

A Faith Worth Fighting For: Rules of Engagement

Jude 1:1-16

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Now let me invite you if you would please to take a copy of God's Word in your hands and turn with me to the book of Jude. If you're not familiar with the book of Jude, turn to the very last book in the Bible, the book of Revelation, then turn back one book and you're right there; the book of Jude. Page 1027 in our church Bibles. Before we read it together, would you bow your heads with me as we ask for God's help in understanding and believing His Word. Let's pray together.

O Lord, Your holy Word is now spread before us but our hearts are inclined not to listen, our ears often filled with the din, the cacophony of a myriad of other voices. So we pray, we cry to You to pour out the Holy Spirit upon us, to unstop deaf ears, to make our hearts receptive soil as the seed of the Word of God is sown that it may bring forth a rich and wonderful harvest to Your glory and honor and praise. For we ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

We're reading the book of Jude. This is the Word of Almighty God:

Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ:

May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. And angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day - just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual

immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.

Yet in like manner these people also, relying on their dreams, defile the flesh, reject authority, and blaspheme the glorious ones. But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you.' But these people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively. Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error and perished in Korah's rebellion. These are hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, shepherds feeding themselves; waterless clouds, swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for who the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.

It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, 'Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, 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.' These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires; they are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage.

But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, 'In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.' It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

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, 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."

We praise God that He has spoken in His holy and inerrant Word.

The Meddlesome Message of Jude

Well this evening we begin a short, three-part series considering the teaching of

the book of Jude, the brother of James, therefore the half brother of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you'll look at verse 3 you'll see that Jude had intended to write to the churches a general letter of instruction in Christian truth. Perhaps he meant to reflect on lessons learned from personal and intimate acquaintance with his brother, the Lord Jesus Christ, during the days of His earthly ministry. "I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation," he says. And yet he finds that he cannot fulfill that ambition and purpose. He feels constrained, compelled by the situation and circumstances of the churches he is writing to, to change his tone and adjust the target of his admonition entirely. "Although I was very eager to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints." He is driven by necessity to write a letter occupied not first with theology and catechesis and instruction in truth in general, but one rather burdened with warning and alarm, which should tip us off immediately and prepare us for the fact that the book of Jude, like the Bible as a whole, is a meddling book. It steps on our toes; it interferes. It's not really literature, at least not in the conventional sense. I think that's the wrong way to think about the Scriptures. It's far too nice. The Holy Scriptures in general, Jude in particular, really is a wartime missive from the heavenly commander in chief to his soldiers, fighting and bleeding on the front lines of a fierce spiritual battle. Jude is giving us the rules of engagement as we march to war. "Contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Fight for the truth, people of God!"

I. Calling

And tonight I want you to see four themes that run through the opening sixteen verses, four "C"s in fact, that help us understand the wartime mentality that Jude wants us to cultivate. The first of them, if you'll look at verses 1 and 2, the first of them is calling. Jude is writing to those who are called. And then the other two phrases, "beloved in God the Father," and "kept for Jesus Christ," explain more fully what it means to be called. The key idea, Jude is saying, that marks the identity of a Christian, is their calling. They are called ones. Now Jude, as we saw when we read it together just a moment ago, is going to say some very challenging things about false teachers and about immorality. And before he leads us down into the trenches of spiritual conflict and combat, he wants us to understand our true identity clearly that we might be encouraged and made ready for the fight. And so he begins here with our calling. And by calling he's referring to the effective, powerful, irresistible, sovereign work of the Holy Spirit who through the preaching of the Gospel draws people into union with Jesus Christ, works new life in their hearts, enlightens their understandings, inclines their wills, and gives them the gift of saving faith. All of that is involved in this idea of calling. In Romans 8 and verse 30, Paul declares "Those whom God has predestined He also called and those whom He called He also justified and those whom He justified He also glorified." So calling is a work of grace, unconditioned by anything in us, that makes salvation an infallible reality in the lives of everyone

that receives it.

The classic Scriptural illustration of effectual calling is the summons of Jesus that was issued to Lazarus. You remember that story in John 11:43? Lazarus was dead and buried; he was totally unable to respond or to alter his own condition. He was dead and then Jesus called him. "Lazarus," He said, "come out!" And at the command of Jesus, new life and an obedient response overtook Lazarus and he stepped from the tomb alive. That is a picture of the call of God that works in the mighty power of the Holy Spirit when the Gospel is preached and sinners respond in faith. That's what's happening. God in Christ, by the power of the Spirit, is summoning those of us who once were dead in trespasses and sins to step alive from the grave of our natural condition. Because of the great love with which He loved us, God who is rich in mercy, in that moment of calling, makes us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved. As you head into the fight, Jude is saying, as the spiritual struggle rages all around you, as false teaching and moral temptation and the combat with your own sinful inclinations grow fierce, strengthen your faith and find the courage to stay in the fight here. You are a Christian today not because you made it so but because God called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. He has done it. You are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works. Your identity and your security rest here in the call of a sovereign God. You are a Christian because He has made you so and you are His.

Placed In The Path of The Love Of God

And more than that, notice if you are called you are also "beloved in God the Father" and "kept for Jesus Christ." Wonderful expressions, aren't they? Not just beloved by God; that's true. But beloved in God the Father. When you were called to new life through the Gospel you were placed directly into the path of the love of God. Not off to the side to be perhaps overlooked by him who may occasionally remember you're there and throw some tidbit of grace, some crumb of leftover mercy and love your way. No, no, you were planted directly in the path of the central stream of the unceasing love of God the Father. You are beloved in God the Father and you are kept for Jesus Christ. Psalm 2 and verse 8 pictures the Father telling the Son that one day He will give Him the nations for His inheritance. If you are a Christian, you are the prize that God the Father has prepared for His Son. He called you and He will keep you so that you might adorn His Son's final victory over all things at the last day. His prize, His inheritance, His treasure. Isn't that beautiful? That's who you are, child of God.

The Constant Reality Of Our Need

But then quite naturally Jude follows the common letter writing custom of his day, doesn't he, and he offers a prayer wish for these called ones - beloved by God the Father; kept for Jesus Christ. Verse 2, "May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you." Thomas Manton, the great Puritan, explains what Jude is

saying here. “Those that are sanctified and called,” he says, “have still need of mercy, peace, and love.” And so you see these two things put side by side. Our identity, what we’ve received, this marvelous new status, called by God from death to life, beloved by the Father, kept to be the treasure of Jesus Christ. And yet for all that, for all the riches that are ours, we still need mercy, peace, and love. Jude knows we need more. Isn’t that true? Don’t you feel like that? Every day we need more. The battle, after all, is hot and real and hard. Temptation is powerful. And we stumble and fall often. Satan hates us. The world rejects and ridicules our message. And subtle errors like poison easily seep into the church warping our thinking, and if we’re not careful, derailing our faith. The battle is hot and we need more. We need help every day. And so Jude wants to get us ready to hear his call to arms. And so he helps us look back at our identity in Christ to be reminded of our security, who we are, and then to look forward for future blessing reminding us of our ongoing need. And we need both always, don’t we? A grasp of our security without any sense of ongoing need is going to breathe complacency and indifference in our hearts. If we think we’re safe and we don’t need more help, more grace, new mercy, we’ll become complacent and indifferent. We’ll try to coast. And there is no coasting in the Christian life.

But a sense of desperate, present need, without a clear grasp of our security and our identity, will breed paralyzing fear and you cannot contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. You will not march to war if indifference and presumption or fear and insecurity have captured your heart. And so Jude wants us to look back and to ground our security in the sovereign call and the perfect love and the infallible keeping of Almighty God. And he wants us to look forward clinging to Him for more - more resources, fresh help, fresh mercy, more peace, deeper love. First of all, calling is vital that we grasp who we are and the resources of God available to us as we face the conflict and combat ahead of us.

II. Conflict

And that is the second theme I want you to see, the second “C.” First calling; now conflict. Verses 3 and 4 - “I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend earnestly for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.” So you see what’s been happening in the churches? Here are the battle lines. There are false teachers creeping into the church unnoticed and Jude is sounding the alarm. He wants to wake up the troops. The enemy is already in the camp. “The faith once for all delivered to the saints” - the essential body of doctrine given to the church that Christians must believe is under attack, he says.

The Enemy’s Strategy: Moral And Theological

And he even outlines the enemy's strategy for us. You see that in the passage? There are two lines of attack. There is a moral assault and a theological assault. They are ungodly people, Jude says, who pervert grace in the service of sensuality. There's the moral assault. And they deny essential truth about the person and work of Jesus Christ. There's the theological assault. And you may have noticed, even from your own experience, that typically they come together. Moral slide and theological compromise are partners. I think it's interesting that Jude puts moral compromise first. They pervert the grace of God into sensuality. He puts moral compromise first. I think that's fascinating because again and again I've seen professing Christians slide into apostasy and reject the truth altogether, driven primarily by a desire to make room for their sin. We remake Jesus in our image so that He will never demand more of us than we are prepared to give Him. That's the great danger Jude is alerting us to. That's what these folks were doing. Look at it. They were perverting the grace of God. Insisting on holiness - "You know that's dreadful legalism," that's what they would say. Calling Christians to obedience in the details of their lives is to misunderstand grace. Grace means God is never angry with His children. Grace means God does not see your sin. Grace means God is happy with you no matter what you do. They pervert the grace of God in order to indulge their sensuality.

Here's a good rule of thumb - when you spot theological error, look for a moral root. When you spot theological error, look for a moral root. Very often that's the real driver for the decay of truth in the church or in a person's life. That's why Jude is so very important for us to be studying together. We are, after all, "Word people," aren't we? We have a long illustrious history of standing for and defending and promoting sound Biblical doctrine. Praise God for that heritage. But without moral vigilance, that noble tradition could easily be lost. And it begins, it begins when we allow, when we permit a disconnect between the truth we profess and the lives that we lead. "I confess the Biblical Gospel but I'm sleeping with my fiancé. I love to talk theology but I'm in denial about my alcohol problem. My laptop and my iPhone is riddled with pornography but Jesus makes me feel better." Wake up! Wake up! Theological decline rides the coattails of moral failure. You can't have Biblical Christianity, you can't have a Biblical Christ and pervert the grace of God into sensuality. So we're being called to arms, called to contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. The fight for the Gospel - "the Gospel trains us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age" - Titus 2:11-12. That's the Gospel we are to fight for; a Gospel that leads to purity and holiness.

III. Character

Calling, then conflict, then the third "C" - character. Jude warns us about the false teachers; now he wants to show us how to spot them, how to identify them. He shows us their characters. And if you scan over the next ten verses or so you will

see Jude piling up images and metaphors to describe these men. I think there's about fourteen different illustrations or metaphors and we're going to take a brief look at them in a few moments, but for now it might help clarify Jude's point if you notice the two summary statements that he gives us. Here's the point of all the colorful illustrations he's about to provide. Here are the identifying features of the false teachers who have crept into the church - verse 8. "These people also, relying on their dreams, defile the flesh, reject authority, and blaspheme the glorious ones." Or verse 16 - "these are grumbles, malcontents, following their own sinful desires; loudmouth boasters showing favoritism to gain advantage." You see the three features of these false teachers in those two summary statements? First, they reject Biblical authority. Secondly, they are filled with self-promoting pride. And thirdly, they are moral failures. They reject Biblical authority, they're filled with self-promoting pride, and they are moral failures.

The Fruit of A Counterfeit

And the illustrations that Jude uses drive home those points. So look at verse 5. He reminds them of Israel's story and he highlights their rejection of the Lordship of God in their lives. He talks about their unbelief as they march through the wilderness toward the Promised Land. In verse 6 he points to the pride of the angels who would not submit to God's order for them and fell from heavenly glory. In verse 7 he reflects on the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah because of their debauched lifestyle and their sexual sins. There they are - do you see them? A rejection of authority, terrible pride, tragic moral failure. Or look at verses 9 and 10. Probably Jude is using a story from extra-Biblical tradition well known to the people. It may even have been a story used by the false teachers themselves as they looked for some justification for their errors they were peddling in the churches. And here is Jude using their own texts against them. They had a story about the archangel, Michael, arguing with the devil about Moses' burial in which Michael is marked and characterized by self-effacing humility. When it came to dealing with demonic powers, he would only say, "The Lord rebuke you," claiming no authority for himself. Not so the false teachers, however, verse 10 - "they blaspheme what they don't understand." Pride! Or take a look at verse 11. The false teachers are like Cain, Genesis chapter 4 - fighters who turn on those they claim as brothers. They're like Balaam, Numbers 22 -24 - the prophet who is hired to prophesy against Israel. They're like snake oil salesmen - lining their pockets at the expense of the people of God. They're like Korah, Numbers 16, who rebelled against God's authority and challenged Moses' leadership. They think they know better than the Word of God and the servants of God. And there they are again. Do you see them? Pride and self-interest, a rejection of authority, and moral failure.

All in all, Jude says, verse 12 - they are hidden reefs at the Lord's Table. You remember the sinking of the Italian cruise ship, the Costa Concordia. You remember that? It hit a hidden reef on January 13, 2012. Thirty-two people died in that tragedy. It's still there on one side. A wreck and a ruin of this grand cruise

liner it once was. That's what these false teachers are like. They are dangerous and deadly. They are, Jude says, like shepherds who are out only to feed themselves, not the sheep; getting fat at the sheep's expense. Waterless clouds - they seem to promise much; they deliver nothing. Fruitless trees makes the same point. They promise fruit; they don't deliver. They're like wild waves of the sea, he says, that churn up all the detritus and the garbage. And so these men, verse 13, churn up their own shameful actions. Those are the marks of these people. You see them there again. They reject Biblical authority. They're governed by pride and self-service and they're locked in moral failure. What you say about yourself matters. Of course it does. But who you are and how you live matters much, much more. Saying you follow Jesus is one thing, but what matters most is actually following Him in the details of your life. "By their fruits you shall know them," Jesus said. Be on the lookout for false teachers and search your own heart and your own life lest you yourself be found a counterfeit.

IV. Consequences

And then finally Jude points to a fourth "C" that tells us why this all matters so very much. Calling, conflict, character, and then finally consequences. Consequences. Why does it matter how you live or what kind of attitude you embrace or what you teach and believe? Here's why it matters so much. Look at verse 5 again. The Jesus who saves also judges. Even those who claim to have been saved by Him, if they do not really trust Him and show it by living for Him, the rebel angels are held in prison waiting for the final judgment, verse 6. Sodom and Gomorrah, examples for us Jude says, were destroyed for their sins undergoing a punishment of eternal fire, verse 7. They will perish in Korah's rebellion, verse 11. Like wandering stars, verse 13. The blackness of darkness forever is reserved for them. Or look down at verses 14 and 15. Jude is quoting this time from the book of Enoch - again, not part of Holy Scripture but likely to have been material the false teachers were appealing to. And nevertheless, the message that it contains and communicates is one that the whole Bible is unanimous and makes again and again. Look at it. Verses 14 and 15 - God is simply going to destroy all who live ungodly lives and teach ungodly lies.

Holiness Matters

Do you get the point? Do you hear the warning? Why does it matter how you live or what you believe? It matters because judgment is coming. Hell is real. God is holy. Sin is deadly. And without holiness, no one shall see the Lord. I hope you feel the urgency of the spiritual conflict that we are all engaged in. As John Owen famously put it, "Be killing sin or sin will be killing you." A mere profession of faith simply will not do. You must live the life or you remain as liable to the blackness of darkness as ever you did. Calling, conflict, character, consequences - holiness matters. It matters! So remember your calling. Remember the love of God for you. Remember the keeping, preserving power of the Holy Spirit who will present

you like treasure to Jesus Christ one day. And remember, there is mercy, peace, and love more and more available to you as you head into the fight. Contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints and resolve now, relying upon the help of Almighty God, that you will live for His praise and glory because holiness matters. Shall we pray together?

Our Father, we praise You for Your Word challenging hard and yet vital and necessary. Help us as we examine our own lives in its light to bow before You in repentance, to flee to Christ for cleansing, to rest upon Him for grace, for the enabling of the Spirit and then to rise and be obedient in His service. Help us to keep a close watch on our heart, on our lives, on our words, on our thoughts, that we might be to the praise of the glory of Your grace. For we ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

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