

Contend

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Preacher: Tom Holland

[0:00] We've been warned by the Spirit of God through the pen of Jude of the grave danger the church is facing!

He brought the church to the grave and the church to the grave. In addition to the warning that Jude gave, he also issued a command, which we're quite familiar with by now.

This command came, of course, through the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit that the church through the centuries was to obey.

And because of the epidemic mentioned above, it is vitally important that the church in our day obey this command. I cannot understate that.

Not only have churches been swept away by the epidemic of apostasy, entire denominations have disappeared into the labyrinth of unbelief and rejection of the true gospel.

[1:31] In fact, our own denomination, as you know, at one time came dangerously close to being swallowed up by this great apostasy.

So what is the command and how do we fulfill it? Well, of course, the command is contend earnestly for the faith. The Greek word there to contend, and you can read it for yourself, but it's very instructive because we derive the English word of agony or to agonize.

And this is the effort that we are to expend as we undertake to defend the gospel and protect the church from apostate charlatans.

The Greek term is associated with strife and vigorous combat. It was used also as a description of the struggle between wrestlers.

We are here commanded to contend or agonize for the faith that has been once delivered to us. And the church was issued this command nearly 2,000 years ago, and we are to contend until Jesus returns for us.

[2:57] There is not one iota of inspired scripture that tells us to stop contending. We are to contend until we are with the Lord.

So contend is the command. The question is, how do we fulfill it? And Jude is going to reveal that to us this evening. And first, we are called upon to remember.

Jude 17, verses 17 to 19. But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they were saying to you, in the last time there will be mockers following after their own ungodly lusts.

These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly minded, devoid of the Spirit. And I think we all understand the concept of devoid of the Spirit.

If you don't have the Spirit, you don't have Christ. If you don't have Christ, you don't have the Father. If you don't have all three of them, you're not saved. So the first step to contending is for the church to remember, to go back to the writings of the apostles.

[4:21] And we must remember that false teachers pose a constant threat to the church as a whole and to individual members.

The threat was present in the Old Testament all the way back to the beginning of Adam's family.

The threat affected the early church and the threat is active today.

It will remain active until Jesus returns for His bride. Apostates have always plagued God's people and we should never be off guard when they appear in our fellowship.

And when the Holy Spirit commands us to remember, He's referring back to the words of Christ, back to the words of the apostles.

It was Christ Jesus during His earthly sojourn who first warned New Testament believers of the dangers posed by the apostates in Matthew 7.15.

[5:26] And of course, you'll recall that's part of the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 7.15, beware of the false prophets. Well, they had them all the way back then.

Beware of the false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. Note the danger of these apostate false prophets.

They appear to the church as gentle sheep. No one ever has to fear a sheep. They are one of the gentlest of animals in the animal kingdom.

But the Lord of the universe offers a very stern warning. Those who appear as sheep are in reality ravenous wolves.

They are wolves that are starving and want to devour anything they can. And since wolves of apostasy cannot hurt the shepherd, they turn their attention to devouring the sheep of the flock.

[6:35] Can't get to Jesus, get to the people of the Lord. The Apostle Paul's message was no different in 2 Corinthians chapter 11. But what I am doing I will continue to do so that I may cut off opportunity for those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting.

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness whose end will be according to their deeds. I didn't put this in the lesson there, but I was always kind of marveled at the fact in the writings of Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, he said that he went out in the woods one day because he was wanting to pray and he was trying to figure out what's the true religion on earth.

And he said, as I was praying and asking God, reveal to me the true religion, I was suddenly enveloped in utter darkness.

Well, who does that sound like? And he said, then in the midst of this blackness, there appeared to me an angel of light. That was Joseph Smith's exact words.

[8:15] Well, who is that? Paul, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, tells us. The other apostles were just as strong in their warnings concerning false teachers and apostates.

The message repeated by Christ and the apostles was that false teachers would infiltrate the church and oppose the truth as revealed in Scripture.

They are described as mockers who follow after their own godly lusts. They set out by design to cause division within the church.

And add to this the fact they're worldly minded and devoid of the Holy Spirit. And we can see why we are commanded to be on guard against such individuals. So we are to remember.

Harken back. We are also to remain. Jude 20 and 21. But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.

[9:36] You could say keep yourselves or remain in the love of God. As believers, we must exercise discernment to protect ourselves, to protect our families, and to protect our church from apostates.

We exercise discernment by remaining on the path of sanctification. Remaining in sanctification means that we are to build ourselves up in the faith.

We do that through spiritual growth, by building a firm foundation of doctrine, to guard and guide our lives through the consistent intake of God's holy word.

And let me say, and I've said it before, that takes more than two hours on Sunday and 30 minutes on Wednesday, the intake of His word. So the first element in remaining in sanctification is through the study of God's word and then applying what we learn in daily living.

We live it out. The second element of remaining in sanctification involves praying in the Holy Spirit. We are to pray the will of God for our lives.

[10:57] Now this point is vitally important. All of it is, but we are to know what the word of God teaches through the consistent study of the Bible.

We are then to pray for those things that we know are consistent with the will of God because they are revealed in the pages of His book. Dr. McBride just said, pray the scriptures.

Pray the scriptures. Prayer is a form of submissiveness to God. It involves the entire Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are also to keep ourselves in the love of God.

That is a way of saying we are to remain within the sphere of God's blessings found in the Bible. And it is through obedience that we are received back from God. We are also to wait anxiously for the mercy of Christ that will be revealed at His second coming. We are to greatly anticipate the return of Christ.

[12:03] That's our great hope. That's our great hope. And we are to anticipate it, first for His church, then for His earthly return to establish His kingdom on earth.

You know, I've never doubted that Jesus would not return in my lifetime. Now what happens if He don't? I go to Him. I get a one-man rapture and you guys have to stick around.

But I just, I believe that. I believe it. So we are to remember and remain. And then we're also to reach out and have mercy on some who are doubting, save others snatching them out of the fire, and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh.

Unbelievers in the church are exposed to a great threat when they come under the teaching of a false shepherd. And let me tell you one of the problems.

This is in your notes, but when a false shepherd comes to us, he doesn't have a sign on, does he? Doesn't say, false shepherd, beware. Far from it.

[13:17] He wants to appear like a real shepherd. Now the great oxymoron is that these same unbelievers who also represent a great mission field for the spread of the gospel.

It was Dr. Billy Graham who said the most fertile evangelistic opportunities are found on the church rolls. You know, we got people in our rolls, and I dare say very few in this room would know who they are.

You know, if they come every three or four years maybe. Jude identifies in these two verses the three categories of unbelievers in the church who are both a menace and a mission field.

And the first category is you have really the confused. And have mercy on some who are doubting. Apostates live to confuse people.

That's their mantra. Sow seeds of confusion and dissension. This was the plague of the Corinthian church. I'm always amazed that an entire wing of the church with, by the way, hundreds of millions of adherents to it built their doctrine on the Corinthian experience.

[14:30] That's the last church I want to build doctrine on. I mean, I just don't know. They were believers. Most of them. The Lord says so. But their doctrine was messed up.

False teachers confused them. This confusion led to doubts about what exactly to believe concerning the Bible. These are the very people we are to have mercy on.

Those who are strong must guard the weak from the ravenous wolves. I remember getting invited by a family here years ago to come over on a Saturday morning because a Mormon elder and his followers are going to show up at their house.

And I went over there, Jim Byers and I, we had a lively time. Went for about four hours. And I finally asked him, I said, look, we're not getting anywhere here. If you died and you stood before Jesus Christ on a throne and he looked at you and he said, Joseph Smith was wrong, what would you say?

He said, I'd look at Jesus. I'd say, you're wrong. And I said to the host and his wife, I think we ought to just end this. I don't think we need to continue after that.

[15:50] And he said, I agree, you guys can leave my house. And we got rid of them. And I probably went about three hours and 59 minutes too long anyway. I don't know where I'm at now.

Now, showing mercy does not mean being tolerant, being toleration is not good English. Being tolerant of their false beliefs.

Yeah, I need a different secretary. It means leading them into truth.

We don't tolerate their error. We tell them what the truth is. Don't worry, they're going to leave when they hear the truth. We are to be meek and patient with them as we lead them from darkness to light.

And then Jude talks about the convinced. Save others, snatching them out of the fire. The idea here is one of rescue. Christians are to be in the business of rescuing unbelievers.

[16:58] We can even rescue believers that have just gone so far afield. But the task mentioned here is especially difficult because we are to rescue those who have become convinced of the message of false teachers.

You know, in the Southern Baptist Convention a few years ago, I haven't seen any stats lately, but something like 265 people a day left the convention for a cult.

A known cult. People leave for different reasons. I know there was a lady at Barfield Southern that left because she got into line dancing. She joined a club of line dancers that met on Sunday morning.

So she quit. I don't think that's a good excuse to the Lord. God, of course, is the one who saves. But He does so by using people as the resource of providing truth to those who need it.

And by the way, that is everyone. James understood this. James chapter 5. My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

[18:22] Now, earlier I said snatched him out of the fire. That word snatching is very strong in the Greek language as you can imagine. It means to seize someone by force if necessary.

We rescue people from apostates by showing them how false and eternally damning their message really is. And next, we see the command in a church or even a false church concerning the committed.

And on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh. This is an example of those who have become committed to the teachings of the apostates.

Members of cults would be a good example. They are deceived people, deeply committed to their deception. We're to show them mercy but build up some fear in them.

There is always a danger for us too. We need to be afraid. We could become polluted with their false beliefs. We too could become polluted.

[19:32] Now, we do not want to be polluted with their garment of flesh. And since I'm just the messenger here, let me tell you what that passage says in the original language according to one Greek scholar I read.

Be careful when you handle their dirty underwear. Be careful when you handle their dirty underwear. We should avoid spiritual defilement with the same zeal.

As the church, we must deal wisely. We must deal wisely with spiritual contamination. If we don't, it could spread throughout the church. You know, churches hang by very thin threads and it can be snapped.

So we handle those polluted by false teachers in such a manner that it can result in their salvation. And we ourselves must stay focused on our own personal Bible study, prayer, obedience, as we anticipate the return of Christ.

Lastly, and perhaps the most difficult, we must reach out to apostates and try to pull them out of the judgment fires of God. So we're to witness to both apostates and their victims.

[20:50] The Christian life is a pilgrimage and it is filled with spiritual battles. But at the end, there is triumph. The writer of the great hymn, I should say writers, I guess, Onward Christian Soldiers understood this.

By the way, those words were written by, you probably knew this, Dan, Sabine Baring Gould in 1865 and the music was composed by Arthur Sullivan in 1871.

And you all know this and I'm not going to sing it. Think of contending for the faith when you, not hear these words, but when you hear these words. Onward Christian Soldiers marching as to war with the cross of Jesus going on before.

Christ the Royal Master leads against the foe. Forward into battle, see his banner go. Onward Christian Soldiers marching as to war with the cross of Jesus going on before.

At the sign of triumph, Satan's oath doth flee. On then Christian Soldiers, on to victory. Hell's foundations quiver at the shout of praise.

[22:03] Brothers, lift your voices. Loud your anthems raise. And the refrain again, like a mighty army moves the church of God. Brothers, we are treading where the saints have trod.

We are not divided, all one body we, one in hope and doctrine, one in charity. Onward then ye people, join our happy throng. Blend with ours your voices in the triumph song.

Glory, laud, and honor unto Christ the King. This through countless ages men and angels sing. Onward Christian Soldiers marching as to war with the cross of Jesus going on before.

Thank you.