

June 14, 2026

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH ONCE FOR ALL DELIVERED TO THE SAINTS

Jude

(A sermon on the book of Jude)

On Christmas day in 1914 the world was at war. And on one particular battlefield, British troops were hunkered down on one side and Germans on the other when the British troops noticed that the Germans began singing and were putting up little fir trees. In response, British troops started doing the same. It was Christmas day. And so each side began singing Christmas carols and letting down their guard. Slowly, and no doubt with great trepidation, each side began to emerge from their bunkers and met out in the middle of the field, an area known as “no man’s land.” There, they celebrated Christmas together. They ate together, shared tobacco with one another, and even some games of soccer broke out between them. It’s come to be known as the truce of 1914.

But the generals were reported to have become furious at this moment. They feared that if you let down your guard or even became friends with the other side, you’d forget your mission. After all, they were at war. And when you’re at war, you can never let your guard down for one second. Sure enough, the next day, these two groups went right back to trying to kill each other and win the war.

I think the same dynamic can happen in churches. Think about us for a second, Cornerstone Community Church. The Lord has lavished so much grace on us over the years that it’s almost embarrassing. He’s brought to us a number of people who love the Lord, his Word, and his church. Our fellowship is sweet. The desire to see the Word exalted is present in the hearts of our members. The men I get to pastor alongside of love those under their care and seek to lead and oversee faithfully. And we’ve often stopped and given thanks for the Lord’s rich blessings, which is fitting.

But seeing the Lord’s rich blessings like this can also present for us a danger. We might—like those soldiers in the truce of 1914—be at risk of forgetting that we’re in the middle of a war. After all, Scripture is quite clear that we have an enemy who would love nothing more than to divide and destroy this congregation. He is described as a roaring lion, roaming about, seeking whom he may devour. And just as we could spend of the rest of the day recounting the Lord’s rich blessings toward us, we could also recount numerous ways the enemy has attacked, and at some moments, quite successfully. And so, we must always be on guard, never forgetting we’re in the middle of a war.

That idea of being on guard and recognizing you’re at war really comes to the surface with the letter of Jude. The author, Jude, identifies himself as “a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James” (v. 1). This almost certainly means that if James is his brother, then he is the half-brother of Jesus, having Joseph and Mary as his parents. And as he opens the letter, he notes that he was eager to write about their common salvation, perhaps rejoicing and worshiping in light of the

glorious work of Christ's redemption, but then he adds that though he wanted the letter to go that way, he "found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (v. 3).

Now, just to make sure we're oriented to what Jude means with that, let's break it down a bit. When he says "The faith," he's not talking about faith as in believing but faith as in doctrinal content. He's talking about truth, doctrine, the content of Scripture. The author of Hebrews opens his letter reminding us that prior to the coming of Christ, the Lord spoke "at many times and in many ways . . . by the prophets" (Heb 1:1). We're familiar with that if we read our Old Testaments and note how often the prophets preface their messages with the refrain, "Thus says the Lord," meaning they're speaking the very words of God. But then he adds, "But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" (Heb 1:2). That is, God did something better than speaking through the prophets; God himself came to us as the Son took on flesh and dwelt among us.

Then, after Jesus lived, died, and was raised for us, he ascended to the Father's right hand, awaiting the day when he will return and take us home. But prior to his ascension, Jesus said multiple times that he had more to say, more truth to give, but that this would be done as the Spirit came and would lead his apostles into all truth, reminding them of what he had taught them and giving them all the truth they'd need. Well, the Spirit did that, and what did the apostles do with that truth? The apostles and some other close companions recorded this truth that was once for all delivered to them in the Scriptures. In other words, for us, the Bible is the truth—the faith—that was given to us by our Lord through his Spirit, and it cannot be added to. It was given "once for all." There are no more infallible, authoritative words given anymore by the Spirit. What is given to us in the Scripture is the faith once delivered to the saints as Jude is referencing here.

Well, why do they need to contend for it? Jude answers that question in verse 4, adding, "For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." That is to say, Jude switches the focus of his letter from his original intent because he noticed that some ungodly people had crept into the church, some false teachers who perverted Christian faith and practice, and they'd been unnoticed by the believers there. These men were threatening to destroy their church by their lives and teaching. Jude will describe them as those who "are hidden reefs at your love feasts" (v. 12), referencing the fact that when the church gathered, ate together, and even came to the table together. These people were right there with them, hiding in their midst.

And, if that can happen with the church to whom Jude wrote this letter, it can happen here as well. And so we must never forget that we are at war and never forget our need to constantly contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. So, how do we do it? Well, I think Jude gives us three things we need to do in this short letter. The first is that we must be on guard against those who pervert the truth.

We must be on guard against those who pervert the truth

I say that we must be on guard because Jude notes that the men in this case had crept in unnoticed, and we'd be naïve to think we are immune from such vulnerabilities. And so if men who pervert the truth aren't going to slip in unnoticed, then that demands that we are on guard against anyone and anything that would pervert the truth among us.

But that raises a question, doesn't it? How do we recognize those who are trying to creep in and pervert the faith once for all delivered to the saints? What characterizes them? Well, the good thing is that Jude spends most of his time answering that question. In verses 4-19 Jude describes what they're like and what is true of them. So, let's just walk through the list of Jude's descriptions.

They're condemned

Jude's first description of these people who have crept in to pervert the truth is that they were "long ago designated for this condemnation" (v. 4). In other words, these are unbelievers, awaiting the day when they'll face God's judgment. Now, yes, they may profess faith. They may even give the appearance of one who has faith in some ways, but they're unbelievers. In verse 19 Jude will describe them as "worldly people, devoid of the Spirit." And because of this, they're condemned. They'll face the judgment of God in the end.

In verses 5-7, Jude doubles down on this, making clear to us that those who pervert God's truth will face judgment in the end. He reminds his readers (and us) that God killed an entire generation of unbelieving Israelites in the desert, is holding in chains angels who rebelled against him for the day they'll face judgment, and poured out his wrath on Sodom and Gomorrah. Our God will not overlook sin. These will face judgment. In verses 14-15, Jude will come back to this point, noting that Enoch prophesied that God will come and judge the ungodly, and indeed he will. That's what Jude wants us to know first. These people do not know the Lord and will face judgment in the end. But he adds more, noting that they turn God's grace into a license for immorality.

They turn God's grace into license for immorality

The second characteristic that Jude mentions is that they turn the grace of God into a license for immorality. Jude writes in verse 4, "Who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." One of the markers of these condemned people who aim to pervert the truth of God in the church is that they are immoral. Specifically, Jude tells us they're sexually immoral, noting that they are involved in sensuality, and in verse 8 he notes that they "defile the flesh," which is probably another reference to sexual immorality. One of the consequences of denying the truth of God's Word is that you'll ultimately pursue immorality. You might even have some biblical-sounding reasoning for it, as these men were likely touting God's grace. But they were perverting God's grace, pointing to it as a license to engage in sin. That's the second characteristic. The third is that they reject authority, are arrogant, and have no proper reverence.

They reject authority, are arrogant, and have no proper reverence

After Jude mentions the Lord's judgment in verses 5-7, he writes in verse 8, "Yet in like manner these people also, relying on dreams, defile the flesh, reject authority, and blaspheme the glorious ones." The first few descriptions there can be summed up as rejecting authority. First, instead of submitting themselves to God's Word, they rely on their own dreams as guiding them. Then, Jude explicitly states that they reject authority. One of the tell-tale signs that someone is a threat to the faithfulness of a local church is that the person rejects authority and doesn't want to receive instruction from others or even God's Word.

This also means that these people are arrogant. Jude will refer to them in verse 16 as "loud-mouth boasters." One of the clearest signs of danger among us is a professing brother or sister who is arrogant and unwilling to submit to authority. Those things don't need to be seen as minor.

And Jude also notes that they show no reverence. He mentions this in verse 12 when he notes that they happily come to the table "without fear." That is they have no reverence for God or fear of him. And he makes the same point in verses 9-10 about all heavenly beings in general when, after noting that they "blaspheme the glorious ones," he tells us that Michael and archangel didn't even rebuke the devil himself but said, "The Lord rebuke you." In other words, these people have no fear of things more powerful than them, especially the Lord himself. They are arrogant, reject authority, and have no fear of God. And, obviously, they bear no fruit.

They don't bear fruit

In verses 12-13 Jude gives a long description of these people through a series of metaphors. He tells us that they're like waterless clouds, trees that still haven't borne fruit by late fall, stars that fall from the sky never to shine again, and waves that simply stir up foam. All of these images suggest that they're worthless. They don't bear fruit. They may talk a good game or even seem impressive, but if you evaluated their lives, there's no fruit there. Again, we must beware of the one who wants to guide and teach others without demonstrating the fruit that comes from faith and faithfulness in their own lives. Continuing on, we can add that they show favoritism to gain an advantage.

They show favoritism to gain an advantage

Jude also mentions their proclivity for showing favoritism to some simply to gain an advantage for themselves. He says that at the very end of verse 16, noting that they "show favoritism to gain an advantage." In other words, one thing that can make these wolves in the church hard to discern is that they may be showing you favoritism. Perhaps they do good things for you, serve you, or even give to you. But that alone doesn't suggest true godliness, as they may only do these things in order to gain an advantage for themselves. And, finally, though we could say more. They sow division.

They sow division

As Jude begins verse 19 he notes that they “cause divisions.” They are not those who labor to ensure that we walk in unity and love but seek to divide some against others. Perhaps they gossip, slander, or provide reasons why you should be untrusting of some and keep them at bay. This is not their effort to guard you but to sow division.

Now, we could say more. As I noted, Jude spends most of his time describing these people who creep in and pose a threat to the faith, to the truth of God’s Word in local churches. We could add that they follow their sinful passions (vv. 16, 18), grumble (v. 16), aren’t content (v. 16), are selfish (v. 12), are harsh (v. 15), and more. But the point is that we should be alert to these characteristics. We shouldn’t overlook the one who is arrogant, rejecting authority, showing no reverence, excusing immorality, causing division, bearing no fruit, and cozying up to some to gain an advantage. These are the very characteristics of those who creep into churches and lead them to destruction. And we must be on guard against these things.

And I’ll note that we’ve had these kinds of people among us before, and by the Lord’s grace, they’ve been revealed, and you as a congregation have rightly acted to remove them. So, well done. But let’s not let our guard down. May we be diligent to watch for these things and be diligent to pray that the Lord would reveal all who have evil intent in our midst. After all, as Jude reminds us, the apostles themselves predicted these things, saying, “In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions” (vv. 17-18). So, we must be on guard against those who would pervert the truth.

But that’s not the only thing we must do if we’re going to contend for the faith. We must also keep a close eye on ourselves.

We must keep a close eye on ourselves

After noting the characteristics of those who creep into the church with evil intent and will face God’s judgment, Jude turns to those who *do* know the Lord, have his Spirit, and are striving to walk in holiness. He has a word for us as well. He writes in verses 20-21, “But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.”

Now, when we look at these verses, it’s helpful to realize that there is one command here, one imperative. It’s “keep yourselves in the love of God.” And it’s surrounded by three participles—building, praying, and waiting. So, the main thing that Jude is saying to us is: “Keep yourselves in the love of God,” which is to say, persevere in the faith.

Our first response to this might be to issue an objection. After all, we might say, “Doesn’t God keep us?” Indeed. In fact, this letter will end in verses 24-25 with a reminder that God is the one who keeps us from stumbling and will preserve us on that great day, blameless in the presence of

the Lord. However, here is where we must remember that God's sovereignty never functions in Scripture to eliminate or minimize our responsibility. And so we must put forth effort to make sure that we don't drift from the pursuit of faithful obedience toward our Lord.

But how? Here's where those three participles guide us. Jude tells us that we first keep ourselves walking in faithfulness by, first, "building [ourselves] up in [our] most holy faith" (v. 20). Now, here, just as we saw in verse 3, "faith" doesn't mean our believing but the content of what we believe. So, Jude starts by telling us to contend for the truth not to be perverted, and now he tells us to build ourselves up in this truth that was once for all delivered to the saints. And so the first way that you labor to ensure you're walking in perseverance is to devote yourself to knowing, hearing, and obeying God's Word. This is a constant note sounded in the Scripture. The Word of God will keep us. It is what shapes us. But there's more.

Second, he tells us to pray in the Holy Spirit (v. 20). Now, some have suggested that this may be something like praying in tongues. After all, Paul does seem to parallel the phrase "praying in the Spirit" with praying in tongues in 1 Corinthians, but I don't think that's what's going on here. Rather, I think he means, praying, as we're enabled by the Holy Spirit. For the believer, the way we experience a relational walk with the Lord is through prayer. Simply put, you'll never feel like you are walking with the Lord in a relationship with him as your Father if you neglect prayer. We must anchor ourselves in the Scripture and pray.

And, finally, Jude adds, "Waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life" (v. 21), which I think is simply a way of saying, "Keeping your eyes and hope set on the appearing of our Lord." This is what Christians do. We live now in light of what is to come.

And so, we have Jude giving us a very straightforward message about how we persevere, and my guess is if it's shocking to us, it's only shocking because we already have heard it a thousand times. We commit ourselves to knowing, reading, and obeying God's Word. We faithfully pray. And we live in light of what is to come—eternity with our Lord Jesus Christ. However elementary and familiar these practices may feel, they cannot be neglected by one who longs to walk in faithfulness until the end. We must keep a close watch on ourselves.

But Jude mentions one final thing. We must help those who are struggling.

We must help those who are struggling

The Christian life is not something we do alone. As we've noted multiple times, when Christ calls us out of this world to himself, he also calls us to one another. And so as Jude equips us to contend for the faith, he not only focuses on those who would pervert the truth nor even simply ourselves but also our brothers and sisters who are struggling. In verses 22-23 he writes, "And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh."

Here, he's turning our attention to those, most likely, who have been affected by these false teachers that have crept into the church. How do we handle them? Well, with those who doubt, we show mercy. We come alongside of them, deal with them gently, and point them back to the truth. With others who seem like they're running toward hell, we go after them and turn them back. Confronting them in their sin. And with others who need our aid, even as they've soiled themselves deeply in sin, we hate what they've done, but we fight for their souls. In other words, it's not enough to be concerned with our own perseverance. We must labor for the perseverance of others as well.

And so, the Lord has been so gracious to us, but we must never lose sight in the midst of this joy that we're at war. There's a lion seeking to devour. So, be alert for those who would creep in to divide, distract, devour, and destroy. Keep a watch on yourself, staying in the Word, listening to the Word preached, obeying it, praying faithfully, and never forgetting the life to come. And commit ourselves to upholding, lifting up, and running after one another as we stray. And as we do so, we'll be faithfully obeying this small New Testament letter of Jude that we simply cannot afford to overlook. Amen.