

### Contending Earnestly for the Faith

#### Jude 1-4

Jude 1-4: *“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: <sup>2</sup> Mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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.”*

#### Background Notes

The author of the epistle of Jude identified himself as *“Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James.”* Who was this “Jude,” or “Judas”? It was certainly not the Judas who betrayed the Lord, but the Lord had another disciple named Judas. However, if that disciple was the Judas who wrote the epistle of Jude, most likely he would have identified himself as the “apostle Jude” in the greeting. And there’s another little-known Judas in Acts 15, but there doesn’t seem to be any historical connection between that Jude and the author of the epistle of Jude.

Most likely the Jude who authored this epistle was the half-brother of our Lord. Verse 1 says that Jude was the brother of James – that would have been the James who wrote the epistle of James. He, too, was a half-brother of our Lord. There is no doubt that the Lord had half brothers and sisters, because in Mark 6:3 some of the local people said, *“Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?”* So it is believed that the Jude who wrote the epistle of Jude was the son of Mary and Joseph, and thus the half-brother of our Lord.

The epistle of Jude was probably written in the 70s AD. The epistle of 2 Peter is similar in content to the epistle of Jude, and it was written in the mid-60s AD. 2 Peter 2:1 predicted that false teachers would arise in the early Church: *“But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord.”*

In the epistle of Jude, the false teachers had already infiltrated the early Church: *“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” (v4).* So it seems that the epistle of Jude was written some time after 2 Peter, probably in the 70s AD.

The salutation and the greeting of the letter are in verses 1-2. In verse 1, notice the phrase, “*preserved* in Jesus Christ” or “*kept* in Jesus Christ.” That’s a great proof text for the assurance of salvation. If you’re a true believer in our Lord Jesus, your salvation in Christ is secure. You are kept and preserved in Jesus Christ.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The faith of the true Church was delivered once for all.

Notice the exhortation to the early Christians in verse 3: “*contend earnestly for the faith, which was once for all delivered to the saints.*” Was this exhortation only for the early Church, or is it for Christians today as well? You’d better believe it’s for the believers today as well! In the midst of derision and persecution from unbelievers without, and an apathetic attitude and falling away from believers within, the true Church must contend earnestly for the faith.

The “true” Church is **not** an ecclesiastical organization or denomination. The true Church is universal. It is comprised of *all* true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and they are the “saints” mentioned in verse 3.

In verse 3, “the faith” does **not** mean a particular creed or formulated confession of faith. It means the whole body of truth revealed in Scripture. This body of truth was given by revelation from God Himself. This body of truth is not the accumulated religious experience or thought of man - it is the *God-revealed* content of the faith. This body of truth was delivered **once for all** (not once upon a time!) “Given *once for all*” means that the body of truth contained in Scripture is **complete**. No further revelation will come in the future. Nothing is to be added, or subtracted, or changed. The Bible is complete.

Now it is our responsibility to contend for the faith. It’s our job as believers to defend the faith - to contend **earnestly** for the faith. Are we doing our job? Do we know *how* to defend the faith? The faith of the true Church has been delivered once for all, and we are to defend it well.

### 2. The fate of the false teachers was determined long ago.

“*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.*” The “certain men” who had crept into the early Church without being noticed were the false teachers of the 1<sup>st</sup> century. They were the “Gnostic teachers” that were denounced by the apostle John in the epistles of 1 & 2 John.

The false doctrine of the Gnostics denied the full deity of Christ. The Gnostics claimed that the “divine Christ spirit” came upon “the man Jesus” at His baptism, and then the “divine spirit” left before Jesus died. *That’s heresy!* No wonder Jude said that even though they professed to be Christians, the Gnostic teachers actually denied the Lord Jesus Christ (v4).

The Gnostics took two different directions in lifestyle. Gnosticism claimed that only the spiritual side of a person was important. The physical body was not as important because it was part of the material world, and the Gnostics believed that the material world was evil. In fact, they taught that the physical body and its desires hindered the development of the mind and spirit.

Therefore, one way to deal with the physical body and its desires was to practice *extreme* self-denial and harsh treatment of the body, in order to keep the body and its desires firmly in check. The Gnostics who followed this approach to life were “ascetic” Gnostics. Some true believers in the early Church had gotten into the ascetic way of life, thinking it made them more spiritual.

The Bible teaches self-denial, but not asceticism. The apostle Paul refuted the ascetic approach to life in Colossians 2:20-23. *“Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations - “Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” which all concern things which perish with the using - according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.”*

The other lifestyle direction that some of the Gnostics took was the antinomian, or libertine attitude toward the body and its desires. Since they believed that the physical body was less important than the spirit, then a person could do anything they wanted with the body. Fulfill all the body’s fleshly desires. It doesn’t matter, because only the spirit is important.

Jude refuted this evil doctrine of Gnostic false teaching. Verse 4: *“For certain men have crept in unnoticed who turned the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.”* And verse 8: *“Likewise, these dreamers defile the flesh,”* and verse 10: *“Like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves.”*

By the way, both extremes - the ascetic approach to the Christian life and the libertine or antinomian approach to the Christian life - are found in the Church today. Be warned! Be careful not to become involved in extreme ideas of how to live the Christian life.

Notice what verse 4 says about the fate of the false teachers: *Long ago they were marked out for this condemnation.* What does this mean? Does it mean that God foreordained them for destruction because He had programmed them to be

false teachers and they had no choice in the matter? No! The Bible doesn't teach that idea here - or anywhere else in Scripture! God foreordained the *fate* of these false teachers long ago. The *fate* of *all unbelieving false teachers* is eternal damnation.

God has predetermined that the destiny for all unbelievers is damnation. This truth is clear throughout the Bible, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The fate of false teachers has been determined long ago.

## **Practical Application**

### **You may have to change your ministry plans.**

In verse 3 Jude said that he had planned to write about the more pleasant theme of our salvation, but he was forced to write about the false teachers because of the urgency of the situation: *"Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people" (v3).*

If the Lord ever changes your plans for how you thought you would serve Him, that does not mean that your original plans for serving the Lord were wrong. However, because of the urgency or necessity of some situation, the Lord may have had you change your plans.

Perhaps you planned on serving the Lord in foreign missions, but the Lord changed your plans because of a great need here at home. There was a time that I thought I would serve the Lord by starting a church, but the Lord changed those plans. So don't be surprised if the Lord asks you to change your ministry plans.