

Contending Earnestly for The Faith

Introduction

I was thinking that we are such a privileged people. We have been called to be partakers, and I like the translation “companions of Christ.” Think about that. We have been called to be the companions of Christ. What is on my heart is this little phrase in the book of Jude. I do not remember the last time I read Jude, but I go through it once in a while. It is very strategically placed, I think, toward the end of the Bible, right before the Book of Revelation. But in verse three, there is a little phrase there that has been on my heart since the brothers asked me to share. It is called “contend earnestly for the faith.”

Let us commit this time to the Lord:

Lord, we come just like that woman who long ago came to Thee. We come now, Lord, to honor Thee. We come now, Lord, to bow at Your feet. We come now to commit this time into Your hands. We realize that apart from You, we can do nothing of spiritual value. So, we ask You, Lord, to anoint us both to speak and to hear. We pray as Your Word goes out, it will go out in power. Lord, the things that we will share, I believe most here know, but Your Word tells us to be reminded. To be reminded! We pray in Your precious name. Amen.

Context of Jude 3-4

We are going to look at a lot of verses this morning. They are all going to be connected with this one verse, I believe. So, we are going to start in Jude 3-4. To provide a little context, I am reading out of the New American Standard Version, and mine is the 1977 version.

It says, “Beloved, while I was making every effort.” Some versions say “diligent.” Jude is very diligent in writing to you about our common salvation. He thought he was going to write about this initial salvation that we have, and we talked about that this morning—the forgiveness of our sins, didn’t we? However, he said, “I felt the necessity to write to you appealing.” I like the Darby version here. He says, “exhorting; I am writing to you exhorting.” Remember, exhorting has two meanings: it is to encourage and to warn. He wanted to encourage the saints and to warn them of something that they must contend earnestly for. He says, “That you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ.”

The Urgency of Contending

When I read this verse again and again, I thought so often about how many movies would start with a bang—boom! You are into it right away. Jude does that here. He

jumps right in, and immediately he is trying to tell them something extremely important. If I could put it this way, their lives depended on this: to contend earnestly for the faith.

But he comes right on the tail of that: why you need to contend earnestly for the faith. Because there is opposition to it, isn't there? There are lots of oppositions, and he mentions a portion of that here in verse four. Before we get into defining "contend earnestly" and looking at what the faith is, I wanted to speak first with a few verses about what he is talking about here in verse four. These are the individuals who were creeping into the church, ungodly persons who were turning the grace of God into a mess and denying their only Master. Such strong words here!

Warnings from Scriptures

Fall Away from the Faith

I Timothy 4:1: We are very familiar, most of us, with these verses, but it is good to be reminded because we are seeing this happen more and more before our eyes. We are witnessing how that parable in Matthew, chapter 13, of the leaven being put in; the leaven is spreading more and more into the church today, and there are many who are falling away into what we call apostasy. He says here in I Timothy 4:1, "But the Spirit explicitly says that in latter times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons." Amazing!

Draw Away the Disciples

Acts 20:28-31a: The context of this is Paul meeting with the elders in Ephesus. When you get a chance, read that whole discourse. It is wonderful some of the things Paul leaves with them, because he knows he is never going to see them again. Reading in Acts 20:28-31, it says: "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves, men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be on the alert..."

Denying the Master

II Peter 2:1-3: II Peter and Jude kind of go together. There are a lot of similarities between them, and there are many things that are repeated in both, almost word for word. He says, "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them, the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed, they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep." Notice we have that word again about deny. Denying here refers to the Master who bought them.

The Danger of Denial

A couple of days ago, when I was considering this, the word "deny" stood out to me so strongly. It made me think of this passage I want to read in Philippians 3:18, just one verse, and Paul is speaking to believers here with very strong words. He says, "For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ." Now, in what way are they enemies of the cross of Christ? I think this word "deny" speaks to that—how they are enemies of the cross of Christ. They are the ones who will not deny themselves. They are the ones who will not pick up the cross. They do not want to come under the government of Christ.

And we probably have all gone through this to some degree, maybe even going through it now. There could still be pockets here or there. Maybe you are not aware of it, even if it is present at this point in time. But we have to be very careful about this matter of being an enemy of the cross. This phrase, I think, is the total opposite of earnestly contending for the faith; to become an enemy of the cross is to do the opposite.

So, when I think of this word "deny," I guess you can say it is kind of a neutral word. It is all a matter of what you deny. We have a choice every day, don't we? Who are we going to deny? Are we going to deny ourselves or are we going to deny the Lord? We know the story of Peter, how he denied the Lord, but thank God he was recovered, and we have those two epistles from him that are wonderful. That is something we have to consider every day. When we get up, pray, "Lord, may I not deny You today. May I deny myself and pick up the cross."

The Faith

Understanding The Faith

Now, before we consider this meaning of contending earnestly, we need to know what we are contending earnestly for. Otherwise, we are just going to be a ball of energy or something. So, we need to know what "the faith" is. If you look into the Scriptures, you will find this mentioned many times. I want to read a few passages to help us with this.

Obedient

First, we will go to Acts 6:7. In fact, three of these in a row that I am going to read are all from the book of Acts. I want to emphasize basically one word from each of them. Acts 6:7 says, "And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to 'the faith.'" They were becoming obedient to "the faith." So, we see this word obedience is tied to "the faith."

Turn Away from The Faith

Now, the second one is in Acts 13:8. I am not really sure how to pronounce this man's name, Elymas. It says, "But Elymas the magician (for thus his name is translated)

was opposing them..." Now he was opposing Barnabas and Saul in this context. "Seeking to turn the proconsul away from 'the faith.'" Away from "the faith." So notice again right here what the conflict is against. It is against "the faith."

The Kingdom of God

In Acts 14:21b-22, it says, "... they (that is, Paul and Barnabas) returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith," and Weist says here, "exhorting them to be persevering in and holding true to 'the faith,'" and then saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." Through many tribulations, we *must* enter the kingdom of God. So we see in this portion here that somehow the faith has reference to the kingdom of God.

Glory

And lastly, from Colossians 1:22-23a on this matter of "the faith." It says, "Yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—if indeed you continue in "the faith," firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel..." Later, it tells us that hope is glory, that we would have glory and share in the glory of the Lord.

The Nature of the Faith

When I consider this thing of "the faith," I really struggled over how to put this into words. Let me read what I put down on paper. The phrase "the faith" certainly has reference to the whole revelation given to us by God which includes all the doctrine. But to drill down to the heart of the matter, 'The faith' speaks in reference to the King and His kingdom. It is Jesus, the Son of God. In reference to man, it is to be conformed to the image of the Son, not as to His deity, but as to His character. In other words, it speaks of 'Sonship'. What we are contending earnestly for is sonship, to be like the Son of God, to be conformed to His image. That is really what it is all about, "The faith." The reason I struggled over this is that when we think of "the faith," we often think of doctrine; we think of the Word of God, and that is right. But we are contending earnestly, to gain Christ. That is what this is all about. That is what the Word is all about.

Meaning of Contend Earnestly

Now, with that said, let us look at this meaning of "contend earnestly." Now, bear with me here a little, because I am going to grind just a bit. We find that in most versions, it does translate this as "contend earnestly." This Greek word we find in the ESV, the RSV, and the NIV, almost sounds like a respiratory term, doesn't it? They just translate this word as "contend." Phillips translates it as "put up a real fight." Young's New Testament translates it "to agonize." The King James Version and the Rotherham version, (if you have ever heard of that one,) reverse these words and say "earnestly contend." Of course, I had to end with Wuest, didn't I? Wuest translated it as "contend with intensity and determination." *Contend with intensity and determination.*

Now we find the base Greek word that is used here in several other Scriptures, but there is a difference in Jude because there we find a preposition added to this word to intensify its meaning. That is why many of these versions include the word “earnestly.” “Contend” would cover the basic meaning of the word, but he uses “contend earnestly.” I think it is because of the topic he talks about which is apostasy, that which will come against ‘The faith.’ He wants you to really grasp this; you are going to need to agonize and strive. We will talk about some of these words in a minute.

So “contend earnestly for the faith” here does not mean defending the faith, even though that is found in the Scriptures. There are a couple of places, such as in Philippians 1:16, where Paul talks about defending the gospel. In Acts 22:1, Paul makes a defense for himself when he is on trial. However, that is not the meaning here. It is a different meaning. I want to read what Strong's Concordance says about this. He actually gives four meanings, and we are going to touch on that a little bit.

Number one, it means to contend with adversaries, to fight.

Number two, it means to contend or struggle with difficulties and dangers. We certainly have those in this pilgrim walk, don't we?

Number three, it means to enter a contest, to contend in the gymnastic games.

Number four, it means to endeavor with strenuous zeal to strive to obtain something. I really like that meaning.

Scriptural Examples of Contending

So, I want to look at a few verses where this base word is found. This will help us a little bit, I think. First of all, I did not write this one down, but I will just mention in passing that in Luke 13:24, the Lord used this word. Of course, He did not use it; He did not speak in Greek. However, it is translated there as “strive.” You can look that up sometime in the context of that verse. The context has to do with the kingdom of God, talking about striving to enter the kingdom of God.

Strive According to His Power

First of all in Colossians 1:28-29, which are very familiar Scriptures. I just want to point out the Greek word in here, which says, “And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ.” What an ambition! *Present every man complete in Christ.* “And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.” There is our Greek word: “I labor, striving.” The Rotherham version puts it this way: “contending according to His power, which mightily works within me.” I put this verse first because of what he says here: “I labor, striving.” How do we labor and strive? “According to His power!” It is very important to know that we are striving according to His power, which mightily works within us. This is not something we are doing on our own. Yes, we have to cooperate. That is the major thing that we have to do with the Lord is cooperate; and we are to strive according to His power.

Constantly Engaging in the Contest

I Timothy 6:12a says, "Fight the good fight of faith;" Fight the good fight. That first mentioned "fight" is our Greek word, just like we said in Strong's, it may have the meaning of fighting. Now, Wuest says here, "Be constantly engaging in the contest of 'the Faith.'" Be constantly engaging in the contest of "the faith."

Fight the Good Fight and Finish the Course

And if you turn a little bit forward to II Timothy 4:7-8, Paul says, "I have fought." That is the Greek word there: "I have fought the good fight." Now that word "fight" could in this verse be translated as contest or struggle. So you could say, "I fought the good contest or struggle. I have finished the course; I have kept 'The faith'; notice that fighting the good fight and finishing the course is connected to keeping 'The faith.' *The* faith with the article there makes the difference. He says, "In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing." To love His appearing is another way of saying that you love the Lord. You are not going to love His appearing if you do not have that love. But if we have the love, we are going to love His appearing.

Finish My Course and the Ministry

And lastly, I want to read another little portion out of Acts 20. This does not actually have that Greek word in this passage, but I just want us to see Paul's mission, or his passion here. Acts 20:24, catch this beginning here, if you will. He says, "But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself..." Wow! I think that is powerful. "I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself." That is so against our nature, I could say; that is so against our old man to do this—not considering our life of any account. But he goes on to say, "... in order that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God." What a testimony that is. I hope I can put that on my epitaph someday.

Exercise Self-Control in All Things

We are looking at the phrase, "contend earnestly," and I am going to end it here with I Corinthians 9:24-27. You have probably all been waiting for this one, right? Paul must have been very familiar with the Olympic Games back then because he uses this illustration at least three times in the Scriptures. Of course, he also uses the illustrations of a soldier as well as a farmer. But here he is thinking of the Olympic Games when he speaks these verses: "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. And everyone who competes..." Now my version says "compete." When you are in the Olympic Games, it is a very good word to use to compete because you are competing against others. I do not like that in our case because we are not competing with one another, are we? We should be encouraging one another in the faith. So I like what the King James Version says: strives."

And everyone who strives, or as Darby puts it, “contends in the games.” So either “competes” or “strives” can be used, but “contends” is closer to the Greek word.

“And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things.” *Self-control in all things*. I think many of you know that I used to be a fairly avid tennis player, and even in my small world of that sport, there was a lot of self-control that had to be done—things you had to give up and things that you had to do if you wanted to really advance. I can remember, for those of you who know anything about tennis, there was a player named Roger Federer, and he is retired now. I saw a couple of videos of him once working out. When I was a tennis player, I did not do some of the things he did with weights because I was told long ago that if you do a lot of weights, you will lose flexibility and so on. They did not know back then how you could use weights in the right way without turning you into Arnold Schwarzenegger, so you could not be flexible. Anyway, there is a lot of self-control in this matter of contending earnestly.

“They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore, I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I buffet my body ...” *I buffet my body*. We find in our Christian walk that very much at times, we probably have to buffet our bodies. We have to bring it under control. We must not allow it to rule over us. I will not give any examples; you can think of those yourself, but we have to be careful about that. And he says, “...I make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.” Some versions say that I should be unapproved. Ellicott said this about that word: he says, “as unworthy for the crown and the prize.” This word that is translated “disqualified” or “unapproved” is the negative version of the word that we find in James 1:12. It says, “Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, ...” (See the positive!) he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”

Insights from Watchman Nee

Now, I want to share something by Brother Watchman Nee. Some of you may receive those daily devotions from CFP, and this one came out a little while ago. When I read it, I said, “Whoa!; I have to include this to read to the saints.” It is based on I Corinthians 9:24, and it says, “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.” Brother Watchman Nee said, “After a person is saved, he is sent by God on a specific course that lies ahead of him. The entire life of a Christian can be likened to running a race. Yet this is not a race towards the goal of eternal life. (I want to emphasize that this is not a race that is running towards the goal of eternal life.) On the contrary, only the person who has eternal life is qualified to run. No, the result of this race is that some of the participants are to be crowned, while others are not. What is meant by the crown? The crown represents the kingdom. It signifies reigning, having dominion, and glory. Thus, to obtain the crown means to gain the kingdom; that is to say, to reign with the Lord Jesus. For a Christian, having eternal life is already a settled matter, but having the kingdom depends on how that Christian runs.”

After I read this, I jumped to the concordance to look up the word “kingdom” to see how many times it occurs in the New Testament. Any guesses? 162 times and mostly in the Gospels and the Book of Acts, but also in other places. If I recall correctly, only two instances do not refer to the kingdom of God; they refer to the kingdom of the enemy. The Lord talked about how if a kingdom is divided, it will not stand. So, 160 times that word “kingdom” comes up in its different forms—sometimes as “kingdom of God,” sometimes as “kingdom of heaven,” and sometimes just as “kingdom.” The kingdom is, therefore, a very important matter, I believe, to our Lord Jesus Christ. He has been promised the kingdom by His Father, and I believe He is looking forward to coming back and sitting on that throne.

Practical Help on Contending Earnestly

What I want to do next is look at a couple of very familiar verses and bring them in alongside to give us a little practical help on contending earnestly for the faith. Our brother actually read these Wednesday night in the prayer meeting. I also saw this by Brother Nee within the last week in these two verses in his devotional. I was struck by the connection. This is in Hebrews 12:1-2a. We will see the same theme here. The author talks about running a race. He says, “Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us,” (referring to all those in chapter 11. They are all witnesses to us, examples of those who have earnestly contended for ‘The faith’. They have gone before us, and now they will win that prize. They will receive a crown and have a part in that kingdom.) “let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith...”

Lay Aside Every Encumbrances

Notice that he starts off by saying, “Let us also lay aside every encumbrance.” Some versions say “weight.” When I think of that, I think of one of my old neighbors. I had two neighbors who lived next to us, and they were actually built the way I wanted to be. Both of them were about six two, had good builds, and were incredibly athletic, and very good basketball players. They were only a couple of years apart, but the older brother used to go running a lot, and he wore those ankle weights to build himself up. Do you remember that? He wore them when he went running, but of course, when he played in a game, he never used them. Here you would not want to wear them because that would be an encumbrance if you wore them in a game. Here, Paul talks about laying aside every encumbrance.

What is an encumbrance? It is anything that will impede or hinder you from spiritual progress in the race. Anything that can deaden or dull your spiritual life is an encumbrance. That could be many, many things, and some of them are not bad in themselves. It is all a matter of where your heart is with those things.

So encumbrances are something I had to put away. I am almost embarrassed to tell you this, but I had to put this encumbrance away out of my life. It is going to seem really

minor to you, but it was chocolate. I had to put it away; it was like a drug to me. I bet you could tell me about how chocolate is probably addictive. The sugar in it is very addictive. When I would eat it, I just had to have it. The next day, I would have to have it. Then the next day, I would have to have it. If I did not have it one day, I knew that I was not having it. Finally, the Lord used that verse from Philippians, where it talked about enemies of the cross. It goes on to tell how they made God their belly. That came to me one night in the middle of the night, around 3 o'clock. I woke up, and that verse came to me; I knew what the Lord was putting a finger on. It was chocolate. Now I am not telling you to give up chocolate; do not get me wrong. If you can eat chocolate, great. I just cannot, at least not at this point in my life. I had to get rid of that encumbrance because it dominated me.

The Old Covenant

But there can be a lot of encumbrances. In Matthew, chapter 13, the parable of the sower talks about some encumbrances, such as the worries of the world and the deceitfulness of riches. Luke even adds to that and says, “the pleasures of this life.” Those things are obviously encumbrances in our lives, so we have to be very careful.

But let me give you what I think is really what the author is putting his finger on here in the book of Hebrews as a great encumbrance and that is the Old Covenant. This may shock some of you because you are saying, “Wait a minute, that is in the Bible.” Yes, it is in the Bible. However, the Old Covenant can be an encumbrance to your spiritual growth. How? Simply because you cannot perform it. You cannot grow that way. If you have not learned that yet, try it. Try to live by the law. Try bringing in all the feasts and all those things, and get yourself under that Old Covenant. You are going to find that it is a big encumbrance, and it will stop you from progressing spiritually. That was not the goal God gave us in the Old Covenant to live by, was it?

He gave it to show us what we were and are in ourselves, that there is not the strength there. There is not the capability in our own power to live a life pleasing to God. It is impossible, because of our fallen nature to do so. The Old Covenant was not an end in itself; it was a means to the end. Remember, Paul said this in Galatians— it was to be a tutor to lead us to Christ. That was the purpose of the Old Covenant. Thank God we are under the New Covenant now as believers. The book of Hebrews very much contrasts those two. If you read that book, you will see the contrast between the old and the new.

Lay Aside the Sin of Unbelieve

This verse goes on to say, “We are to lay aside the sin which so easily entangles us.” The New King James Version says, “The sin that so easily ensnares us.” Some versions say, “besetting sin.” They talk about how there may be this besetting sin, like a love for chocolate, that can come in and ensnare us. That can be the case. But really, I think in the context here in the book of Hebrews, the sin that he is talking about that can entangle us is unbelief. It is unbelief. It is right in the context where he is talking about

faith. It is right in the context where he talked about all these heroes of the faith in chapter 11. It is unbelief. If you look at Hebrews 3:19, it speaks of the children of Israel not entering into the Promised Land. And why was it? Because of unbelief. Doubt can be a big hindrance, a major enemy to us and stop us cold in this race.

Run with Endurance

But then the verse goes on to say, “Let us run with endurance.” Let us run with endurance. A fuller translation of this could be “patient endurance.” Patient endurance for the race that is set before us. “Run with endurance, the race that is set before us.” This endurance speaks about having patience with whatever may come into your life.

I want to use the illustration our brother used a little while ago when he talked about coming into that situation at the end of the year. He told us about having to go through it with endurance and patient endurance because of all the bills coming up at once. We have all been there, or I imagine we have, where we go through a situation, and the only way we can get through it is with patient endurance.

The Lord brings those things into our lives, and He brings them there on purpose because He wants us to learn how to abide in Him in a greater way, if I can put it that way. He wants us to learn to abide in Him. And so He has to bring these things into our lives where we see that in ourselves, we cannot run this race; we cannot do it in this pilgrim journey on our own. So He brings trials and testing for this purpose: to create and bring about the character of Christ in our lives. We need this patient endurance. We need to run with it.

Fixing Our Eyes on Jesus

Then the writer goes, and probably most of you really like this part of these couple of verses where it says, the author exhorts us “Fixing our eyes on Jesus.” Wuest translates this as “looking off and away to Jesus.” The Amplified translates this as “looking away from all that will distract us and focusing our eyes on Jesus.” I really like, “that will distract us.” When you think about things that can distract us, I think in terms of looking back in time maybe, or looking around. Or maybe the one that grabs us the most: looking at ourselves.

The Danger of Looking Back

In this matter of looking back, there are two obvious examples in the Scriptures. The children of Israel, when they came out of Egypt were constantly looking back. As soon as trouble or trials came, they looked back and they talked about how good it was back then. They forgot all they went through— the beatings, the hard work— because it was not in the present. They were living in the present and thinking, “Oh, this is horrible what we are in now. We have to go back to that.” They were caught up in looking back.

Think of Lot's wife. They came out of Sodom and Gomorrah, and they are told not to look back, but she looks back, and she is turned into a pillar of salt. Her heart was still there. Even though judgment was there, her heart was still there, and she looked back.

The Lord said this in Luke 9:62: “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Looking back, and I must confess that I do that a lot in my life. I catch myself looking back. For example, I lived in San Diego, California, for five years, and it is almost the ideal place to live, weather-wise, if you like warm weather. Now, if you like to ski or anything like that, forget it, but there are mountains pretty close. Sometimes I look back when I am here, and it is a hundred degrees with a hundred percent humidity, and I think, “Oh, San Diego, it is 75 degrees, it is dry, and there are no mosquitoes or flies flying around.” I know that is a silly illustration, but sometimes we find ourselves looking back.

There is a good aspect of looking back. There is a good aspect to looking back at what the Lord did for us on the cross. We talked about that this morning—the forgiveness of our sins. But there is a dangerous part of looking back. Paul said this in Philippians 3:13-14: “Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on...” And this word “press on,” Strong's says it means this: “To run swiftly in order to catch a person or thing, to run after.” We are pressing on, as it were, to catch the Lord Jesus Christ, aren't we? That is what it is all about.

The Danger of Looking Around

Now, as far as looking around, I think we have a good example from Peter. Remember when they were in the boat, and the Lord came up to them, and they thought He was a ghost? When they recognized who He was, Peter said, “Can I come out to You?” The Lord says, “Come on.” I would have loved to see Peter walking on the water. No, I do not mean when he started to go under, but I would like to have seen him walking on the water. All of a sudden, the wind is blowing, there is a storm around, and he looks at the wind. *He looks around at the wind.* He takes his eyes off the Lord Jesus and starts to sink. What an illustration for us! What a danger looking around can be!

And one other thing I thought about in this looking around is that sometimes we get caught up in a negative way of looking around at others. In fact, Paul talks about this in II Corinthians. I cannot tell you where it is, but he talks about comparing ourselves with others in that section, and that can be a very dangerous thing to do.

Now, if I can go back to tennis again, I did quite a bit of comparing myself to other players, but it had a good aspect to it because I would look at them and compare my forehand to their forehand, my backhand to their backhand, and my strategy to their strategy. I could learn from that. But I think it can be very dangerous when we compare ourselves to our brothers and sisters and say, “Well, so-and-so can do this, but I cannot do that. I could never do that.” Or maybe we compare like this and say, “Oh, so-and-so does that, but I do not do that.” We have to be careful about comparing ourselves with one another. If you want to compare yourself with someone as a believer, do it with the Lord Jesus Christ. That will be very positive. At first it may hurt a little because you will

see how far short you will fall, but it can be very positive in encouraging us, motivating us to gain more of Christ.

The Danger of Focusing on Self

So lastly, there is this distraction about focusing on ourselves. There are two extremes here, I believe. One extreme is that we may think too higher of ourselves than we ought to: "Oh, I am a better Christian than so-and-so." Thinking higher than we are is very dangerous ground. But I think where a lot of people get caught in the mud is the opposite of that. They think of themselves and concentrate too much on their weaknesses and limitations. They focus too much on, "Oh, I am weak in this. I am limited in that." That may be true in you, naturally speaking. You may be very much there. But that can be such a distraction because think of the children of Israel when they were right on the border of going into the Promised Land. Then the spies came back. Remember, there were twelve of them, and ten of them had a bad report. They just listened to those ten and said, "That is right, we cannot go in. We are too weak; they are too strong; therefore, we are limited." They just gave up; they gave up the race.

So we need to be careful about focusing on ourselves in a negative way, making too much of our limitations and weaknesses, even if they are there. It is in knowing that the Lord is greater than those. When we do that, in a sense, we are limiting God, aren't we? We are making ourselves bigger than He is when we do that. We do not want to do that.

The enemy used that tactic against the Lord when He was in the wilderness. Remember that? When He was under temptation, he tried to get the Lord to focus on Himself, to take His eyes off the Father and to act independently of the Father. That is what he wanted Him to do. He gave Him those questions. Remember, "If You are the Son of God, prove to me that You are the Son of God. Do this: turn the stones into bread." He was trying to get Him to act independently. Thank God He did not!

Conclusion

Well, lastly, it says to fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfector of faith. This matter of looking to Jesus as our Author and Finisher of faith we are to do that in a way so that we may gain Christ. That is what it is all about. The goal of keeping our eyes on the Lord is so that we may know Him more, and we can be conformed to His image.

Paul states his passion and great ambition in Philippians 3:10. We all know this verse, don't we? He says, "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death."

This is so essential in our coming to know Him and in our contending earnestly for the faith that we know Him in an experiential way. In reality, we are to know the power of His resurrection and that we fellowship with His sufferings, and that we are conformed to His death.

Let us commit this back to the Lord.

Lord, we come back and bow before You now. We give Your Word back to You. Again, we thank You for Your great privilege and great calling on our lives to be companions with You. We want to contend earnestly in this matter of getting to know You more, to become more under Your Lordship, to grow in obedience, to run this race well, to finish our course, and to hear one day, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Lord, we know You desire this more for us than we do. You want us, Lord, someday to sit with You on that throne, as it says in Revelation 3:21, to be able to sit with You on that throne as overcomers. We realize that apart from Your mighty power working in us, apart from Your resurrection life, we cannot do it. But we continue to want to look unto You. You are the Author, the Originator, and the Perfecter; You are the Finisher. You are the One who is going to bring us through as we cooperate with You. We thank You, Lord, for Your great love for us. We thank You again for the forgiveness of sin that we can taste every day. We bless You and pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Contending Earnestly for The Faith	1
Introduction	1
Context of Jude 3-4	1
The Urgency of Contending	1
Warnings from Scriptures	2
Fall Away from the Faith	2
Draw Away the Disciples	2
Denying the Master	2
The Danger of Denial	3
The Faith	3
Understanding The Faith	3
Obedient	3
Turn Away from The Faith	3
The Kingdom of God	4
Glory	4
The Nature of the Faith	4
Meaning of Contend Earnestly	4
Scriptural Examples of Contending	5
Strive According to His Power	5
Constantly Engaging in the Contest	6
Fight the Good Fight and Finish the Course	6
Finish My Course and the Ministry	6
Exercise Self-Control in All Things	6
Insights from Watchman Nee	7
Practical Help on Contending Earnestly	8
Lay Aside Every Encumbrances	8
The Old Covenant	9
Lay Aside the Sin of Unbelieve	9
Run with Endurance	10
Fixing Our Eyes on Jesus	10
The Danger of Looking Back	10
The Danger of Looking Around	11
The Danger of Focusing on Self	12
Conclusion	12

Speaker	Sheridan, Steve
Venue	Richmond, Virginia, US
Date	March 16 th , 2025
Link	https://christiantestimonyministry.com/item/contend-earnestly-for-the-faith