

Defending the Faith

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: Christ protects His people from stumbling due to false teachings and calls on them to contend for the faith.

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: Jude

The quest to discover one's ancestry and to fill in the different branches of the family tree often helps people to maintain a sense of belonging. Where does your family come from? Who was your great-great-grandmother or your second cousin once removed? What significant events in history have played a role in shaping your family?

There is something strange and yet stabilizing about going back in history to understand the DNA in our every cell and the blood that runs deep within our veins. No matter how far into the past we go, we usually find relatives who exhibited great courage or diabolical treachery, entrepreneurial brilliance or just plain foolishness.


? Why do you think some people are compelled to understand their ancestry and family history?

Group Time

Point 1: Contend for the faith against false teachers (Jude 3-4).

³ Dear friends, although I was eager to write you about the salvation we share, I found it necessary to write, appealing to you to contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all. ⁴ For some people, who were designated for this judgment long ago, have come in by stealth; they are ungodly, turning the grace of our God into sensuality and denying Jesus Christ, our only Master and Lord.

Jude wrote his letter with a sense of urgency. Planning to write about the joy of salvation, he instead sent a call to action and a warning of judgment. False teachers had infiltrated the church to turn the grace of God into something it is not—a license to sin. This, of course, required their denial of Jesus, who came to free us from sin, not enable us to sin even more. Jude called on the church to be faithful and true to the gospel and to reject those who would twist it.

 Why is it important that we understand the necessity of God's judgment?

Jude framed his appeal to contend for the faith of the gospel with the grand narrative of Scripture. He referred to the gospel as having been handed down. The good news of salvation came from Jesus through the apostles, but it also reflects the truth God laid down in the Old Testament. Jude also warned that the Scriptures have always taught that rebellion leads to death and judgment.

Authority of Scripture: Since the Bible is the _____ Word from God, the Bible is the ultimate _____ of authority for the Christian. Submitting to the authority of Scripture means that we are to believe and obey God by believing and obeying His _____.

Voices from the Church

“We should not take God's grace for granted. The church is not the place for criminals to hide. God's grace covers those who repent and abandon their evil ways for the ways of God. The people who take God's grace for granted and those who preach that this is acceptable must be renounced ... God will judge people who reject Christ and continue to live corrupt and immoral lives.”¹

—Africa Study Bible

Point 2: Recognize the signs of false teachers (Jude 12-13,16-19).

¹² These people are dangerous reefs at your love feasts as they eat with you without reverence. They are shepherds who only look after themselves. They are waterless clouds carried along by winds; trees in late autumn—fruitless, twice dead and uprooted. ¹³ They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shameful deeds; wandering stars for whom the blackness of darkness is reserved forever.

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¹⁶ These people are discontented grumblers, living according to their desires; their mouths utter arrogant words, flattering people for their own advantage. ¹⁷ But you, dear friends, remember what was predicted by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ They told you, “In the end time there will be scoffers living according to their own ungodly desires.” ¹⁹ These people create divisions and are worldly, not having the Spirit.

Jude issued a strong warning to the church by describing the attitudes and actions of the false teachers, who had entered the church unnoticed and begun to deny Christ. Jude called them dangerous, worldly, and divisive. They pretended to enjoy the fellowship of God and of believers, but it was an act as they only cared about themselves. They bore no fruit and had no shame because they did not have the Holy Spirit.

HOW CAN WE IDENTIFY FALSE TEACHERS?	HOW CAN WE IDENTIFY FAITHFUL SHEPHERDS?

Jude reminds us that this type of rebellion comes as no surprise to God. We have been forewarned in the Scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments, that encountering ungodly, idolatrous, and false teachers will be part of living as the church during the last days (Jude 17-18; cf. 1 John 2:18-19). False teachers in the church have been a reality since the first century, and that continues even today. It is the duty of the church to identify and challenge these charlatans and to contend for the truth of the gospel for the purity of the church and so the unbelieving world may hear the truth about Jesus.

 How should believers respond to false teachers in the church?

Point 3: Rely on Christ's protection against false teachers (Jude 20-25).

²⁰ But you, dear friends, as you build yourselves up in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting expectantly for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life. ²² Have mercy on those who waver; ²³ save others by snatching them from the fire; have mercy on others but with fear, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.

²⁴ Now to him who is able to protect you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of his glory, without blemish and with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority before all time, now and forever. Amen.

Believers have a responsibility to inoculate themselves against error by investing themselves in the truth and love of God. We are to contend for the faith while we look forward to the mercy to come with Jesus Christ's second coming. We are to remember the truth of the gospel and the Scriptures. And we are to show mercy to others that they too may be saved from God's judgment. But ultimately, God is the One who protects His people and keeps us from falling prey to false teaching.



What are some ways believers can have mercy on those who doubt?

Jude's exhortation to contend earnestly for the faith is grounded in the triune God of the Bible. And with faith in the God who is able to keep us from stumbling, we can get close to the fire and show mercy and take action to rescue others from the darkness. God's mercy in Christ leads to eternal life, and His protection of His people from judgment and error leads us to worship our triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

God Is One in Three Persons: While the Bible affirms that God is one (Mark 12:29; 1 Cor. 8:4-6), it also affirms that God exists as three Persons—Father, Son, and Spirit. Each Person of the Trinity is fully _____—the Father is God (John 6:27), the Son is God (Phil. 2), the Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4)—and each Person is _____ from the others (Matt. 11:27; John 10:30; 14:16). This perfect unity within the three Persons of the Trinity is a _____-order doctrine; departing from it is to _____ orthodox Christianity.

My Mission

Because Jesus is the truth and He did not waver in bringing salvation to us, we defend the faith as we also share it with those who do not know Christ.

- **What will it look like for you to contend for the faith on the job or with your friends and family?**
- **How can your group work together to grow in your awareness and rejection of false teaching?**
- **Name one person who would benefit from hearing about the mercy of God. How will you step into that conversation, trusting God to help you proclaim His mercy in Christ?**



Voices from Church History

“Some wish to live within the sound Of Church or Chapel bell, I want to run a Rescue Shop Within a yard of hell.”²

—C. T. Studd (1860-1931)

Notes

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Jude 1-4

Bible commentators often point out the similarities between Jude’s and Peter’s epistles. Like Jude, Peter often spoke about our common salvation. First Peter 1:3-5 points out that God has given us “new birth” into His family through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Amazingly, by the grace and power of God, our spiritual DNA has changed because we have been born of the Spirit (John 3:5-7; 6:63). Since we are in Jesus Christ, we are part of God’s new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

We can learn from Jude and Peter’s desire to speak positively of our salvation. What we possess in Christ is intrinsically greater than what the world and false teachers possess to oppose the gospel. Our default mode, therefore, should be one of celebration and rejoicing. We should be eager, as Jude was, to discuss and affirm the salvation we share.

However, sometimes situations arise when we must speak out against people and ideas that oppose the gospel and pose harm to the church, which is another area where we can learn from both Jude and Peter. When the time came to defend, they met the challenge presented by the false teachers (see 2 Pet. 2).



What are some problems facing the church that need to be addressed with boldness founded on the truth of the gospel?

Day 2: Read Jude 5-7

The Bible contains sixty-six books: thirty-nine in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New Testament. Because of their Spirit-inspired, authoritative nature, these books make up what is called the canon of Scripture. This collection of books, which includes history, poetry, wisdom literature, prophecy, gospels, and apocalyptic literature, comes together to tell one story, namely, the true story of the whole world.

At the heart of this story is Jesus, in whom God has revealed His fullest purpose and meaning for human history—and the meaning of your life and mine.³ Throughout the Bible we see sin and rebellion juxtaposed against the holiness, righteousness, steadfast love, and faithfulness of the one true God. In Jesus' death we see these realities converge as God displays both His just wrath against sin and His confounding mercy toward sinners. In Jude's letter, we see a medley of God's mercy and judgment.



How can your worship of God reflect both His attributes of mercy and just judgment?

Day 3: Read Jude 8-11

To be clear, Jude was not asking his readers to identify and execute the false teachers in our midst. In fact, he exhorted the church to follow Michael the archangel's example and leave final judgment to God. However, Jude is calling us to develop a heightened awareness in these end times. We need to train ourselves to spot the counterfeits in our midst, and the best way to do that is to study the truth and get to know God. So another action we can take in addition to learning more about God's character from Scripture is to take note of humanity's sinful flaws and rebellious acts.

This is precisely what Jude commended in verse 11 by naming Cain, Balaam, and Korah as types of sinful behavior not to be imitated. These figures and those who followed in their rebellion experienced God's judgment. For this reason, we can be assured that we will suffer similar fates to these men if we pursue similar paths. God's judgment was real in ancient times and will be real at the time of final judgment.




Why do people avoid reflecting on the assured and absolute reality of God's judgment against sin?

Day 4: Read Jude 12-19

The key verse in Jude’s letter is found in verse 3: “Contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all.” Jude encouraged his readers to stand up for what they knew was true. We can be confident in the source of our information—the faith that was delivered to the saints—because the words of the apostles and the writers of the Bible were inspired by the one true God. Even so, these essential truths that we have received from Jesus and the apostles need to be fought for and affirmed against those who would twist them or deny them.

The threat of false teachers and false teaching should not surprise us. This has been the reality since the church’s earliest days, something the apostles predicted (vv. 17-18) and even something the people of God faced during the Old Testament (v. 11). The prospect of their judgment is real (vv. 14-15). Just as we can be confident in the truth of the apostolic faith we have received, we can be confident in the judgment that those who reject it will receive.

 Why should the prospect of judgment make us take all the more seriously the apostles’ teaching that we have received in Scripture?

Day 5: Read Jude 20-25

If you are a believer in Christ, have you considered lately how you have been spared from God’s judgment and instead have experienced His mercy and grace? Apart from God’s intervention in your life, you would be subject to the same deception and eventual judgment false teachers stand to face. If you’ve trusted in Jesus alone for salvation, then you can rest assured you will know grace rather than judgment. And the One who saved you will prove faithful to protect you and keep you from stumbling.

In light of Jude’s doxology, pray these words back to God as an act of worship: “Thank you, God, for keeping me from stumbling—yesterday, last night, this morning. Thank you that I am without blemish in Christ Jesus because of His death, burial, and resurrection.”

 What are some ways God demonstrates His faithfulness to protect you in the truth of the gospel?

Encourage One Another

Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

- Contend for the faith against false teachers (Jude 3-4).
- Recognize the signs of false teachers (Jude 12-13,16-19).
- Rely on Christ's protection against false teachers (Jude 20-25).



How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?



How might we sometimes be defending ourselves more than actually contending for the core truths of the Christian faith?



Why might our culture see the condemnation of false teaching as hateful and intolerant rather than as loving and compassionate?

Notes
