Contending for the Faith, Today

Chris Staples 12 July 2018



‘Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people.’ (Jude 1:3)

In this opening to his letter, Jude describes a tension we still face in the 21st Century church. It is so tempting to focus all of our attention on teaching the wonderful salvation that we share in Christ and neglect the assault that is coming against the true Gospel in the world of ideas. Naturally, most of us want to find common ground and avoid any prickly issues for fear of making people uncomfortable, but we are urged to do more than that. We are urged to contend for the faith.

> ‘Contend‘ means to defend, assert, claim, hold onto, plead for and affirm.

Jude initially wanted to write a generalised message about the salvation that we all share, but instead he was compelled, like Paul the apostle often was, to urge that the church fight for the true Gospel. ‘Contend‘ means to defend, assert, claim, hold onto, plead for and affirm. The word Jude uses for contend or defend is epagonizesthai, which contains the root of our English word

‘agony’. The defence of the faith may well be a costly thing, but that defence is a duty which falls on every generation of the Church.

Correcting Compromise

It is important to notice that Jude was not blaming Satan for the issues in the church, but the false teachers. He makes it clear that the job of speaking out about error belongs to the Church. He was well aware of his responsibilities as a ‘slave of Jesus’ (Jude was actually Jesus’ brother!) to protect the saints and the faith.

> They were twisting the grace of God into a justification, even a reason, for sinning

Jesus Himself, in Revelation 2 and 3 with His letters to the seven churches, emphasises the same responsibility that we have to put things right: ‘Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first…’ (Revelation 2:5); ‘Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.’ (Revelation 3:3)

We should therefore not be surprised when there is a need to contend for the true Gospel in the church. It should perhaps be more concerning if we never hear corrective teaching or if we are never repenting at the realisation that we have got things wrong.

Two Distortions of The Truth

So, what error did Jude consider so dangerous and worth fighting against? He highlighted two important distortions of the truth that are actually still pertinent to the Church today:

‘For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a licence for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.’ Jude 1:4

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A Sentimental View of God

The Greek words used here describe a complete loss of any decency and awareness of sin. The

basic implication is that the grace of God makes our sin unimportant, meaning that we can sin as we like without any consequence. In fact, we can be confident that the more we sin, the greater the grace of God, so why worry about sin? Grace was being perverted into a justification for sin. How can we recognise the subtle forms of this teaching today? It sometimes manifests in a distorted teaching of what God's love is like. For example, sometimes it is in a gospel that centers around me instead of the glory of God and in serving others. Often it comes through in a watered-down Gospel message that portrays a nice, comfortable God who only wants us to be happy.

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A Compromised View of Jesus' Lordship

The second error was denying the complete Lordship of Jesus. At times He was put on the same level as others, revealing a failure to recognise the manhood and uniqueness of Jesus. In Jude's time, there was a group called Docetists who believed Jesus was just one of the many stages on the journey to the perfect God – something often heard today.

We can deny Jesus' Lordship in more than one way, and this is a point sometimes missed in the Church.

- He can be denied **during times of persecution**. In some of our Four12 churches, culture is pressing us to deny the Lordship of Jesus and compromise our Biblical beliefs in areas like relationships, family, sanctity of life and leadership.
- We can also can deny His Lordship **for the sake of convenience** and develop false ideas about Him **to suit changes in culture or situations** we face.
- Perhaps we allow compromise to **use talented individuals in leadership**, or give them a platform.
- At other times we're tempted to **compromise on our teaching or doctrine to avoid controversy and attract a crowd**. Ultimately this is denial of the Lordship of Christ for our convenience.
- Lastly, we can **deny Him with our lives and conduct**. It's not just our words but our lives that testify to the Lordship of Christ. 'You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone.You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry…' (2 Cor.3:2-3)

> For it is only the true Gospel that has the power to set people free.

It is no surprise, then, that Jude was alarmed. He saw that this type of teaching had subtly infiltrated the church and, as Paul warned the Corinthians, 'if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the Spirit you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.' (2 Cor.11:4). They were not alert and, as any good shepherd should, he needed to urgently warn and correct them. They were twisting the grace of God into a justification, even a reason, for sinning and denying the complete and uncompromising Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Jude's letter still has much to teach us in our generation. May we to take up the cause to 'contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people.' For it is only the true Gospel that has the power to set people free.