

Contend Earnestly for the Faith

By [Wayne Jackson](#)

Jude was in the process of planning a correspondence—or perhaps actually writing—to his fellow Christians concerning their common salvation. But suddenly under the direction of the Holy Spirit, he was constrained to urge his brothers to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3).

It becomes obvious from the subsequent information in this small epistle, that the danger of false doctrine threatened the security of the early church. There are several important truths in Jude 3 worthy of serious consideration.

The Faith—A Unified Body of Truth

Jude’s warning concerns **the faith**. The term “faith” is used in several different ways in the New Testament.

It is sometimes employed in the sense of **one’s personal level of trust**. Christ did not trust himself to certain people for he knew of the evil disposition that characterized them (Jn. 2:24). One reads of great faith and weak faith (Matt. 8:10; Rom. 14:1).

Frequently, however, “faith”—especially the expression “the faith”—is used objectively for **a body of doctrine** (i.e., the gospel system). We learn of those who were “obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7), of preaching “the faith” (Gal. 1:23), of denying and falling away from “the faith” (1 Tim. 5:8; 4:1).

It is in this latter sense that Jude uses the expression “the faith.”

We must also observe that the term faith is singular. The New Testament does not sanction the idea of many faiths or the faith of one’s choice as that notion prevails in the denominational world.

The biblical concept is that of one faith (Eph. 4:5). This certainly contains the implication that Christians can believe and teach the same doctrine (cf. 1 Cor. 1:10).

When one believes and obeys the truths of the one faith, he will be a recipient of the blessings of that common salvation alluded to in the opening portion of Jude 3.

The Faith—Divinely Given

We must also observe that the faith was **delivered** unto the first-century saints.

The expression “was delivered” is a passive voice form. This reveals that the doctrine of Christ is not a human production. Rather, it is from heaven. Note Paul’s affirmation concerning the origin of the gospel in Galatians 1:11-12:

For I make known unto you, brethren, as touching the gospel which was preached by me, that it is not after man. For neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ.

As a **divinely given system**, therefore, the faith is not subject to addition, subtraction or modification in any form.

The Faith—Its Finality

Jude also asserts that the faith was **once for all** delivered to the saints.

The Greek term is *hapax*, and it means “once for all time.” Thayer comments that the term is “used of what is so done as to be of perpetual validity and never need repetition” (1958, 54). For example, Christ was offered **once** to bear the sins of many (Heb. 9:28; cf. 1 Pet. 3:18).

Jude thus affirms, in anticipation of the Christian body of doctrine being completed, that there would be no need for continuing revelation. God’s system of truth was **fully and finally** made known within the New Testament record. There is, therefore, no ongoing revelation, with accompanying spiritual gifts, today (cf. 1 Cor. 13:8-10; Eph. 4:11-16). See [What](#)

The Faith—Its Guardians

To whom was the faith delivered? It was delivered “unto the saints.” We must emphasize two important things here.

First, saints are simply Christians. All children of God are called to be saints (1 Cor. 1:2). The meaning of this term is that we are, by our obedience to the gospel, **set apart for spiritual service** unto the Lord.

This concept stands in vivid contrast to the Roman Catholic dogma regarding sainthood. In Roman theology, one is acknowledged as a “saint” only after he or she is confirmed and recognized as such as a consequence of the Church’s official processes of “beatification” and “canonization.” Both of these rites are wholly unknown to the Scriptures.

Second, the faith has been delivered to or deposited with the Lord’s people. Paul wrote to Timothy: “O Timothy, guard the deposit committed unto you” (1 Tim. 6:20).

The gospel is a treasure (2 Cor. 4:7), and we sustain a serious responsibility to it. Our obligation to “the faith” can perhaps be summed up as follows.

A responsibility to teach the gospel

We must **teach it**. Jesus declared that our mission is to preach the gospel to the whole creation (Mk. 16:15). How sobering is the truth that all people who are separated from Christ are without hope in this world (Eph. 2:12). We are debtors (see Rom. 1:14).

We labor under a divine obligation, to see that all men have the opportunity to know of the Lord’s saving grace as made available through his plan of redemption. How sorely the church has neglected this sacred duty.

Christians must live the gospel

Christians are under obligation to conduct their lives consistent with the principles of the New Testament system.

“Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ,” admonished Paul (Phil. 1:27). The apostle was quite conscientious that he might not do anything which would be a hindrance to the religion of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 9:12)—even in matters of judgment.

When the world observes children of God, the Lord should be magnified, not distorted (Phil. 1:20).

Defending the gospel

We must also be prepared and willing to defend the faith. Paul acknowledged that through the providence of God he had been sent to Rome in chains that he might be allowed to defend the gospel (Phil. 1:16).

While no **normal person** seeks a constant climate of controversy, every realistic soldier of the cross is keenly aware of the fact that spiritual battle cannot be avoided if one stands for truth and against error.

Whenever the faith is assaulted, either from without or from within the body of Christ, faithful men and women must firmly rise up and contend for the truth. We must not allow the heat of battle to fall upon a few. Everyone must attempt to do his or her part.

Shall I be carried to the skies,
on beds of flowery ease;
while others fought to win the prize,
and sailed through bloody seas?

Contending for the Faith Is Not Contentiousness

There are some who have yet to learn the difference between contending for the faith and being contentious for the faith.

Contending for the faith is a **balanced proclamation** and **defense of the fundamental elements of gospel truth**. Contentiousness is a wrangling disposition that generates ill will over inconsequential matters.

Let us reflect on the following points.

Not making new law

Contending for the faith is not making laws for God. There are those, generally termed legalists, who feel obligated to coerce others into accepting their **peculiar opinions** of the will of God in the absence of divine revelation.

The Pharisees were of this class. They bound burdens upon others which they themselves ignored (Matt. 23:4). Their breed is not extinct.

No excuse for rudeness or hostility

Contending for the faith is not to be equated with brutality.

Some inept proclaimers know no method of teaching except the bludgeoning technique. They insult and degrade potential disciples. They feel that if they have not made someone angry, they really haven't preached the truth.

The "Watchtower Witnesses" frequently exhibit front-door rudeness. When someone abruptly turns them away, they **congratulate themselves** upon the fact that they were persecuted for the cause of truth.

Though Christ was occasionally sharp with hypocritical leaders who should have known better than what they were doing, he was gentle and compassionate with honest inquirers, even though they were entrenched in sin (cf. Matt. 12:20).

Unnecessary Division

Contending for the faith is not "marking" everyone with whom you have the slightest disagreement.

One aspect of **spiritual maturity** is the ability to determine what should be made a test of fellowship and what may be overlooked as honest differences of opinion.

Does a man's teaching reflect upon Deity? Does it corrupt the New Testament plan of worship? Does it militate against holiness? These, and questions of a similar nature, are vital in resolving this confusion.

With some, however, the issue is not "What does a brother stand for?" Rather, it is "With what clique does he run?"

Not partiality or favoritism

Contending for the faith is not characterized by favoritism. Paul instructed Timothy to do "nothing by partiality" (1 Tim. 5:21).

When Peter acted the part of a hypocrite by refusing to eat with Gentiles in the presence of certain influential Jews, Paul knew that such an inconsistency could not go unchallenged. So when Peter came to Antioch, the apostle to the Gentiles "resisted him to the face" and rebuked him publicly (Gal. 2:11ff).

One of the greatest tests of a man's character is whether or not he has the grit to stand against a friend or relative who has drifted into error.

Conclusion

Inspiration has exhorted us all to "earnestly contend for the faith." What a challenge this is in these times of confusion and rapid change.

May the Lord grant us the wisdom to accept this responsibility with devotion, firmness, good sense, love and abiding commitment to the cause of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- [What About Christian Fellowship?](#)
- [Examine Yourselves!](#)
- [The Meaning of Romans 3:31](#)
- [The Mandate for Christian Unity – A Study of Ephesians 4:1-6](#)
- [Justified by Faith](#)
- [A Common Faith and Common Salvation](#)
- [The Dynamics of the Doxology.](#)
- [A Divine Platform for Christian Unity](#)
- [Does God Speak Directly to Man Today?](#)
- [When Love Grows Cold: A Profile of the Ephesian Church](#)

Works Cited

Thayer, J. H. 1958. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Nashville, TN: Broadman.

Scripture References

Jude 3; John 2:24; Matthew 8:10; Romans 14:1; Acts 6:7; Galatians 1:23; 1 Timothy 5:8, 4:1; Ephesians 4:5; Galatians 1:11-12; Hebrews 9:28; Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Corinthians 4:7; Mark 16:15; Ephesians 2:12; Romans 1:14; Philippians 1:27; 1 Corinthians 9:12; Philippians 1:20; Philippians 1:16; Matthew 23:4; Matthew 12:20; 1 Timothy 5:21; Galatians 2:11

Cite this article

Jackson, Wayne. "Contend Earnestly for the Faith." *ChristianCourier.com*. Access date: October 16, 2020. <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/40-contend-earnestly-for-the-faith>

**CHRISTIAN
COURIER**

©2020. All rights reserved. ISSN: 1559-2235.

Publisher

Fortify Your Faith
P.O. Box 11746
Jackson, Tennessee 38308
Phone: (731) 256-7280 – Fax: (731) 256-5152

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Acceptable Use Policy](#)