

## Keep The Faith

Scripture Text: Jude 17–25

### Introduction

In the first part of the small letter of Jude, we learn about ungodly people who had slipped into the church. We learned that in the midst of this danger, the church must *contend for the true faith* that was once for all delivered to the saints. There was a real danger in the church then, and there is a real danger for us today. If we are not careful, Satan will slither his way into the church and destroy the fellowship. Jude warns us about this danger and urges us to *contend for the faith*, to agonize and fight for it. As we come to end of Jude's letter, we may ask ourselves, "How can we practically contend for the faith? How can we personally apply Jude's caution about ungodly influences to our own lives?" Jude has given us the warning, so now what is the plan of attack? *This message will present four ways how we **keep the faith** that was once for all delivered.*

### Keep the Faith by Being Aware of Ungodly Intrusions

The first mark of keeping the faith in this passage is remembering what endangers the church. I have heard it said that the greatest danger to the church is not persecution. It is not restrictions on our religious freedom. It is not immoral laws that are enacted by the government. The greatest danger to the church is not from without, but *it is from within*. The church thrived under persecution. The church was watered by the blood of martyrs. But a church will not stand if it fails to keep the faith in the midst of Satan's destructive schemes. Jude reminds us of that danger. Look at the following verses.

**Jude 17–19** <sup>17</sup> *But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> They said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions." <sup>19</sup> It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.*

In these verses, Jude reminds us of dangers that were predicted long ago. Those who are called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ, must contend for the faith that was once for all delivered **because** ungodly people slip into the church and try to corrupt the faith. Jude reminds the church of what they should have known. Jude probably refers to what Jesus and His apostles had already predicted, that ungodly people would *infiltrate the church*. Look at some of these warnings.

**Matthew 7:15** *"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.*

**Acts 20:29–30** <sup>29</sup> *I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; <sup>30</sup> and from **among your own selves** will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.*

**1 Timothy 4:1** *Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,*

**2 Timothy 4:3–4** <sup>3</sup> *For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, <sup>4</sup> and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.*

Not all who claim to be following Christ actually do. There are those who are not genuine believers who teach false things and cause divisions in the church. I have personally seen the damage of false teaching in a church, and sometimes it may not be completely obvious. That is why what we teach and what we learn is extremely important to the health of a church. We need to know what is true! We should also not tolerate sin. To keep the faith means we will stand up against what God says is wrong. While Jesus is merciful, He does not tolerate sin. There is a broad way and a narrow way. There is eternal damnation and eternal life. There is holiness and ungodliness. If we do not contend for what is true, then we will be guilty of tolerantly embracing every wind of doctrine (Ephesians 4:14). So, pay attention to what is taught by everyone and pay attention to what others are doing. Jude shows us how to keep the faith in the midst of ungodly influences. We do it by living *proactively* as a follower of Christ.

### **Keep the Faith by Cultivating Your Personal Relationship with God**

We must not think that contending for the faith simply means attacking false teaching. There are those who spend a great deal of time arguing for or against something. There is a place to oppose falsehood, but it should never be *at the expense* of our personal relationship with God. We will not successfully keep the faith if we concentrate *only* on resisting opponents of the faith. Therefore, we must take *positive steps* to continue in the love of God and to not neglect our own spiritual growth. You are not being faithful by solely meeting as the church once or twice a week, going to Sunday school, and listening to a sermon. Some do not even do that much! If you are to seriously keep the faith, you must be *actively engaged* in your own personal relationship with God.

**Jude 20–21** <sup>20</sup> *But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, <sup>21</sup> keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.*

It may seem that Jude is telling us to do *four things* in those verses, but he is actually telling us *one main thing* to do, and three steps to make it happen. The main statement in those verses is to *keep yourselves in the love of God*. We must remain in the love of God. Earlier, Jude wrote that believers are “loved and kept by God.” The love by which God called us to be His people was emphasized in verse one. God promises to keep His own, but His own have a responsibility to *persevere in the faith*. God keeps His own *and* they must keep themselves in His love. These verses sound similar to John chapter 15 where Jesus told His disciples to *abide in His love*.

**John 15:9–10** <sup>9</sup> *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.* <sup>10</sup> *If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.*

According to John 15, remaining in Jesus' love is related to obeying Him. This seems to be similar to what Jude is telling us. We must keep ourselves in God's love, in what He has told us, in what He has promised to us, in a genuine relationship with Him. Jude provided three steps we can take to keep ourselves in the love of God. The first step is by building ourselves up in the most holy faith. Paul wrote that the only foundation for the church is Jesus Christ, and people must build upon that foundation (1 Corinthians 3:10–15). The "most holy faith" Jude mentioned is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This includes the teachings of Christ and about Christ, which coincides with the faith that we are exhorted "to contend." We remain in God's love by continuing to grow in our understanding of the Bible and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As we understand God's Word better, we know God better, and our love for Him increases.

The second step by which we remain in God's love is by praying "in the Holy Spirit." Our relationship with God is nurtured by prayer. Prayer is an essential part of our faith and of our relationship with God. In order to keep ourselves in God's love we must be *prayerfully dependent* on Him. How strong would a relationship with one's spouse be if the two never communicated? How well would a relationship be if one spouse seldom listened to the other? The prayer Jude mentioned here is not some selfish prayer that demands our desires from God. It is not prayer that treats God as a divine vending machine. To pray in the Holy Spirit means to pray *according to the will of God - His desires and His plans*. It is prayer that is motivated by God and which seeks His will. It is the kind of prayer Paul mentioned - *praying at all times in the Spirit* (Ephesians 6:18).

The third step in remaining in God's love is to wait "for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ." This means we focus on the second coming of the Lord. Think of two lovers who are separated by a great distance who both *eagerly wait* for the day they will be reunited. To continue in our love for God means we will continue to long for the day when Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom of the Church, will return. We eagerly wait for the day when we will know Him more fully. We must live with eternity in view as we eagerly wait for the arrival of our Lord and Savior. This is similar to what Titus wrote.

**Titus 2:13** *waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,*

We cannot remain in God's love if we immerse ourselves in this world and cease to long for our future perfection before God. Those who take their eyes off their future hope will find their love for God slowly waning. It may also be evident that their real love is for the present evil age. Therefore, to keep the faith means we must cultivate our own personal relationship with God by growing in our understanding of the faith, by praying fervently in the Holy Spirit, and by eagerly waiting for Jesus to return for us when He will welcome us into our heavenly home.

## Keep the Faith by Helping Those Influenced by the Ungodly

The church must also show mercy *to those affected* by false teaching. There may be people near you who are struggling with the faith. There may be people in your local church congregation who are doubting the faith or heading down a path of destruction. What are you doing about that? We do not have the right to ignore it! If we do, we rob people of the opportunity to repent and to experience truth and freedom in Christ. This is not loving! Jude gives us the answer in how to respond to these people.

**Jude 22–23** <sup>22</sup> *And have mercy on those who doubt;* <sup>23</sup> *save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.*

Jude turned to how believers should treat those who were influenced by false teachers. There appears to be *three groups* of people mentioned and a progression of how badly each group is affected by ungodly intrusion. Jude began with those who were least affected by the ungodly by encouraging the church to have mercy on those who were doubting. This group had begun to doubt whether the faith they had been taught was correct. Those who waver under the influence of false teachers should not be rejected or ignored. Believers should extend mercy to them and be patient with those struggling with doubts. Showing mercy here does not mean ignoring the seriousness of false teaching, but exhorting them with the truth of God's Word, in love and patience.

The second group was in even greater danger and closer to being captured by the teaching and behavior of the intruders. If this group continued on the same destructive path, they would be consumed by God's judgement of fire. Perhaps these are people who never made a genuine profession of faith, but they might if they were not overly influenced by false doctrine. However, there is still hope that they can be reclaimed, rescued from the judgment to come, and put into a right relationship with God. Their lives could be saved, and they could be snatched from the fire that threatened to destroy them. This is a reminder that false doctrine has serious consequences.

The third group is in the worst shape. They had already been defiled by the false teachers. Perhaps they had joined with the false teachers in perverting God's grace and denying Jesus as Lord. The image of their sin is that of soiled under garments. To be "stained by the flesh" means to be stained by bodily function. It is a reminder that sin is stinky and foul and it makes us filthy. Therefore, we must strike a balance between showing mercy to this group while staying out of the *cesspool* of sin. My parents used to caution me about hanging with the wrong crowd lest they corrupt me. We have to be careful showing mercy to some that we do not get caught up in their sin. Those who are spiritually healthy should keep a close watch on themselves and show mercy *with fear*.

We see in these exhortations that the church should never brush false teaching and sin in the church under the rug. We should never treat lightly false teaching or sin in the church. We should never think that it is "not my problem". It is our problem and it will be a serious problem for the fellowship if it is not addressed. But at the same time, we must

never be harsh and unmerciful. We need to prayerfully and lovingly help those who are under the influence of false teaching and who are heading down the wrong path, while at the same time protecting the unity and purity of the church.

### **Keep the Faith by Trusting God to Keep You**

Lastly, the church must trust God to keep them safe. Jude opened this letter with the following greeting: *To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ.* Now, Jude closes the letter by reminding us that God is able and willing to keep His own from falling away from the faith. False teachers threaten the church, but those who truly belong to the Lord will never surrender. They will keep the faith. Their perseverance is not due to their own strength, for God Himself keeps us from falling away. He makes us able to stand before Him blameless and joyful when Christ returns.

**Jude 24–25** <sup>24</sup> *Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy,* <sup>25</sup> *to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.*

There is a beautiful tension in Scripture of us keeping ourselves in the faith and God keeping us faithful in Him. How can both be true? I believe this is a mystery! God gives us His grace so that we desire to keep ourselves in His love. In these last verses, we read that God is able to keep you from stumbling. This does not mean that you will never sin again. If that were so, then there is not one of us who has any hope of being *kept in Christ*. For anyone to say that he or she does not sin is to deceive themselves and to make God a liar (1 John 1:8-10). Salvation is a three part process. You *were saved* when you confessed Jesus as Lord. You are also *being saved* as the Holy Spirit conforms you into the image of Christ. And, you *will be finally and forever saved* when Jesus returns and you stand in His presence with your glorified body. God does not promise that we will never sin again. He does promise He will preserve His children from abandoning the faith so that they will be able to stand before Him “with great joy”.

Since God is perfectly faithful, supremely powerful, and infinitely loving, He will not allow any of His faithful children to be lost. God will complete His saving work He began in you. Because you did nothing to earn salvation, you can do nothing to lose it. However, salvation is not a license to sin or to believe whatever we choose. If it were, then most of what Jude wrote would make no sense. For those who genuinely profess Christ as Lord and Savior, who are recipients of God’s grace and who respond to it with faith, they will never fall away. And because your salvation is God’s work in you, He alone deserves *all the glory and praise*, now and forever. Therefore, let us not be Christians in title only. If Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior and we have been saved by His work on the cross, then let us contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to us, and let us keep that faith by cultivating our relationship with Christ, having mercy on those who are falling away, and giving glory to God for His work in us and His promise to keep us. This is good news. Thanks be to God. Amen!