

HOW TO CONTEND FOR THE CHRISTIAN FAITH AS A SLAVE OF CHRIST:

An Introduction to the Epistle of Jude: Lesson # 1

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Please note: This is part-one of a five-part series titled, “*Earnestly Contend for the Faith as a Slave of Jesus Christ.*” As reflected in above title, this message is an introduction to the Epistle of Jude from a bird’s eye perspective. After walking through the content of this epistle, using a chart I constructed for this introduction (which is available on my website: www.prshockley.org under the tab “Biblical Studies”, I then ask how then we should live. This series is also available on audio at www.pinevalleybible.org.

I. INTRODUCTION:

Mark Twain married a Christian lady. She at first didn’t want to marry, but later did. He at first went through the motions of religion with her, but later said he couldn’t keep up the hypocrisy. In time, she came to the place where she no longer believed in a personal God. During a time of deep grief, Twain said to his wife, “*If your Christian faith will comfort you, go back to it.*” She replied, “*I have none.*”

- A. This account underscores the purpose of Jude’s sermon to Jewish Christians who were living in a Gentile society.
- B. Contend for the Faith because false teachers are among you! Do not be led astray. Rather, maintain the Christian faith which was entrusted to the saints, both doctrine and practice, free from doctrinal and moral corruption.
- C. Perhaps this message is more needed today than ever before. Consider the following from Chuck Swindoll:

The message of Jude speaks directly to the threat of attack on the purity of our faith-not necessarily a bold, frontal assault, but a slow, subtle erosion of our faith. How easily it can creep in unawares. By and by the whole direction of our life’s mission changes. Please hear this: The Ministry of the church of Jesus is a saving ministry-not only the saving of the lost, the deliverance of unbelievers from the dominion of sin to the realm of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ, but also the deliverance of believers to a fresh awareness of the power of the Holy Spirit and the reality of Christ’s reign in their lives. It is so easy to lose our direction as individual believers; it is so easy as a group of believers who are part of Christ’s body, the church, simply to become an exclusive club where we gather as the initiated who talk only to ourselves, applaud ourselves, look at ourselves in the mirror and admire everything we see. We need to keep our calling and our mission clear. We must be ever diligent to keep our faith from eroding. The message of Jude is this: Stand Firm. Contend for the Faith!¹

¹ *The Living Insights Study Bible*, pg. 1389.

D. *The Nelson Study Bible* puts it this way:

Few books in the New Testament have more to say to our generation than the Epistle of Jude. Distorters of the faith will find the book distasteful because of its warning and uncompromising stance against defectors from the truth of Jesus Christ. But to those who approach with receptive hearts, Jude's words speak as clearly and forcefully today as they did almost two thousand years ago.²

E. Why are we studying perhaps one of the most neglected books in the New Testament? This little letter is a dynamic, authoritative response to the claims of cults and false doctrines of today that not only exist outside of our church walls, but are seeping in to the very core our churches. What are the results?

1. The Promotion of Ungodliness: Act contrary against God and His ways.
2. The Promotion of Antinomianism. Antinomians twist God's grace by abusing its privileges; they abuse grace for their selfish gain. In fact, they use grace as a license to sin!
3. The Promotion of Immorality.
4. The Promotion of Heresy: Heresy may be identified as a departure from an essential truth of the Christian faith. Christians can become heretical.
5. The Promotion of Apostasy [*apostasia*; Acts 21:21; 2 Thess. 2:3]: Apostasy means "a falling away from," a deserting or turning from a position or view formerly held. Spiritually it is a defection from truth just like political apostasy is a defection from authority.

F. Consider the following description of apostasy by Dr. John F. Walvoord:

Spiritual apostasy occurs when a person who once claims to be a believer departs from what he or she formerly believed to believe. An apostate, though having claimed to be a believer, never was saved in the first place. Relatively minor differences in doctrine are not referred to as apostasy; instead apostasy is a departure from major components of Christian truth.

Major characteristics of those who apostasize include embracing doctrine of demons, having a seared conscience, lying, forbidding marriage, and prohibiting the eating of certain foods (1 Tim. 4:1-3). Apostates may have a form of godliness but know experientially its power or reality (2 Tim. 3:5). Apostasy is denounced in Hebrews 10:26-29; 2 Peter 2:15-21; and Jude 3-4.³

Dr. Walvoord goes on to say:

² *The Nelson Study Bible*, 2020.

³ *The Theological Wordbook*, edited by Don Campbell, Wendell Johnston, John Walvoord, and John Witmer, 19.

Apostasy is a departure from truth not simply because of ignorance; it is deliberate and therefore merits divine judgment. The only cure for apostasy is for the individual to come to Christ for salvation, to become a true believer in Christ.

- G. So, the difference between a heretic and an apostate is that a heretic denies some aspect of the Christian faith but retains the name Christian whereas apostasy is a deliberate repudiation and abandonment of the faith that one has professed (Heb. 3:12).
 - a. Perhaps the most notorious example of an apostate is Judas Iscariot.
 - b. So when apostasy seeps into the church, the church loses its integrity and distinctiveness before others, invites God's chastisement, and reaps a whirlwind of destruction spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and perhaps even physically.
 - 1. Having recognized the purpose of this epistle: Earnestly Contend for the Christian Faith because false teachers are among you. a. In fact, Jude describes the false teachers as ungodly, secretive, antinomian, and heretical.
 - 2. He reminds us that they not only coming, they are here...devoid of the Holy Spirit. If you do need these instructions you may become contaminated by their influence and led down paths you never thought you would go.
- H. So, in this expositional series, titled, "***Earnestly Contend for the Christian Faith as a Slave of Christ,***"
 - 1. We are first going to examine the Epistle of Jude from a bird's eye perspective.
 - 2. Then in our second lesson we will scrutinize verses 1-2 and ask what it means to be a slave of Jesus Christ.
 - 3. In our third lesson we will reflect upon the central theme of this epistle and explore what it means to contend for the faith. In fact, we will consider reasons why need to tenaciously hold to the truth (vs. 3-4).
 - a. One of the truths we will observe is that doctrinal and moral deterioration is typically never sudden. A garden just doesn't suddenly overgrow with thorns and a church does not typically "suddenly" fall apart. But, slowly, almost imperceptibly, certain things are accepted that once were rejected. At first, they may appear harmless, but the small crack that is laid down upon the foundation begins to grow and grow, the gap becomes greater and greater as moral erosion joins hands with false teaching. As spiritual decadence builds, the distinctiveness of Christ is marginalized until He is eventually an anathema to us, or a figment of one's ignorant imagination.
 - 4. Then in our fourth lesson we will consider the future judgment of false teachers by Jesus Christ (vv.5-16).
 - 5. In our last lesson we will deliberate on how we can be ready to meet the danger of apostates and heretics of every kind (vv. 17-25).

II. AN EXPOSITION OF JUDE:

[For this section I walk through Jude using the chart I constructed for this series. You must have a copy of the chart. It is located on www.prshockley.org under the tab which states, “Biblical Studies.” The chart is in PDF format. After I walk through Jude using the chart, I then return to this manuscript and consider how should then we live in view of this introduction].

- A. But before we do, let’s take a bird’s eye view of this short but powerful epistle. I want to walk you through Jude’s Sermon, which someone once titled, “*The Acts of the Apostates*.”
1. Rhetorical analysis reveals a very natural outline of this sermon:
 - a. First section: Introduction and Purpose: vv.1-4.
 - b. Second section: Exposure, Condemnation and Destination of False Teachers: vv. 5-16.
 1. Who are these false teachers? Scholars generally agree that the apostates at the time when this letter was written were the Gnostics-people who embraced the notion that physical matter is inherently evil and the spirit as being good. One implication of this worldview is that the flesh could do anything it wanted to do, because no one is under moral obligation. Immorality and antinomianism go hand-in-hand. We may even refer to these implications as hedonism. Regardless what we call it, it is rebellion against authority and moral and spiritual debauchery.
 - c. Third section: Exhortations to Believers: vv. 17-25.
 2. I love how Warren Wiersbe homiletically divides this book!
 - a. Verses 1-7 is a Call to Arms!
 - b. Verses 8-16 is Meet the Apostates!
 - c. Verses 17-25: You Don’t Have to Stumble!⁴
- B. Let’s now proceed to walk through this chart [see chart]:

⁴Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, "An Exposition of the New Testament Comprising the Entire 'BE' Series"--Jkt. (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989), Jude 1.

III. HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE IN VIEW OF THIS INTRODUCTION?

Lessons we should take from this overview of this epistle should include the following:

- A. **BE ON THE ALERT!** Every believer is susceptible to false teaching; no one is immune to the influence and power of apostasy. Each of us can be led astray...and be taken places we never thought possible-no matter how educated we are in the things of God. Do not be led astray since false teachers are among you! Therefore, like a soldier, be aware, vigilant, and discerning.
- B. **BE KNOWLEDGEABLE!** We need to thoroughly and competently be equipped in doctrinal truth so that we might be aware of those who are struggling. How do we recognize false teaching if we don't know doctrinal truth? It is insufficient to be merely aware of doctrinal truth. Rather, we must take ownership of the truth in order that we might recognize false teaching. Remember, milk-like teaching is for babes in Christ. If we have been Christians for some time, then we need to be longing for and relishing in the substantive teachings of biblical and theological truth.
- C. **BE SKILLED!** We need to learn HOW to earnestly contend for the truth. How can we earnestly contend for the truth if we don't know to contend for the truth? One important way to know how to earnestly contend for the truth is to take seriously the study of Christian apologetics. Apologetics not only defends the Christian faith but provides explanatory power in the marketplace of ideas and alternative worldviews.
- D. **BE INVOLVED!** We need to be sensitive to those around us who might be struggling, doubting, and are in need of "rescue." Thus, we need to know each other relationally, rather than maintain superficial relationships. We need to build deeper relationships into the lives of each other! Statistically 85% of members of a typical local church only know each other superficially regardless how long they have been in each other's presence. Protecting each other is one way we demonstrate our love to one another.
- E. **BE COMFORTED!** God will never lead us where He can't keep us. If you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ, believing that Jesus is God and that He died on the cross for your sins and rose again, then remember that He will "preserve" you-no matter how difficult your circumstances become. You will never lose your salvation-even though you may be surrounded by a pack of blood-thirsty wolves in sheep costumes. But also remember that as you obey God's Word in your moment-by-moment decision making, then you undergo a transformation, a further conformity to Christ. God is going to do His work but we are called to do our work! As a result, we can trust God even further!