way, many of us who are in good health now will face the temptation of Physician Assisted Suicide in our elderly years. As our health and mental capacities decline, as discomfort and pain increase, as purpose and meaningful life begins to elude us, as the lack of resources becomes apparent and the inconvenience of being a burden to others overwhelms us... the option of ending our own life will present as a significant temptation...

And it is unconscionable that this is still being considered as a “solution” for children, and those struggling with mental health and the homelessness.

And when this issue was discussed at a forum with a number of my colleagues their conclusion was that while they might not want to recommend this for someone who was considering it, they would try to show “compassion” by helping them find someone who would assist them with it.

So brothers and sisters, if we want to avoid ending up as someone who endorses and promotes such fatal decisions- then contend for the faith... Contend for the faith with regards to Sabbath and Marriage and it will not be as great a struggle to contend for the faith with the Sanctity of Life.

Now what exactly does it mean to contend for the faith? Well I’ve hinted at it a little bit so far, but basically its resisting, pushing back, striving against falsehood and ungodly behavior in order to reclaim what is authentically Christian content and conduct within our lives and in the Church. Whatever seeks to infiltrate or influence in order to take ground from orthodox beliefs and conduct should be resisted and pushed back.

That’s what it means to contend for the faith.

Thus Jude instructs his readers in vs. 20 to build themselves up in their most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Which ties back into making sure we are worshiping regularly and being obedient to God’s design and intentions for marriage.

Content and conduct influence each other back and forth – so if we are to contend for the faith we must be built up in it

ourselves, both in terms of correct biblical content, and conduct that is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

In this regards it is important that we also make sure we are learning theology and doctrine and are built up in proper teaching about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, salvation, sin and evil, heaven and hell, and the new heavens and earth, along with the correct doctrine about scripture itself... We need to be built up in this content and know it correctly and well.

Now so far we've only been talking about the issues, not the people as Jude does - but brothers and sisters when we contend for the faith we are going to encounter people and that is why our conduct needs to be empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit. When people are involved, it requires skill and tact and wisdom because there are different kinds of people we'll encounter in our contending.

The first group is described in vs.22 they are "the doubters." These are the people who are starting to wonder if

homosexuality is really a sin because their best friend came out, wondering if God really made us male or female because their child is gender dysmorphic, or if divorce could maybe be a good thing because their parents are getting divorced, or that an abortion was preferable to having their daughter give up everything she's worked so hard to achieve, who wants to bring a child into the world when the parent isn't ready... you get the picture. This is where it starts – this is where these issues hit home and become personal for people in some way... and they start to doubt. We are to show mercy when this happens.

And I don't think this is just pragmatic pastoral care that realizes a soft touch is needed when people are hurting and struggling, its to show these someone how they must relate to those who are causing their struggle, with mercy.

Mercy is to take a forgiving stance against someone who has offended you, offer them kindness – not compliance with their offence, but a degree of understanding. And pray the Holy Spirit will use this mercy to overcome their doubt.

The next group in vs. 23 is the “dabblers.” These are the people who have progressed from doubting to playing with fire. Maybe it’s a parent who is starting to take their child to receive “gender treatment,” maybe it’s a close friend who is moving in with their boyfriend, or who is messing around with someone else who is married, you get the idea. They are making bad decisions, playing with ungodliness and Jude says *“save them by snatching them from the fire.”*

Brothers and sisters, this is where you need the Holy Spirit’s help and guidance on how you can stage an intervention and gently but firmly confront them and say *“what are you doing? This needs to stop – come back to your senses and stop sinning!”* As the saying goes “A wise man loves correction... however a fool despises discipline.”

And that’s the last group brothers and sisters, those who have moved from doubt, to dabbling and who are now “done.” These are people who refuse your mercy, despise any accountability and discipline which attempts to return them to the truth. They’ve moved on from making bad decisions and

are now making fatal ones that will result in their spiritual destruction.

So as vs. 23 warns us, show them mercy, its not our place to bring their condemnation upon them because we don’t know how God may work in someone’s life to return a wayward believer - but keep your distance because you don’t want to be too close when they reap the spiritual destruction that they’ve sown in their life. Don’t let those who are done take you down with them!

But brothers and sisters, we also don’t want to become discouraged by the seriousness of ungodliness which Jude calls out in this letter, which perhaps has struck a note a little close to home for us... Nor do we want the exhortation to contend for the faith to overwhelm us.

And it can be a little disconcerting to know that some people whom we used to know as strong Christians, leaders in the church even... can fall into doubt, begin to dabble with fire,

and end up making spiritually fatal decisions. We might wonder what hope is there for us to avoid the same fate?

Well brothers and sisters let me close off this message the same way Jude ends his letter.

While it is our calling to contend for the faith, you can trust the Lord Jesus to keep us in the faith. Let me say that again... is our calling to contend for the faith, but you can trust the Lord Jesus to keep you in the faith.

Vs. 21 the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ will bring us to eternal life – not our efforts, not our striving, not our contending... the mercy of Jesus Christ. And in Vs 24 it is God himself Jude says *“who is able to keep us from stumbling... and present us in His glorious presence – without fault, and with great joy!”*

So brothers and sisters – do not let the enemy take today’s word from the Lord and twist it to discourage you or condemn you or overwhelm you, instead... receive it as instructing, empowering, and encouraging.

So be bold, be strong, be courageous – contend for the faith, and you trust that the Lord Jesus will keep you, in the faith.

Amen.