

## JUDE 1:2-4 - CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH

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### I. Introduction

### II. Jude 1:1-4<sup>1</sup>

A. **Jude 1:1-4** Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ: mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

#### B. Illustration

1. “[Joan Waste, a] poor, honest [English] woman, blind from her birth, and unmarried, aged twenty-two, was of the parish of Allhallows, Derby. Her father was a barber, and also made ropes for a living: in which she assisted him, and also learned to knit several articles of apparel.

Refusing to communicate with those who maintained doctrines contrary to those she had learned in the days of the pious [King] Edward, she was called before Dr. Draicot, the chancellor of Bishop Blaine, and Peter Finch, official of Derby.

With sophistical arguments and threats they endeavored to confound the poor girl; but she proffered to yield to the bishop's doctrine, if he would answer for her at the Day of Judgment . . . that his belief of the real presence of the Sacrament was true. The bishop at first answered that he would; but Dr. Draicot reminding him that he might not in any way answer for a heretic, he withdrew his confirmation of his own tenets; and she replied that if their consciences would not permit them to answer at God's bar for that truth they wished her to subscribe to, she would answer no more questions. Sentence was then adjudged, and Dr. Draicot appointed to preach her condemned sermon, which took place August 1, 1556, the day of her martyrdom. His fulminating discourse being finished, the poor, sightless object was taken to a place called Windmill Pit, near the town, where she for a time held her brother by the hand, and then prepared herself for the fire, calling upon the pitying multitude to pray with her, and upon Christ to have mercy upon her, until the glorious light of the everlasting Sun of righteousness beamed upon her departed spirit.” [[Foxye](#) Ch.XVI]

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2. The young lady in this account from *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* went to the stake over matters which many today would consider theological distractions. Her life was cut off in its prime on account of her theological convictions and her unwillingness to compromise from the truths which she knew from Scripture.
3. This is but one of innumerable events down through church history where individuals have had to put their life on the line based on their understanding of the teachings of Scripture. Most of these situations are lost to the mists of history—were never recorded or involved people history no longer remembers.
4. The historic emphasis on knowing what we believe.
  - a) As one historian of Church history has expressed, "Because [early Christians] were prepared to die for their beliefs, and expected to rise again in Christ and reign with him in glory, and because they often had to die, it was very important for them to know precisely in whom they were believing (2Tim. 1:12), who he was and is what he can and will do. It was the constant threat and frequent reality of dying for the faith that made doctrine so important to the early church and caused heresy—false doctrine, which cost one's salvation—to appear so dreadful. . . . Of course no martyr of the early church thought that he would be saved and attain eternal life because he held a certain set of propositions to be true. He believed that he would obtain eternal life because he trusted in Christ, not because he believed specific doctrines. But he did not make a dichotomy between faith as doctrine and faith as trust; part of trusting in Jesus Christ and his ability to 'save to the uttermost' was the acceptance of certain propositions about the person and work of Christ." [Brown 19,20-21]
  - b) Thus, when the propositional truths taught by Scripture are distorted or perverted, it has historically been recognized as a critical threat to the preservation of the Christian religion itself—the faith "once for all" handed down to the saints.

### III. The Unpleasant Necessity of Contending

#### A. Preference vs. Necessity

1. **Jude 1:3** Beloved, while I was *very diligent* to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.
2. A reluctant necessity - unpopular in our day where "doctrine" (that is, *teaching*) is considered to be a "dirty word."

#### B. The Mandate to Preserve the Faith

1. **Jude 1:3** Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.
  - a) "delivered" is *paradidomi* – to hand over to another, to entrust

b) The faith was “handed off” to the church at large (“the saints”) which is responsible for safeguarding it down through the ages—much like runners in a relay race hand a baton from one to the other.

(1) In this case, each Christian generation is to preserve and pass on the right interpretation of the Scriptures to the next generation.

2. “content earnestly” is *epagonizomai*

a) To make a strenuous effort on behalf of, to struggle for.

b) It will require diligence and effort to guard and preserve “the faith” in the face of human and demonic attempts to pervert and overthrow it (1Ti. 4:1).

c) The Greek term is a compound made up of *epi* (upon, or intensifying) and *agon* (a struggle).

(1) And “intense or earnest struggle.”

(2) From which we derive the word “agonize.”

(3) It includes the ideas of suffering, enduring, even fighting as a combatant.

d) It will not be a picnic!

3. Kenneth Wuest translates this passage as: “contend with intensity and determination for the Faith once for all entrusted into the safe-keeping of the saints.” [[Wuest](#)]

4. History Shows that Jude’s concern was well-founded.

a) The church, down through history, has had to respond to a pervasive and continuous tendency to divert the faith through the introduction of erroneous teachings.

b) The “silver lining” in this cloud of distortion has been the clarification of orthodoxy.

c) ‘It’s been said, “God writes straight with crooked lines,” meaning God has allowed heresy to arise to help Christians clarify what they believe.’ [[CH](#)]

### C. A Brief Survey of Doctrinal Errors

1. Motivation

a) Recognize how similar errors, sometimes with a slightly different twist, resurface again and again.

b) Appreciation for how errors of the past underwrite the latest “wind of doctrine” attempting to move believers away from sound doctrine (Eph. 4:14).

c) The necessity of the Church to guard orthodoxy *continually*.

2. Nature of the Godhead (2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries)

a) **Docetists (Gnostics)** – Jesus only seemed (gr. *Dokeo*) human and only appeared to die. God would never stoop so low as to touch flesh. God cannot die. In some versions, the divine “Christ” left “Jesus” before the crucifixion.

- b) **Apollinarians** – Jesus not equally human and divine. In Jesus’ human flesh resided a divine mind and will, but he did not have a human mind or spirit.
  - c) **Modalists (Sabellians)** – God’s names (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) change with his roles or “modes” of being. When God is Son, he is not the Father—they are mutually exclusive roles.
  - d) **Ebionites** – Jesus is a human being—a special prophet—but not divine.
  - e) **Adoptionists (Monarchianism)** – Jesus was not divine as conceived, but at birth or baptism he was “adopted” by God and given an extra measure of divine power.
  - f) **Arians** – Jesus, as the Word, was created by God before time, but is not eternal or perfect like God—although he was God’s agent in creating everything else. (This view is similar to that of Mormonism and the Jehovah’s Witnesses.)
  - g) **Monophysites** – Jesus could not have two natures. His divinity swallowed up his humanity “like a drop of wine in the sea.”
  - h) **Nestorians** – Jesus has two natures and also two persons: the divine Christ and the human Christ lived together in Jesus.
  - i) Orthodoxy eventually established by Church Councils
    - (1) Council of Nicea (325 A.D.)
    - (2) Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.)
    - (3) **Orthodoxy** – Jesus is fully human and fully divine, having two natures in one person—without division or separation. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit coexist as three persons within the Godhead (the Trinity).
3. The Nature of Man (5<sup>th</sup> century)
- a) The doctrine of Original Sin
    - (1) How serious and far-reaching were the effects of the Fall upon man’s nature?
    - (2) "Pelagius, a British monk, came from Rome (c. 400) and advocated his theory which denied original sin, asserted man is able to do good apart from divine grace, and affirmed that Adam's sin concerned only himself." [[Walvoord](#) 244] "Hence, according to Pelagius, human infants are not born with a predisposition to sin; they are born innocent, without sin. This means that humans have the ability to live lives that will please God." [[Woodbridge](#) 90]
    - (3) Result: humans are not in critical need of redemption.
4. The Lord’s Supper – the Eucharistic Controversy (9<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>2</sup>

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“The [Eucharistic] controversy was sparked by a Frankish monk, Paschasius Radbertus (d. ca. 860), strongly influenced by Augustine.” [[Brown](#) 229].

- a) In the Lord's Supper, is the bodily (corporeal) presence of Christ in the wafer or is the wafer only a symbolic representation of Christ's body?
  - b) Corporeal presence implies each celebration of the Lord's Supper is a *new sacrifice* rather than a mere commemoration.
  - c) The Sacrifice of the Mass
    - (1) Christ now offered up again-and-again on the Roman Catholic altar as a "meritorious sacrifice."
    - (2) Undermines the completed work of Christ on the cross. Something more—ongoing—must be added to it.
    - (3) Undermines the certainty of salvation. If the work of Christ was not complete on the cross but ongoing, then how can there be assurance of salvation? How many more meritorious sacraments are necessary for the participant to attain eternal life?
    - (4) Establishes control of an official priesthood over the "laity."
      - (a) Only a designated priest could transform the wafer and wine into the actual body and blood of Jesus—the miracle of transubstantiation (formalized in 1215).
      - (b) No longer could the common believer administer the Lord's Supper—further undermining the New Testament truth of the priesthood of all believers.
  - d) Seemingly subtle errors in the interpretation and application of theology almost always lead to serious social consequences.
  - e) This error—along with other abuses of the Roman Catholic Church—eventually sparked the Protestant Reformation which flowered in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.
5. Unitarianism (early forms in the 16<sup>th</sup> century)
- a) Rejected the doctrine of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus.<sup>3</sup>
6. Pietism (17<sup>th</sup> century).
- a) Emphasize the *individual* believer rather than the *community of believers*.
  - b) Embraced mysticism which eventually elevated *personal experience* over Scriptural truth.<sup>4</sup>
  - c) Downplayed the importance of doctrine.

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<sup>3</sup>Unitarianism is the term usually applied, since the eighteenth century and in some instances at an even earlier date, to the radical form of Christian belief which rejects the doctrine of the Trinity and the unique divinity of Jesus Christ and affirms uncompromisingly the unity of God – [[Hart](#) 557]

<sup>4</sup>"By [Count von] Zinzendorf's time, sentimentality seems to become more important than objective truth on which it was originally based." [[Brown](#) 390].

- d) "Pietism itself was not heretical, but by stressing personal experience and religious sentiment [emotion], it removed many of the obstacles to heresy." [Brown 391]
  - e) Seeking a subjective assurance of salvation by way of spiritual exercises—often degenerating into legalism and the pursuit of perfectionism—the unbiblical doctrine that the true believer can and indeed must avoid all sin in the present life.
  - f) Not all within the Pietistic movement was error, but the errors of Pietism continue to influence believers even in our own times:  
 "[Pietism's] emphasis on deeds rather than creeds [works at the expense of doctrine] has permitted modern Protestantism to degenerate into a kind of spiritually illiterate moralism. . . . In a theological climate in which no doctrine can be labeled heresy, no teacher a heretic, the proclamation and defense of biblical and theological truth has become a curiosity. Without Pietism, Protestantism might never have survived the eighteenth century, but with Pietism, it may ultimately cease to be Protestantism." [Brown 393]
7. Christian Liberalism (late 19<sup>th</sup>, early 20<sup>th</sup> century – before WWI)
- a) Motivation: sought to save Christianity from the assault of contemporary intellectual developments by accommodating the traditional faith to modern culture. [Reid]
    - (1) Darwinism, Freudian psychology, relativistic view of truth.
  - b) "The freedom and ability of mankind were emphasized; humans were the fundamentally good, infinitely valuable children of God. Sin was not a radical disjunction between God and humanity but merely a matter of ignorance or bestial remains that could be corrected by Christian education." [Reid]
  - c) Reduced Christianity to a set of moral principles (ethics replaced doctrine as the theological centerpiece).
  - d) Emphasized social work and self-betterment of man.
  - e) Rejected the miraculous.
  - f) View of mankind as fundamentally good was shattered by WWI.
8. Christian Existentialism (after WW1)
- a) Stressed the role of human experience in discovering truth.
  - b) Shifted the locus of authority from the author to the reader: "what it means to me" in my *spiritual encounter* with the text.
  - c) A revolt against external authority, ready-made world views authoritarian and conventional moral values and codes of conduct.
  - d) A belief that the NT message was shackled by the mythological worldview of the first century—it was not to be found in a simple reading of the gospels. [Elwell 612]
9. Neoorthodoxy
- a) Restored some aspects of Reformed theology.

- b) Attacked the concept of objective, revealed truth.
  - c) Abandoned a high view of scripture and its reliability.
    - (1) Introduced the need for “demythologizing” the scripture – not to be taken at face value, unreliable.
    - (2) ‘Applied to the NT, this “demythologizing” was essentially a surgical, rather than a hermeneutical, procedure: everything unacceptable to rational, Enlightenment man was cut away in hopes of salvaging a residue of religious or ethical principles. It was understood that the gospel itself, based as it was on such fantastic notions as incarnation, atonement, and resurrection, could not be salvaged.’ [Elwell 613]
  - d) Focused on a personal “encounter” with God – the Bible “becomes the Word of God to us” in our encounter—not in what it objectively says: the meaning intended by of the author.
10. Postmodernism – Emergent Church (the present)
- a) Postmodernism – the idea the propositional truth, based on facts and universal principles of truth and error—is an outmoded view of reality.
    - (1) *Post* modern because it follows after *modernism* which embraced the idea that all truth can be determined by observation followed by rational, logical deduction.
    - (2) Holds that language, meaning, and interpretation or so *subjective* that we can’t say for sure that we know anything for sure.
    - (3) Younger believers are questioning whether the Word of God is clear enough to justify certainty or dogmatism on points of doctrine.
    - (4) According to Christian postmodernism, Joan Waste, the blind woman I mentioned earlier who was martyred in 1556 over questions pertaining to the symbolism of the Lord’s Supper, died needlessly because she and her protagonists were in opposition about something which can’t really be known due to the uncertainty surrounding the interpretation of Scripture.
    - (5) (If some of you younger listeners find yourselves in partial agreement with this sentiment, take it as a sign and a warning that you have already becoming tainted by postmodernism!)
  - b) Truth is secondary to interaction.
    - (1) Postmodern Christians are not interested in propositional truth. Instead, they are more interested in “dialogue” and “conversation.”
    - (2) Sermons (like this) are outmoded because they assume that one person has “the truth” which they are attempting to communicate to others who have not considered or studied the subject in the same way.

- (3) Postmodern Christianity's problem with the sermon is that there is a locus of authority—the *teacher* who is *preaching* to listeners.
  - (4) Instead, postmodern Christianity would prefer to have a dialogue where all participants have an equal say in "what they think" truth is "to me".
  - (5) Most often, this becomes nothing more than a therapeutic session of "shared ignorance."
- c) Low view of authority.
- (1) This relativistic view of truth ("your truth" is not necessarily "my truth") is characteristic of a low view of authority. There ought not to be an external, objective standard which determines THE truth.
  - (2) Thus, postmodern Christianity attacks the clarity and know-ability (or perspicuity) of God's Word, despite the fact that Scripture itself claims to be sufficient and complete and the conduit through which God, "has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness through the true knowledge of Him" (2 Pet 1:3).
  - (3) For example, one of the movements leaders has this to say concerning homosexuality:
    - (a) 'Frankly, many of us don't know what we should think about homosexuality. We've heard all sides but no position has yet won our confidence so that we can say "it seems good to the Holy Spirit and us." If we think that there may actually be a legitimate context for some homosexual relationships, we know that the biblical arguments are nuanced and multilayered, and the pastoral ramifications are staggeringly complex. We aren't sure if or where lines are to be drawn, nor do we know how to enforce with fairness whatever lines are drawn.' [[MacArthur](#) 246].
    - (b) Is it any wonder the result is the very licentious behavior that Jude mentions in the passage before us? These men have "turned the grace of our God into lewdness" (Jude 1:4).
- d) Unwillingness or inability to deal with details and subtleties.
- (1) A serious attack upon the very nature of truth and objectivity.
  - (2) Coupled with cultural developments in media, we have an explosive mix.
    - (a) A media-induced lack of attention span is undermining the ability or interest of our youth to meditate, to think deeply, systematically and analytically.
    - (b) A refusal to take in information unless it is presented in the form of entertainment.

- i) But entertainment can never communicate important subtleties.
  - ii) Almost all attacks upon the faith originating from within begin as subtle departures from the teaching of Scripture.
- e) "Emergent" in its desire to "emerge" or move away from traditional, Biblical expressions of the Church.
- (1) Church must follow, or chase after, the culture
    - 'At the heart of the "movement"—or as some of its leaders prefer to call it, the "conversation"—lies the conviction that changes in the culture signal that a new church is "emerging." Christian leaders must therefore adapt to this emerging church. Those who fail to do so are blind to the cultural accretions that hide the gospel behind forms of thought and modes of expression that no longer communicate with the new generation, the emerging generation.' [[MacArthur 142](#)].
  - (2) Doing everything possible to 'remake' church into something that might not be recognizable as such. Much of this transformation involves substitution of new terminology purposefully intended to distance the movement from the historic church.
    - (a) "The service" is now a "gathering."
    - (b) A "sermon" has been replaced by a "conversation."
    - (c) There is no "teacher," only a "facilitator."
    - (d) Nobody ever arrives at knowable "truth." Instead, we are all on a perpetual "journey."
- f) Jesus vs. His Church
- (1) One of the most disturbing trends of this movement is an attempt to distance Jesus from Biblical, historical expressions of the Church.
    - (a) You can "love Jesus" while hating the Church.
    - (b) The emphasis is on the individual, "me and Jesus" and the institution of the Church—even in its valid Biblical expressions—is unimportant.
    - (c) The notion that the Holy Spirit has failed to convey the truths of how the Church should conduct itself and express itself within the world for the past 2,000 years is extremely arrogant.
    - (d) The idea that modern Christianity has grossly misrepresented Jesus and failed to understand the gospel message and mandate is a common theme among the writings of the Emergent Church with titles such as:

- i) "The Secret Message of Jesus"
- ii) "Finding our way Again – The Return of Ancient Practices"
- iii) "Re-imagining Church"
- (e) The assumption is that the culture isn't offended by *Jesus*, but by the Church which is a misrepresentation of what He taught.
  - i) In its desire to be embraced by the culture, the Emergent Church is ready to malign the Bride of Christ in order to win favor with those who have rejected orthodox Biblical Christianity.
- g) Emerging from Orthodox Christianity
  - (1) While some of the motivations behind the Emergent Church are sincere and even could be said to be good, the result is a new movement which is emerging from orthodoxy to heterodoxy—outside the confines of the established historical teachings of the true Church.

#### IV. The Causes of Departure

- A. The causes of departure from "the faith" as it was "once delivered to the saints" are varied. Yet some common elements can be identified in all the historic aberrations we've surveyed.
- B. Innovation
  - 1. Refusal to accept Scriptural teaching – especially where Scriptural revelation supersedes man's limited intellect.
    - a) Many a heresy has been spawned from the insistence that teachings that exist in tension within the Scriptures be reduced to a level of "logical consistency" from a human point of view.<sup>5</sup>
  - 2. Desire to gain a following.
    - a) **Acts 20:29-30** "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves."
  - 3. Egotistical belief that others before us couldn't see what we see.
    - a) **Jude 1:3** Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.
      - (1) "We are waiters, not chefs. We don't cook the meal. We get it to the table without messing it up." – John MacArthur.

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<sup>5</sup>  
"In a sense, the first heretics were the more sophisticated and intellectual Christians." [Brown 27].

C. Gifting without character.

1. It is not enough for a pastor or teacher to have the gift of teaching. He must also be found to be *faithful*.
  - a) **2 Timothy 2:2** And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.
  - b) There are many who have the gift of teaching. But gifting *with character* is what we are to be endorsing.
2. Able to save self and others
  - a) **1 Timothy 4:13** Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to *doctrine*.
  - b) **1 Timothy 4:16** Take heed to yourself and to the *doctrine*. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.
  - c) **Titus 1:7-9** [For an overseer must . . . hold] fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

D. Seeds of error are often planted from within.

1. **Jude 1:4** For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.
2. Those who once appeared to be zealous believers often lay the foundation for subsequent departure from orthodoxy.
3. Sincere believers can inadvertently lay the groundwork for subsequent doctrinal departure.
  - a) "In the lives and teachings of the Fathers we find the seed plot of almost all that arose later." [[Vos](#) "Ambrose"].
  - b) Students or followers of an original teacher often run with the original minor departure past where the teacher ever would have taken it.
    - (1) A few degrees of error results in an entirely different final destination.
    - (2) They "crept in unnoticed" – their errors and motivations were not initially apparent.
    - (3) It is a frequent situation within the history of the Church that teachers and institutions have been placed in the awkward and painful position of having to disavow those who they once trained.
4. Those taught within the Church, but never truly grounded or converted who maintain a simmering opposition to orthodoxy, express their frustration by embracing new doctrinal teachings and understandings.
  - a) Rather than leaving Christianity (which would serve the Church well), these remain on the fringes to pollute from within.

b) Pastor's sons.

E. Demonic influence.

1. **1 Timothy 4:1** Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons. . .
2. Satan and his unclean spirits are continually at war attempting to destroy God's Word with a three-fold strategy:
  - a) Remove access to the Scriptures.
  - b) Undermine the authority of the Scriptures (unreliable).
  - c) Undermine the correct interpretation and understanding of the Scriptures.

F. Failure to endure sound doctrine

1. Speaking smooth things grow a larger church.
2. **Isaiah 30:9-10** That this *is* a rebellious people, Lying children, Children *who* will not hear the law of the LORD; Who say to the seers, "Do not see," And to the prophets, "Do not prophesy to us right things; Speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits.
3. **Jeremiah 5:30-31** "An astonishing and horrible thing Has been committed in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule by their *own* power; And My people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end?"
4. **2 Timothy 4:3** For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;
  - a) This is the essential error of the Seeker Friendly movement which led to the Emergent Church movement: an overt desire to elevate currying favor with the culture over the hard immutable truths found within Scripture.

## V. Who Will Carry the Doctrinal Torch for the Next Generation?

- A. **Acts 2:42** And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' *doctrine* and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.
- B. How different this is from many modern fellowships! The first priority of the early Church was doctrine – the teaching of God's truth. The "worship service" is not even mentioned!
- C. This generation needs young men and women who are serious about God, who have the necessary zeal and consistency to undertake the hard work necessary to master the subtleties found in God's Word, and who know what humility is so as to remain faithful to their calling, to God, and to His people. May we watch for them as the Holy Spirit raises them up and help prepare them for service when we are no longer here to carry the torch!

## VI. Pray

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