

Defending the Faith

Part 2 of the The Great Commission, the Harvest and Me!

In part one of this message, we identified:

1. Who we are in Christ.
2. What the Great Commission is and how it relates to us.
3. That the Harvest has already begun, the workers are few, yet the Harvest can be accomplished by “co-laboring” together with other believers!
4. What the Harvest looks like and that we can complete the Harvest in our generation.

Today, we will explore another element of our role in the Great Commission and Harvest: Defending the Faith from the little letter of Jude.

We must be serious minded about our Faith in Christ and not see the “Great Commission” as the “The Great Omission”. It would appear that the “Church” – the Body of Christ as a whole has reversed the Lord’s order from “go and witness...teach and disciple” to an agenda of social action on a whole host of topics and issues. Some have gone to the extreme of “building mansions for their own comfort”. The Gospel has been cheapened. The faith that was once delivered to the saints is no longer taken seriously.

We see all throughout church history that the church (Body of Christ – Christians) have been attacked.

In the book of Acts:

1. In chapter 7:57-60 that Stephen is stoned to death.
2. In chapter 8:1 a great wave of persecution swept over the church in Jerusalem, causing all believers except the Apostles to be scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.
3. In chapter 12:1-5 King Herod Agrippa killed the Apostle James (the brother of John) and imprisoned the Apostle Peter.

In the “Dark Ages”, men such as John Wycliffe and William Tyndale suffered great persecution for their faith in Christ and their desire for and work in translating the Word of God into English for the common man and woman to be able to read the Bible for themselves. Another man influenced by them was Martin Luther who translated the Bible into German with the Old Testament in 1522 and the New Testament in 1534. He also spearheaded the Protestant Reformation by “contending for the Faith”. He fought against the religious institution of his day to combat error and bring the true Word of God to all people.

There have been many martyrs since Stephen and the Apostle James. Millions have given their all for their faith in Christ. Read Foxes Book of Martyrs or the book Jesus Freaks by DC Talk to get some sense of the worldwide persecution that is still rampant within the Body of Christ.

A new report shows that Christians are the “most persecuted group” in the world. A study commissioned by the British government concludes that Christianity is “by far the most widely persecuted religion” in the world and warns that is nearing “genocide levels.” Not only is the persecution of Christians spreading geographically around the world, but the it is increasing in “severity.” There are many Christian agencies and organizations that stand and fight on the worldwide level and world leaders are beginning to recognize and take the threat of persecution and genocide seriously. One such agency is the American Center for Law and Justice who will be before the U.N. is just a few weeks to defend persecuted and dying Christians around the world.

Maybe you have experienced some form of persecution for your faith in Christ! One example that I remember, as a teenager in high school, I was teased terribly for carrying my Bible to school and for not doing the things my peers were doing. However, that is minor compared to losing a home, a job or even your life because you choose to live for Jesus.

The New Testament Epistle of Jude addresses and challenges Christians to Defend the Faith! Jude was originally planning to write his epistle on the Salvation in Christ we enjoy, but he was constrained and inspired by the Holy Spirit to change his message to challenge Christians to fight the good fight of faith and to defend the faith against severe attacks.

Let's read Jude 1-25: I am reading from the New Living Translation:

1 This letter is from Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ and a brother of James. I am writing to all who have been called by God the Father, who loves you and keeps you safe in the care of Jesus Christ.

2 May God give you more and more mercy, peace, and love.

3 Dear friends, I had been eagerly planning to write to you about the salvation we all share. But now I find that I must write about something else, urging you to defend the faith that God has entrusted once for all time to his holy people.

4 I say this because some ungodly people have wormed their way into your churches, saying that God's marvelous grace allows us to live immoral lives. The condemnation of such people was recorded long ago, for they have denied our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

5 So I want to remind you, though you already know these things, that Jesus first rescued the nation of Israel from Egypt, but later he destroyed those who did not remain faithful.

6 And I remind you of the angels who did not stay within the limits of authority God gave them but left the place where they belonged. God has kept them securely chained in prisons of darkness, waiting for the great day of judgment.

7 And don't forget Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighboring towns, which were filled with immorality and every kind of sexual perversion. Those cities were destroyed by fire and serve as a warning of the eternal fire of God's judgment.

8 In the same way, these people—who claim authority from their dreams—live immoral lives, defy authority, and scoff at supernatural beings.

9 But even Michael, one of the mightiest of the angels, did not dare accuse the devil of blasphemy, but simply said, "The Lord rebuke you!" (This took place when Michael was arguing with the devil about Moses' body.)

10 But these people scoff at things they do not understand. Like unthinking animals, they do whatever their instincts tell them, and so they bring about their own destruction.

11 What sorrow awaits them! For they follow in the footsteps of Cain, who killed his brother. Like Balaam, they deceive people for money. And like Korah, they perish in their rebellion.

12 When these people eat with you in your fellowship meals commemorating the Lord's love, they are like dangerous reefs that can shipwreck you. They are like shameless shepherds who care only for themselves. They are like clouds blowing

over the land without giving any rain. They are like trees in autumn that are doubly dead, for they bear no fruit and have been pulled up by the roots.

13 They are like wild waves of the sea, churning up the foam of their shameful deeds. They are like wandering stars, doomed forever to blackest darkness.

14 Enoch, who lived in the seventh generation after Adam, prophesied about these people. He said, "Listen! The Lord is coming with countless thousands of his holy ones

15 to execute judgment on the people of the world. He will convict every person of all the ungodly things they have done and for all the insults that ungodly sinners have spoken against him."

16 These people are grumblers and complainers, living only to satisfy their desires. They brag loudly about themselves, and they flatter others to get what they want.

17 But you, my dear friends, must remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ predicted.

18 They told you that in the last times there would be scoffers whose purpose in life is to satisfy their ungodly desires.

19 These people are the ones who are creating divisions among you. They follow their natural instincts because they do not have God's Spirit in them.

20 But you, dear friends, must build each other up in your most holy faith, pray in the power of the Holy Spirit,

21 and await the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will bring you eternal life. In this way, you will keep yourselves safe in God's love.

22 And you must show mercy to those whose faith is wavering.

23 Rescue others by snatching them from the flames of judgment. Show mercy to still others, but do so with great caution, hating the sins that contaminate their lives.

24 Now all glory to God, who is able to keep you from falling away and will bring you with great joy into his glorious presence without a single fault.

25 All glory to him who alone is God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord. All glory, majesty, power, and authority are his before all time, and in the present, and beyond all time! Amen.

Who is this Jude? He identifies himself as a slave of Jesus Christ and a "brother of James". The only brothers in the New Testament by the names of Jude (Judas) and James are the half-brothers of Jesus, Matt. 13:55 and Mark 6:3. It is important to note that Jude does not identify his biological relationship to Jesus Christ as the source of his authority to speak here, but rather the fact that he was His slave. He

states his biological relationship with his brother James, who was the brother of Jesus and the leader of the Jerusalem church. It is probable that Jude mentions James because of his prominence as leader of the Jerusalem Church to help clarify his own identity.

Jude's epistle is a brief but hard-hitting letter written to warn the community of Christians against false teachers who were blatantly "antinomian". Antinomianism teaches that salvation by grace allowed them to sin without condemnation. The false teachers taught that Grace was a license to sin, that grace is a "get out of jail free" card. This means that they openly and contemptuously denied the original apostolic revelation about the person and nature of Jesus Christ, v.4. These false teachers were dividing the churches on what to believe, vv. 19a, 22 and how to behave, vv. 4,8,16.

Jude describes these would be leaders:

1. They are immoral, vv. 4, 16, 18.
2. They pervert the truth, v. 4.
3. They are destined for divine judgment, vv. 14, 15.
4. They are dreamers, v. 8 (meaning their doctrines are the results of mere imagination, foolish fancies and freakish notions,)
5. They are "clouds" that do not give any rain, v. 12.
6. They are exposed as not having "God's Spirit in them", v. 19. This verse hints that the false teachers presented themselves as having the Spirit of God when in fact they did not. These same false teachers may also be the forerunners of Gnostic heretics in the second century who claimed spirituality.

Gnosticism: is a very dangerous heresy, which came into the church in the 2nd century. The errors of Gnosticism are referred to in 1 John 2:22; 4:2-3, where reference is made to those who denied that Christ had "come in the flesh".

Gnosticism draws its materials and teachings from the mythologies of Greece, Egypt, Persia, and India and from the philosophies of these same lands. The aim of Gnosticism was to reduce Christianity to a philosophy and relate it to various pagan teachings as well as to the Old Testament, which they distorted.

The term "Gnostic" comes from the Greek work gnosis, which means "knowledge". They claimed special or secret knowledge. This knowledge could only be possessed by those of humanity who were "spiritual". Gnosticism created

classes of men and most of human kind were in this class and were utterly hopeless in endless bondage to Satan and their own lusts.

This is one of the worst features of Gnosticism – they elevated of limited number of people into a specially privileged class – the rest were unredeemable and destined for destruction. This is totally contrary to the teachings of Christianity!! Gnosticism denies the incarnation of Jesus Christ! They say that since matter (flesh) is evil – Jesus was not born in human flesh, that He remained a spirit only and returned to heaven before the crucifixion, so it was only a man on the cross.

This false doctrine is still alive today with a new name: New Age.

Why is this important to you?

1. Because we are facing the exact same situation as the First Century Church that Jude addresses. His warning was not just for the church of his day, but for all Christians from then A.D. 65 until Christ returns.
2. The nature and pattern of the attack is not necessarily from without but it could come from within:
 - A. False Teachers who claim a special spirituality or knowledge that is subtle and conning.
 - B. Christians who are not reading their Bibles and not praying open themselves to those subtle devices of the false teachers and move away from the Gospel message.
 - C. Christians who move away from the “Great Commission” of “go and witness... teach and disciple” to an agenda of social action that is not Christ centered. Jesus was greatly concerned for the needs of the man but His message is always more than just material or social, it is about Redemption!

Jude 3 &4:

Dear friends, I had been eagerly planning to write to you about the salvation we all share. But now I find that I must write about something else, urging you to defend the faith that God has entrusted once for all time to his holy people. I say this because some ungodly people have wormed their way into your churches, saying that God’s marvelous grace allows us to live immoral lives. The condemnation of

such people was recorded long ago, for they have denied our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Jude writes to this community of Christians in order to warn them of crafty false teachers who have infiltrated the church.

What is the “Faith that God has entrusted once for all time to his holy people”?

1. “The Faith” consists of the gospel proclaimed by Christ and the apostles. It is the fixed and unalterable truth, given by the Holy Spirit and embodied in the New Testament.
2. “The Faith” is more than objective truth – it is also a way of life to be lived in love and purity.
3. “The Faith” is a kingdom which comes in power to baptize all believers in the Holy Spirit, that they may proclaim the gospel to all nations with signs and miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Jude challenges us to “Defend the Faith”. The Greek word here is “epagonizomai” which literally means to struggle, to suffer, to under great stress, or to fight a fight. We must exert ourselves to the utmost in the defense of God’s Word and the Faith, even though it may be costly and agonizing. We must deny ourselves and, if need be, accept the sacrifices that may come in behalf of the Gospel.

Defending the Faith means that we must take a direct stand against those within the visible church who deny the authority of the Bible or distort the faith as presented by Christ and the apostles, and proclaim it as redemptive truth to all people.

If your allegiance is to Christ and the full New Testament Faith, then you will never allow its message to be weakened by compromising its authority, distorting its truth or explaining away its power and promises!

The false teachers turn the grace of God into immoral behavior and lifestyles. The Greek word here means unrestrained vice or sexual freedom. Jude denounces certain people who teach that salvation by grace allows professed believers to indulge in serious sin and yet not be condemned by God. Jude tells them and us today in verses 8-19 to “Beware of teachers” who behavior or teaching includes such things as:

- licentious behavior – morally unrestrained

- disrespect or rejection of authority
- greed or love of money
- empty promises
- straying from biblical truth
- grumbling and complaining
- critical, divisive, and destructive behavior
- motivation by personal gain
- self-promotion
- flattery of others when it is to his advantage

Do you see parallels to what we see happening in our world today?

Think about a few of things we have seen and experienced in the last few years:

- the re-definition of Marriage
- the teaching and acceptance by many that there are many other ways to salvation and heaven, rather than by Grace through Faith in Christ.
- the influence of immoral behavior through all forms of media.
- the blatant, open attack on Christians and Christianity as intolerant and unknowing.

How have you felt these influences?

Do you really know what your children and grandchildren are being taught in school? (See the article in the lobby – “A Parenting Roadmap for Social Media”)

Have you taken the time to read what your kids read or watch what your kids watch?

When was the last time you talked about Faith and Christ with your family?

Have you given your kids the opportunity to share their struggles and social pressures?

You see, the enemy of our souls is fighting hard, he is contending and defending for his beliefs and we may not even be aware of what he is doing.

Jude says we are to contend or defend the faith. That does not mean we fight physically, but that believers defend the faith wherever we go.

Jude gives us six ways on how, we as believers, we can defend and contend for the faith:

1. By holding to the finality of God's Revelation through Jesus Christ, v. 3.

Dear friends, I had been eagerly planning to write to you about the salvation we all share. But now I find that I must write about something else, urging you to defend the faith that God has entrusted once for all time to his holy people.

There is a tendency to minimize the finality of God's truth. In the academic world, we have those who content that there are many roads to heaven or salvation. They contend that Jesus is not the only way. Christian believers must agree that the truth delivered by Jesus is final and is not subject to be changes by anyone.

2. By keeping Watch for False Teachers and their Teachings, v. 4, 11-13.

4 I say this because some ungodly people have wormed their way into your churches, saying that God's marvelous grace allows us to live immoral lives. The condemnation of such people was recorded long ago, for they have denied our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. **11** What sorrow awaits them! For they follow in the footsteps of Cain, who killed his brother. Like Balaam, they deceive people for money. And like Korah, they perish in their rebellion.

12 When these people eat with you in your fellowship meals commemorating the Lord's love, they are like dangerous reefs that can shipwreck you. They are like shameless shepherds who care only for themselves. They are like clouds blowing over the land without giving any rain. They are like trees in autumn that are doubly dead, for they bear no fruit and have been pulled up by the roots.

13 They are like wild waves of the sea, churning up the foam of their shameful deeds. They are like wandering stars, doomed forever to blackest darkness.

Jude does not have patience for false teachers! We must not either. In Jude's day, the false teachers taught that the grace of God was cheap and that Christians could do anything and be okay. They believe that the more you sin the more grace you received. Paul strongly refuted this in Romans 6. Jude mentions three teachers whose examples should be rejected:

Cain (Genesis 4:1-16)

Balaam (Numbers 22:24)

Korah (Numbers 16:1-35)

These three examples illustrate attitudes of pride, selfishness, jealousy, greed, lust for power, and disregard for God's will that should be rejected!

3. By Growing in Christian Maturity, vv. 20-21.

20 But you, dear friends, must build each other up in your most holy faith, pray in the power of the Holy Spirit,

21 and await the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will bring you eternal life. In this way, you will keep yourselves safe in God's love.

Christians must grow in maturity every day. The discipling process never ends. Just as a soldier must be well equipped and trained for war, every Christian must be trained for spiritual warfare.

4. By Salvaging Victims from Satan and the World, vv. 22-23.

22 And you must show mercy to those whose faith is wavering.

23 Rescue others by snatching them from the flames of judgment. Show mercy to still others, but do so with great caution, hating the sins that contaminate their lives.

There are still many sinners who need the touch of Christ. Those under the bondage of Satan and the world need to be rescued, delivered, and salvaged. It is a shame that some of us, when we were first converted, were lunatics for the Lord through soul winning. When we became so-called professionals, we abandoned the art and lifestyle of soul winning.

5. By Staying Away from Sin, v. 23b.

23b ...hating the sins that contaminate their lives. hating the sins that contaminate their lives.

When Jude touched the subject of "hating the sins that contaminate their lives," he was talking about those living in sin while claiming to be working for the Lord. As believers, we must flee from anything that would tarnish our testimony.

6. By Focusing on God Alone, vv. 24-25.

24 Now all glory to God, who is able to keep you from falling away and will bring you with great joy into his glorious presence without a single fault.

25 All glory to him who alone is God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord. All glory, majesty, power, and authority are his before all time, and in the present, and beyond all time! Amen.

Jude ends his letter with a doxology (a hymn of praise) with a difference.

Defending and Contending for the faith requires God's power that can enable us as believers to stand firm and steady. God's power can keep us from falling prey to the devices of Satan and present us faultless before the judgment throne.

This message is not to bring fear, worry or stress to anyone, but we must know what we are up against and recognize that we must defend the faith. We are not to be overcome by the demonic opponents.

Remember, as Roman 8:37 says, “...in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him (Jesus Christ) who loved us.”