

Fighting the Good Fight

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[0:00] I want to make an opening comment that's not part of the notes, but I think it is important.

! I was listening to Christian radio the other day, and I'm actually trying, I've got the station! identified, trying to find out if they record that or sell, you know, a portion of it. I don't know who I was listening to, but he was solid, sounded very solid. But he was saying, you know, the evangelical church, reformed churches and evangelical churches in America right now, of which we are one, is going through a very interesting period of time because we're seeing a coalition come together under the banner of world peace, world religion, one currency, one sort of political body. And it's a conglomeration, according to this guy, of very liberal churches, very extreme charismatic churches, the Kenneth Copeland, who by the way has met with the

Pope, Benny Hinn, who met with the Pope in Rome, Roman Catholic Church, I may have mentioned them, New Age type folks, and there were a lot of others under the banner, but they're coming together under this banner of world peace. And he said, public enemy number one are the evangelical and reformed churches. We've become the new enemy, which I think kind of dovetails with my reading of Revelation and other books that deal with prophecy. So a very interesting time we've entered into, and it dovetails with what we're talking about from now until probably Christmas break, and that is the church, the true church. Isn't that interesting? 25 years ago we never had to say the true church. Now you've got to say the true church. The true church is engaged in a war on truth.

We're in a war. We have been locked in this fight since the church was born on Pentecost. We're going to be engaged in this war until Christ removes us from this planet. I taught Acts in here last year, I guess it was Oscar. And you know, at Pentecost, Peter and John were arrested within 24 hours. It didn't take long for persecution to begin, and of course it even began before then because Stephen, well after, but Stephen, of course the first martyr, but until the Lord comes back, we're going to be engaged in this war.

The war on truth has claimed untold numbers of people who bought into the enemy's lies, and you've heard me say before, all lies started in the Garden of Eden for humanity.

[3:41] the first life started in heaven with Lucifer. And right now and forever, there are people that will spend eternity in hell for having rejected the truth and look for something else. Look for, you know, world peace and justice, and we'll join together with our friends around the world religion and stuff like that. As in any war, there have been great defenders of truth. The men and women who have come before us formed a barrier against error and stood for Christ and His Word even to the forfeiting of their own life. You know, I'm wondering when we get to heaven, if you haven't read Fox's book of martyrs, maybe you're going to have to sit outside the gate and go through that book first. I don't know.

I have several copies. Some of them are very fragile. 1815. I also have one called the Scotsworthies. And it's the story of the ministers that were executed in Scotland because they wouldn't bow down to the king and proclaim him as the head of the church.

Their position was that Jesus is the head of the church. And 18,000 of them were killed in Scotland. As in any war, in addition to being defenders of the truth, there have been defectors.

Some men and women have gone over to the other side and joined the enemy. Years ago, the statistic was that something like 265 Southern Baptists leave every day for a cult. I haven't seen that statistic upgraded.

I don't know if it's more or less or what, but it's a bunch. But some have gone over to the other side and there have been defectors all the way back into the New Testament period.

[5:53] Many of the inspired writers had to contend with those defectors who spread error. False prophets, false teachers. Paul dealt with the legalists in his day.

He dealt with the Judaizers. He wrote Galatians really as a defense of that, of truth. John had to battle the Gnostics. That's just a couple of the groups.

So the truth war has had its defenders and its defectors. Now Jude, the half-brother of Jesus, stood for truth and he warned his generation and ours about this great war on truth.

Jude produced a short book concerning standing for the truth. It's the 25 verses in length. It lives in the shadow of the book of Revelation.

But it is a powerful book and it's packed with information on how we can be defenders in the war on truth.

[7:05] And indeed the Spirit of God gives to us through this brief writing our marching orders. First marching order is we're compelled to contend for the faith.

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.

For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, underline that thought, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

By the way, this is the only book in the Bible where the author tells us he sat down to write one thing and ended up writing something else. He wrote something else.

Now, we don't know what precisely prompted Jude to change his mind. Obviously, the Holy Spirit led him to go in another direction, but there is no doubt that some human event around Jude compelled him to change the content of his writing.

[8:27] I think I said last time I could just picture his trash can and got all these wadded up pieces of paper because the Holy Spirit was giving him writer's block, you know, and he couldn't get it.

Jude, walking by the Spirit, correctly surmised that the very salvation he wanted to celebrate was in grave danger of being compromised.

The problem was so serious in Jude's day that he sounded the alarm and he issued a call to arms for the church. By the way, that call to arms had never been set aside.

It's down to our day. It's still there. Jude, in effect, drew a line in the sand and he asked who would be on the Lord's side.

It's really what Jude is asking. The alarm bell went off in Jude's head. Most likely, this alarm bell had to do with a serious problem that was impacting the church in his day.

And the problem was the church had been infiltrated. It had been infiltrated. Jude described the infiltrators as those who crept in unnoticed.

[9:48] These infiltrators came in and tampered with the grace of God. And any time someone tampers with the grace of God, you can mark it down, they are a deceiver and a defector.

Tampered grace is a form of denying the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, we don't know the specifics of what set Jude off.

We do know that it was bad. I wrote the word egregious, but I wanted to change that to bad. It was so bad that it caused Jude to change his direction.

And he correctly surmised that the church was in grave danger. He was also incorrect in noting that the danger was from within.

You know, we can be in danger from the outside and sort of be prepared. But when it's from the inside, it makes it a little bit tougher. The fact that the danger was from within is a great clue to us.

[10:53] The people within the church are exposed to truth. They hear truth preached and taught every week, but knowing the truth and then rejecting it is a grave sin before God.

It's a grave sin. And there is, of course, a term for these people, and we talked about that last week. People exposed to the truth who buy into some of the truth and then ultimately reject the truth are known as apostates.

And they're following the way of apostasy. When apostates infiltrate a church, they bring with them the goal of turning that church into a center of apostasy.

And let me just say to you, we've seen denominations become apostate. In my lifetime, whole denominations have become apostate. The true church must always be on guard against apostates and apostasy.

And we should never think that it can't happen here on the buckle of the Bible belt. Because it can happen. There are apostate churches within two or three miles of where we're sitting here tonight.

[12:16] So it can happen. So how do we, Highland Park Baptist Church, guard against apostasy? Well, for one thing, maybe a first step, we read Jude.

We study Jude. We heed his warning. We're going to dovetail this into a study of 2 Peter also, which goes hand in glove.

But our hedge of protection is manifested often on those Sundays, and I covered some of this last week, but it's often manifested when someone comes forward unannounced for membership. They came in, they like what they heard, they came forward. We've never met them. We don't know who they are. And the church leadership goes through this process. I mentioned last time, Pastor Don greets them very warmly, ask them a few questions, may have prayer with them, and then he'll look to one of the elders, and that's the signal that the elder will go out with them, maybe in the back room there in the hallway or wherever, the choir room, and we will begin a process of setting up a home visit.

And Don has rightly concluded, you can learn a lot about a person in their home. I hope he doesn't come to mind tonight, although Pam was here there today to clean up. But, I can tell you that process works.

[13:47] That process works. Another thing that would be helpful, and we've looked at this, and I think the day is coming where we will have an introductory class, you know, for new members, and teach them the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

It wouldn't hurt any of us to go through something like that either. All of this is designed to protect the church from apostasy. The Lord Jesus spoke of this in Matthew and Luke.

Listen to his words from Luke's Gospel. The sower went out to sow his seed, and as he sowed, some fell beside the road, and it was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air ate it up.

Other seed fell on rocky soil, and as soon as it grew up, it withered away because it had no moisture. Other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns grew up, and it choked it out.

Other seed fell into the good soil, and grew up, and produced a crop a hundred times as great.

Now, to say the least, the followers of Christ were confused.

[14:50] They didn't know what that parable meant. So the Lord gives them this detailed explanation of these words, and he says, now the parable is this.

The seed is the word of God. Those beside the road are those who have heard. That's people sitting next to you and I in church.

They've heard. Then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart so that they do not believe and be saved. We're talking about unsaved people.

Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy, but they have no firm root. They believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.

The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard and they go on their way. They are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of life and bring no fruit to maturity.

[15:55] Those are unsaved folks. Those are unsaved people. Then the Lord says, but the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart and hold it fast and bear fruit with perseverance.

That's believers. They bear fruit with perseverance. We continue to the end. We see in this parable three different cases where people hear the word of God and at some point they turn away from it. Now that's classic apostasy. Exposed to the truth. Hear the word, consider it perhaps, and then turn away. Basic definition of apostasy.

It is hearing the truth, understanding the truth in some basic sense and then turning away from that truth. That is the message of Jude.

There is no doubt in my mind that the greatest danger to the church in our day is the infiltration of apostates within the church.

[17:11] And we can call them false teachers, false preachers, put a lot of tags on them. the parable then speaks of the good soil.

There exists within the church the good soil of true believers. They are rooted in Christ Jesus and they produce legitimate fruit for the kingdom of God.

The apostates do not produce true abiding fruit. Why? They are not connected to the vine. Now that's John 15. They are not connected to the vine.

Fellows, where does fruit come from? You know, branches don't produce fruit. It comes from the vine. And the abiding fruit, these guys have no abiding fruit.

In other words, they have no root system. There is no root system. Great example of an apostate was Simon the magician. Remember that guy in the book of Acts? He claimed that he believed. [18:15] He followed through with New Testament baptism. I got immersed. We know now he just got wet. But he followed after the apostles.

He watched them closely. When he saw the Holy Spirit manifested in them, he asked that he too receive the Spirit of God.

But behind his desire to receive the Spirit of God was to market his magic tricks and make more money. That was his goal.

He reasoned that with the Holy Spirit in him, and he could show off speaking in tongues and raising the dead or healing somebody, he would have tremendous power to put on a display to a wide audience, which would generate a cash flow.

It would be the cash cow. Pray you never live in a time when that happens, right? Like on television. It sounds like modern day televangelists. It really does.

[19:25] Simon was found out. He was rejected by the apostles and declared to be an apostate within the church. And they rightly gave him the right Buddha fellowship.

Kenneth Hagin, senior, he was Southern Baptist. And he talked about when he started speaking in tongues, they gave me the right Buddha fellowship.

I heard Kenneth Hagin say it himself. And I was looking at radio stations. I wouldn't listen to Brother Hagin. Apostasy has always been around the true church.

Roman Catholicism as practiced today is a form of apostasy. I can promise you. So is liberalism. So is neo-orthodox theology.

The new orthodoxy. All of the cults practice forms of apostasy. And in my opinion, so does the extreme fringe of the charismatic movement.

[20:30] These are the guys trying to make trees walk and trains fly. Like one said not too long ago, how come you people don't have Rolls Royces? I got four of them. Well of course he does.

He's at the top of the Ponzi scheme. And I'm not calling a name, but why wouldn't Creflo dollar have four Rolls Royces? So Jude tells us that apostasy existed 1900 years ago and that it will exist in our day.

And then he tells us what to do about it. And that's the beauty really of this brief message. I looked at my time. I'm going to have to let you guys go early.

Maybe we can have singing, Mike. He tells us, he gives us the answer for this. It's pretty simple really. Straightforward. And we can all go out of here armed.

I'm armed now, but we can go out armed because here's, he says, this is what we need to do. he says, you've got to contend.

[21:36] You must contend. Contend for the faith that has been delivered once to the saints.

Now, let me say this, and this I'm adding, you can't even begin to contend unless you understand the fundamentals of the faith. Because that's what you're going to contend for.

Meaning, we've got to get into the word, and we've got to get immersed in sound teaching and solid theology. We are to contend earnestly for the church.

And that word contend is very interesting. It translates from a Greek word where we get the word agonize. That's the English version. We agonize over the truth.

We agonize over the truth war. We're in agony when we see Christ being demeaned and lied about.

[22:42] Lied about. I've been praying for the last several months, Lord, come back and vindicate yourself. Come vindicate yourself. And He's going to do that in His timing, not mine.

God. It means we are to fight strenuously for and defend vigorously. This is combat, guys.

This is combat. If a guy breaks into your house tonight to harm your spouse, your children, you're not going to sit in your easy chair and say, well, you know, be careful and don't trip over there because I've got some magazines on the floor.

we're going to get vigorous. We're going to get vigorous. This type of defending the faith could bring about agony as we agonize over who we're having to deal with.

By the way, in the Greek language, it is a continuous command. We are to contend continually because apostasy is always going to be with us in this lifetime.

[23:48] It's not going away until Jesus comes back. So it's in a continuous tense that we keep on contending. Now, what do we contend for?

We contend for the faith. So important. Be contenders for the faith. This is not some unknowable.

It is not a mystical thing here we're talking about. It is the faith that God Himself has given to everyone who believes.

Ephesians 2.8 For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God. And I have people argue with me over that.

They say, well, what He means there is, for by grace you have been saved and not of yourselves. I mean, it's not your grace, it's His. And others say, no, no, you've been saved through faith.

[24 : 45] It's not your faith, it's His. They both come from God. They both come from God. Our faith comes from God. His grace comes to us. It's from God.

The faith is what the Lord has entrusted to us. It is worth more than all the gold and precious stones in the universe.

It is the treasure from heaven. It is the pearl of great price. We are to guard the faith vigorously and share liberally and accurately with others.

And I'll tell you, there's stories out there of men and women that have defended the faith and been killed for it. Been killed for it.

You know Martin Luther stood before the Roman Catholic Church. And they had all his writings laid down. They said, will you withdraw these?

[25 : 48] Will you condemn your writings and recant? Now, he gave a very eloquent response. He said, unless I'm convinced by reason and conscience and I can't go against reason and the Word of God and I can't go against conscience as bad.

But actually what happened when they confronted him, he said, can I have 24 hours to think about this? That's historical. And they said, yeah.

So he came back in 24 hours and that's when he did his great quote of contending for the faith. The faith that we have been entrusted with in our generation.

And none of us know when Jesus is coming back. So we got to pass this on. It's going to have to be passed on to our young guys. We got to pass it on.

Now, who are the guardians of the faith that has been once delivered to the saints? And it's easy to point out the pastor.

[26 : 54] He's a guardian of the faith. Teachers should be guardians of the faith. But in truth, every believer is a guardian of the faith.

Every believer. And if you're a believer, you're a guardian. And if you're not a believer, how can you put up with me all these years? Surely you all are, but we're to contend for the faith.

It is true that we are to proclaim the truth. We're to be in the business of proclaiming the truth but let me add another word. We're also to protect the truth.

Protect it. If we do not protect the truth, which is the accuracy of the Word of God, there's not going to be any truth to proclaim.

And what you'll see is what we are seeing in a lot of churches so-called of truth is measured by all kinds of different standards.

[28 : 00] I mean, if we brought Joel Osteen in here, first of all, we'd probably all leave, but ask him, what is truth? What is truth? Pontius Pilate asked the question of the universe.

What is truth? And I so wish Jesus had said, I'm truth. He's truth. He's a wave of truth and the life. truth.

And we've seen entire denominations depart from the truth. The truth we protect is fragile and the enemy wants us off by degrees, inches.

I use the analogy I think last time of you send a rocket to Mars and when it lifts off it's just one inch off course. When it gets to Mars, Mars isn't there. Because that one inch grows.

The enemy wants us off by a little bit. When I was a new believer, I'd drive down the highway and I'd see a bar and I'd go like this because I was afraid Satan would come walking out.

[29 : 09] Found out later, Satan's not in bars, he's got them where he wants them. He's camping out in churches. He's camping out in churches and homes. So just how serious is God about the preservation of his truth.

Boy, it's serious. God is very serious about protecting the truth. Listen to what the Holy Spirit said through the Apostle Paul. Galatians chapter 1.

I am amazed, and I'm told that's a very strong word in Greek language. I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting him who called you by the grace of Christ for a different gospel.

Which is really not another, only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed.

[30 : 24] As we've said before, so I say now again, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed.

It's so serious, the Holy Spirit has Paul repeat it twice in the same paragraph. He unloads. and twice he says, those people if they're preaching another gospel, any other gospel than what we've preached, they're to be a cursed anathema of God.

Anyone who preaches a watered down version, an inaccurate version, who would pervert the grace of God that was delivered to us by Christ and the apostles, is to be accursed.

the American Standard Version, the old one, used the word anathema. And if you look that up, it means the eternally damned!

damned of God. Well, that is strong. That's strong language. Coming from the Spirit of God. It doesn't get any more serious than that. Remember, there is a war on.

[31 : 42] Many have fallen on the battlefield. we must contend until the Lord takes us home to be with Him. We are to fight for the truth as He Himself is the truth.

That's what we're to do. Thank you.