
Reflection Jude Contend for the faith

Jude had really wanted to write a different letter - this single chapter letter easy to miss but just before Revelation the last book in the Bible. The author, Jude, was Judas, a younger brother of both Jesus and of James, who had become the leader of the church in Jerusalem. Jude had been eager to write all about the wonderful salvation that God has brought us through Jesus, he refers to in the first couple of verses and in the wonderful last two verses. But a deep sense of urgency had grown in his mind that he could no longer ignore *“I felt I had to write to you & urge you to contend for the faith that was once & for all entrusted to the saints”*. (v. 3)

Yes, the Church needed assurance but it also needed encouragement to wake up and smell the coffee, & more seriously, have a canary in the mine to detect the danger of deadly gas. We can't be certain of the details, some of which are pretty obscure, but Jude warns against these false teachers who were undermining the believers with their seductive lies...*who change the grace of our God into a licence for immorality & deny Jesus Christ our only sovereign and Lord*.(4) and...*grumblers and fault-finders* (17) Yes, we depend on God's grace, the love and forgiveness He offers us through Jesus but let us not presume on that grace to live then just as we please to suit ourselves but instead seek to live in a way that honours our Lord. Too many today, think and teach that each person should pick and choose for themselves what parts of God's teaching & of the Christian message to follow. Like with some populist politicians who disregard inconvenient truth and facts, there are consequences.

Jude strikes a balance between God's responsibility to guard us from sin & error and our own responsibility to remain pure in faith & doctrine. On the one hand, he affirms, we are “loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ”(v. 1); Mercy, peace and love are our's in rich abundance (v. 2) and in his great closing verses, offers praise “to Him who is able to keep you from falling or stumbling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy (24)

Hearing such statements, a believer could almost imagine that he or she could passively float along through life on a cloud of divine protection. Not so! says the experience of each one of us. & Not so! says Jude. After urging his fellow believers to *contend for the faith* – certainly

no soft, comfortable task - he lays out what is the responsibility of every believer. *But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith & pray in the Holy Spirit.*”(v. 20)

That means working together in Christ’s body. *Contend for the faith – entrusted once & for all to the saints* – & that includes you and me in this local church **& all** who trust in God’s grace through Christ. The New Testament has no room for solitary believers. The advice for local churches is full of references to ***one another: pray for one another; care for one another; encourage one another; support one another; forgive one another; respect one another; admonish or advise one another when we are getting it wrong , build yourselves up in the faith. We need each other. We need to work together to build each other up.***

Prayer also plays a key part in maintaining faith for the long haul. Do not be afraid of *praying in the Holy Spirit*. Nothing to do with praying in tongues but the reality that the Lord enables every believer to pray to God. & even when we are struggling, *the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for and what to say but the Spirit intercedes for us through wordless groans* (Romans 8:26)

In other words, there is both God’s responsibility and a very personal individual responsibility. God’s power can keep us from falling but must constantly plug in to take hold of that power through the study of God’s word & prayer thought the Holy Spirit. **Yes, God’s love will keep us, but we must also keep ourselves in His love (v. 21) as we wait for the Lord’s ultimate deliverance.**

Be merciful to those who doubt. (v. 22) For those in our community who are struggling to sift truth from lies, we are urged to be kind & gracious, generous with our time & prayers & patient with their questions. For others who may be close to abandoning the faith, *snatch them from the fire.* **Jude is clear, no one is a lost cause & God is able to keep you from stumbling & to present you without fault before His glorious presence without fault & with great joy. No one** – no matter how big their doubts or how sinful their past - is beyond God’s protection. His grace is sufficient for all. He is able... so hold on to God’s presence, safe in the knowledge that the Lord is powerful & kind enough to protect us from all that seeks to harm us & to bring us safely into His kingdom ***Contend for the faith & keep yourselves - and be kept- in God’s love. Now to Him who is able to keep you from falling or stumbling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy be all glory, majesty , power & authority through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN***