

Text: Jude 20-21

Title: Another way to contend for the faith.

Truth: Keep yourself in God's love by spiritual growth and prayer.

Date/Location: February 15, 2015 at FBC

Introduction

Jude began in verse 17 to instruct his readers how it is that they can exert intense effort on behalf of the faith in the face of an onslaught of ungodly influences trying to tear down the church. He gives three steps.

The first step is to **remember apostolic teaching** having to do with ungodly mockers in the **last time**. This teaching (or *doctrine*) is recorded in the New Testament for us today. To remember it, we first of all must **have it**. And we do—in the Bible. Then we have to **know it**. To know it, we have to **learn it**. That's why we read our Bibles, why we study the Bible, and why we go to church to listen to it preached. Once we learn it, we should **review it** and **memorize it** so we can know it better. Then we can remember it when the need arises.

The **last time** Jude is talking about is already here today, the time when people will not tolerate sound Christian teaching but rather seek teaching that suits their own fancies and lusts (2 Timothy 4:3). Teaching that defines sin or says 'no' to sin is not popular. Teaching that distinguishes between truth and error is not popular. Teaching that says some doctrine is wrong is not popular. Teaching that exalts the Holy Trinity is not popular. Teaching that explains the one single way of salvation is not popular. But remembering these kinds of truths is necessary to contend for the faith.

There are two other steps to contending for the faith: keeping ourselves in the love of God, and evangelizing those who have become victims of false teaching. Let's read the text starting from verse 20 and then focus on some of the details. As you read along, notice the Trinity in verses 20-21 and the main verbs of the passage.

I. Keep Yourselves, 21a

There are a lot of action words in verses 20-21: building, praying, expectantly waiting, and keeping. The command "keep" is the main one.

A. **Keep yourselves in the love of God.** The verb means to maintain, guard, or obey. In sum, it means to be faithful. You want to stay in the love of God, as opposed to in the displeasure of God.

- B. Think of the love of God as a sphere or circle in which you exist as a believer. There is a wide range of things you can do in your life that are inside that circle. You don't have to worry about being in the exact center of the circle as if being one inch off makes you totally displeasing to God. God's love provides a wealth of holy opportunities for you to serve Him.
- C. This "love of God" is love from God toward you. You have a responsibility to stay within the sphere of that love. 1 John 15:9-10 teach that we have to "abide" in the love of Christ. We know that love of God through the Spirit who lives inside of each true Christian (Rom. 5:5).
- D. There are constraints to God's love. It has boundaries, in other words. I believe if you are careful and discerning you can sense when you get to the edge of the circle and start to step out. The circle is filled with God's love and light. Those who walk in the light will be in God's love as well. If you start sinning, you will be walking in darkness and therefore outside of that love (1 John 1:7).
- E. Although the love of which we speak is that directed from God toward us, when we abide in that sphere, we naturally exhibit or reflect that love back toward God. Therefore our love for God is tied into this. If you love God, you will abide in His love. A number of additional passages of Scripture inform us as to how we do that, namely by keeping His commands. So we abide in His love by staying faithful to what He wishes for us to do. Consider Exodus 20:6 and Deut. 5:10, both basic statements of Jewish and Christian doctrine. Add to that Deut. 11:1, 19:9, 30:16. And then notice the striking similarity of New Testament teaching in John 14:15, 23-24, 15:10; and 1 John 5:2-3.

II. Build Yourselves Up, 20a

- A. **Build yourselves up on your most holy faith.** This is one method to keep yourself in the love of God. Building yourself up on the faith is taking the faith once delivered and developing it fully in your life. It is adding on to the foundation of the once-delivered faith in the process of personal Christian development.
- B. The same body of revelation from the apostles that describes those who are destructive also explains how we can be constructive. Construction is a very good way to avoid destruction. Spiritual maintenance prevents spiritual breakdown. Growth is a great way to avoid shrinking. Spiritual exercise prevents spiritual atrophy.

- C. The foundation is the person and work of Jesus Christ—the Christian doctrine about Him. He is the corner-stone (Matt. 7:24; 1 Cor. 3:10-11, Eph. 2:20). Nothing else is worth building upon!
- D. One key text in this area is 2 Peter 1:5-7 which speaks of spiritual growth in terms of adding to our faith.
- E. The New Testament is filled with instruction on spiritual growth, adding discernment and knowledge, demonstrating wisdom and spiritual maturity. The only way to touch on all of that fairly quickly and regularly is for you to read your Bible persistently, particularly in the New Testament. The other way is to faithfully attend the services of your local church where the Word of God is proclaimed in every service. This has a growth-inducing influence. It is like water, sun, and fertilizer to a plant. You can't keep a plant in a closet and expect it to grow.
- F. The admonitions to *build* and to *keep* have two notable features.
 1. Their tense indicates a present, always-ongoing activity. There is no stopping point in your life where you can say "I'm done with spiritual growth!" or "I don't need to keep myself in God's love now!"
 2. In both cases, Jude uses a "reflexive pronoun," *yourselves*. This means you do the activity to or on yourself. *You* are responsible for building; *you are* responsible for keeping yourselves. Your pastor bears a responsibility to teach you the need to do so, and how to do so, but *you* have to actually do something to build and to keep. You can be in an environment where all the right ingredients are provided, but if you don't mix them into your life, those ingredients won't profit you a thing! Note too that God does not leave you alone in this: verse 24 reminds us that God ultimately preserves us as we continue in the faith.

III. Praying in the Spirit, 20b

- A. **Praying in the Spirit** is another crucial element of keeping yourself in the love of God. It is easy to leave off the discipline of prayer, but if you really want to avoid the destructive effects of false teaching and ungodliness, prayer is essential.
- B. This prayer is "in" the Holy Spirit, which is the effective kind of prayer of a righteous person. It is not "ritual" prayer, but that led kind of by the Spirit, reflecting the Word of God, according to the will of God, and with the Spirit's help (Rom. 8:26-27).

- C. How do I get better in this? How you get better at praying is by praying! Pay attention when you pray. Listen to other good examples. Read good prayers in the Bible.

IV. Look for the Coming of Christ, 21b

We should also **expectantly await the coming mercy of Christ**, at His second coming. Doing so is naturally connected to keeping and building and praying.

- A. Looking forward to Christ's coming, our blessed hope (Titus 2:11-13), helps us to be pure. Not only does our growth in Christ make us long for His coming, the anticipation of it helps us to grow (1 John 2:28, 3:2-3).
- B. What Christ brings with Him is more mercy which culminates in eternal life. Christians have received mercy already. But the reality is we continually receive God's mercy, and will receive another huge dose of it when our Lord returns and reveals and bestows on us the final installment of blessing in terms of life eternal. This life is never-ending and of the highest and most blessed standard.

Conclusion

We have focused on one way to contend earnestly for the faith. A great side effect of this is that it helps you avoid falling into the error of the ungodly. There are marvelous resources you have that the ungodly do not which help you. You have the Holy Spirit, they do not; you have a holy faith, they do not; you have the mercy of Christ, they do not; you look forward to eternal life, they do not; you have compassion, they do not; you remember the word of God, they do not; you pray, they do not; you are in the love of God, they are not.

This is what a life "kept in the love of God" looks like: look at yourself carefully for spiritual growth; look up to God in prayer through the Spirit, and look forward to the second coming of Christ.

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