

Route Sixty-Six

Part Sixty-Five

Jude

Contending for the Faith

(John 5:39; Jude 3)

With Study Questions

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(John 5:39; Jude 3)

You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me (John 5:39).

Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

Introduction

We live in an odd age where almost any critique of morality or cultural/political/economic policy is met with the accusation of being hateful, judgmental or bigoted. It is odd and ironic that the very voices seeking to dress down this supposed judgmentalism seem to be oblivious to the fact that they are currently engaging in the very thing they're denouncing. If it is wrong to judge, then you should just let me be judgmental without judging me for it.

Of course, the entire enterprise is dependent upon people dismissing any deep or critical thought. I pray that is not us. By contemporary standards, Jude would be the target of daily chastisements. This short epistle is fierce in its reproofs and rebukes. It's as if he is sitting on the porch of a house in a land where outlaws rule the streets. His children are inside, so he sits with a shotgun in hand, lest the predators find their way into the abode of his loved ones.

Truly, the children are to be protected, but there is a prayer that even the outlaws, if moved by the truth and the Spirit of God, will have eyes to see that that house is the narthex leading to eternal peace. Similar to our past few messages, we will approach Jude verse by verse.

Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ: ² Mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you (Jude 1, 2).

Jude is likely a close personal relative of Christ (a half-brother or cousin), but chooses the designation of “**bondservant**” *doulos*, which would amount to a voluntary slave. It is of note that even though Jesus says, “**No longer do I call you servants (slaves-doulos)...but I have called you friends**” (John 15:15), that His faithful followers still refer to themselves as slaves. By inheritance and heavenly riches, Christians are sons and daughters, but by service and obedience we are to be willful, voluntary slaves to an omnibenevolent (all good) Master who died that we might live.

“**Bondservant**” would be a natural, and joyful, self-designation for Jude who was the recipient of God’s effectual “**call**” *kletois*. There is an outward call, e.g. “**many are called, but few are chosen**” (Matthew 22:14), but there is irresistible inward and effectual call. These are the “beloved” in Christ and those who are “**preserved**” by, and in, Christ. Truly a good work that He began, He will complete (Philippians 1:6).

It is with a pastoral heart that Jude prays that we would have an exponential intimacy with the mercy, peace and love of God and toward God and one another. But Jude, similar to what we read in the other general epistles, perceived a threat. Creeps.

Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. ⁴ For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ (Jude 3, 4).

We have a tendency to coast. Jude is bidding us to fight. As a fellow Christian, he is calling us to put on, or more aptly, take off the gloves. We use the word “**contend**” to describe a boxer, a contender. It is a very appropriate use. Not to dig too far into the Greek, but a quick look at the transliterated word is revealing.

Epagonizesthai

Notice the root, from which we get our English word, “agonize.” Truly, salvation is the free gift of God, paid for by the blood of Christ (so it is truly a high price). But the ongoing presentation, or proclamation, of that free gift is ever under siege. And the church must fight.

And, once again, the fighting is not with those throwing rocks through the windows of the church, but those who have subdued positions of leadership. In 2015, the Presbytery of the Palisades cast its vote in favor of an amendment to the PCUSA Constitution that would change the description of marriage from being between “a man and a woman” to being between “two people.” It became the 86th presbytery to cast an affirmative vote, providing the majority needed among 171 presbyteries to approve the change.

This resulted in cheers and tears. My only point here is that this patently unbiblical decision was not foisted upon the PCUSA from hostile outsiders. It was internal. This is the very danger of which Jude writes. These church leaders have crept into positions of authority and turned the grace of God into lewdness, thus denying Christ. Even the most worldly and ungodly thinker must see the dishonesty here. It is one thing to disagree with, and reject, the law and gospel of Christ found in Scripture, it is much more insidious to transform it. Of course, this is precisely what Satan does when he “**transforms**” (literally, reshapes) himself into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14).

In order for the church to avoid thinking this will result in some genuine overthrow of the true faith, Jude conveys that all of these people were “**long ago marked out for this condemnation.**” The very battle in which the church, Christians, find themselves is designed for its own strength. Calvin taught,

...for if these were already long ago ordained, it follows that the Church is not tried or exercised but according to the infallible counsel of God.¹

¹ Calvin, J. (1998). [Jude](#) (electronic ed., Jud 4). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

Jude then gives what might be considered a scalding hot history lesson.

But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. ⁶ And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day; ⁷ as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire (Jude 5-7).

The three examples given are Egypt, angels and Sodom Gomorrah. One specific (Egypt), one celestial (angels) and one general (Sodom and Gomorrah). The point made with Egypt is that even though they most assuredly had a religious experience of sorts (being saved from slavery), they did not persevere and were destroyed.

The point with angels is the leaving of their proper domain or abode. They desired to be more than they were-to have more authority and power. The great beauty and light they enjoyed as the angelic host was not enough. The lust for power is a killer and it resulted in their being in **“chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day.”**

The final example of Sodom and Gomorrah emphasizes the connection between ungodliness and **“sexual immorality.”** **“Strange flesh”** here likely referring to homosexuality. I realize this is an unpopular position and I am not encouraging hatred or bigotry or any of the terms so popular today designed to chastise those who believe marriage should be between a man and a woman. But the power and emphasis behind seeking to redefine marriage is, in Scripture, commonly associated with aggressive antichristian thinking.

Years ago, I wrote op-ed pieces which promoted the biblical notion of marriage between men and women. I would occasionally anticipate in these articles that it is not merely that this is wrong, it will have a profound and damaging effect upon our children. I was widely criticized for using children to make my point. It was a scare tactic. Yet many of you will be aware of a recent Pantene commercial where two homosexual moms

exploit their young “transgender” child to sell hair products. I don’t mean to harp on this, but it is in the text, it is in our culture, and it must be addressed.

Again, attacks and criticisms are to be expected in every generation of the church militant. Almost five hundred years ago, Calvin opined,

So at this day the world is full of Epicurean despisers of God, who having cast off every fear, madly scoff at the whole doctrine of true religion, regarding it as fabulous^{2,3}

Jude will now begin to move from historical examples to historical figures, that we might be wise as to the actions and strategies of those who fight against the hope of eternal life in Christ.

Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries. ⁹ Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, “The Lord rebuke you!” ¹⁰ But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves. ¹¹ Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah (Jude 8-11).

The event of Michael and the devil presents more than our time allows. Suffice it to say that those who wish to be destructive often seek to abolish all order, accountability, authority and governance. These are people, according to Jude, who don’t really know what they’re talking about and whatever they do “**know naturally**” or according to their natures, they handle like “**brute beasts**” in self corruption. After all, if humans are merely the most advanced animal, this would make sense.

² “Fabulous” here meaning having no basis in reality; mythical.

³ Calvin, J. (1998). [*Jude*](#) (electronic ed., Jud 17). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

He then mentions Cain who worshiped God but not in faith as Abel (Hebrews 11:4) and was overtaken by sin and wickedness. He mentions Balaam, a prophet of God who, though he could not prophesy against God's people, offered counsel for money on how to destroy them (Numbers 31). Finally, he mentions Korah who headed a rebellion against Moses and the work of God through his hands (Numbers 16). All of these are examples of people who would, ostensibly, have been among the people of God.

Jude now moves from actual examples to metaphors describing their folly.

These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving *only* themselves. *They are* clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; ¹³ raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever (Jude 12, 13).

"Spots" *spilades*, can actually be translated **"hidden reefs"**. One thinks of surf-spots with great waves but deadly rocks directly underneath. These false teachers are bidding you to thoughtlessly jump in. A farmer sees **"clouds"** and anticipates a watered crop. But there is no true, living **"water"** coming from them. Though they are dead **"trees,"** they do not cease to present themselves as **"raging waves"** who, before God are foaming up their own shame. Finally, they are like **"wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever."** They are lost in an eternity of blackness and wrath. Modern sensibilities might assess Jude as hostile, angry, hateful and even bigoted. But in truth, his words are intensely and unapologetically loving and protective. Like a mamma-bear protecting her threatened children.

It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, ¹⁵ to execute judgment on all and to convict all 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.”¹⁶ **These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires; they are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage (Jude 14-16).**

The seemingly harsh words of Jude pale in comparison to the harsh reality of the judgment which will fall upon those who disregard the warning; in this case a pre-flood warning. Four times in three verses we see a reference to “**ungodliness**” *asebes*. The word does not mean irreligious. Religion is at an all-time high. The devil is a very religious entity who never gives up. This word refers to one characterized by immoral and impious behavior. It might be best understood to designate one who lives in this world as if there is no true God.

They can be spotted by their incessant grumbling, their lack of contentment, their priority of following their own sinful desires (what they like is, by definition for them, the best thing), they raise their voices rather than strengthening their arguments and they will play the political/religious game to gain the advantage in their ungodly pursuits. As one sixteenth century minister conveyed:

These are murmurers. They who indulge their depraved lusts, are hard to please, and morose, so that they are never satisfied. Hence it is, that they always murmur and complain, however kindly good men may treat them.⁴

I pray none of us are numbered among those who so uncharitably critique those God has brought into our lives to help guide us through the storms. Jude counsels on the proper response.

But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ:¹⁸ how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts.¹⁹ These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit (Jude 17-19).

⁴ Calvin, J. (1998). [Jude](#) (electronic ed., Jud 16). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

The prophetic moves from ancient (Enoch) to more current (for them). Our response is not to be shocked or disillusioned to find ourselves in our current battle. We should know in advance that this is the battle. The standard, and biblical, enemies of Christ and His church are the world, the flesh and the devil. We sit in the church and look at the windows, wondering where they are and what they're doing. Jude is saying that we need to be aware that they are in the pew next you, perhaps in the pulpit before you, and at some level within you, lying at the door of our own hearts. But we are to do more than just know this is going to happen.

But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. ²² And on some have compassion, making a distinction; ²³ but others save with fear, pulling *them* out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh (Jude 20-22).

Through prayer, meditation upon the love of God for us, a fervent pursuit of love for one another and our eyes ever focused upon the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life, we are to be built up. And Jude gives here a brief expression of what Paul had taught in more detail regarding our need for one another (1 Corinthians 12:12-31). We need to be cognizant of each other's vulnerabilities and willing to act. Some need a kind word, others a stern warning and all of this done with allowing the defilement of our own souls.

Realizing how ill-equipped any of us are for such an eternally significant task (really all tasks), Jude ends with one of richest and most sublime doxologies in all of Scripture. We will end with that as well.

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present *you* faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,²⁵ To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen (Jude 24, 25).

Questions for Study

1. To what extent are the common accusations of being hateful, judgmental or bigoted legitimate? Explain (page 2).
2. What is a bondservant? How are Christians to be this (page 3)?
3. Christians are called and preserved by Christ. How does happen? What does look like (page 4)?
4. Jude perceived a threat. What was it (pages 3, 4)?
5. What does it mean to “contend” for the faith (pages 3, 4)?
6. Is Jude addressing the threat to the church from within or without? Explain your answer. Can you give examples (pages 4, 5)?
7. Discuss the historical examples and historical figures Jude uses to make his point. How do we know a threat to the church, the truth and to Christ Himself (pages 5-7)?
8. What does it mean to be “ungodly” (page 8)?
9. How are the “beloved” to respond to these attacks and threats (pages 8, 9)?