

Jude 1:3-4: 2,000 Years of Fighting

Most of you know that this coming Tuesday is the 500th anniversary of what is known as Reformation Day. Most people celebrate Halloween on October 31st, what we should really be celebrating is God using imperfect people to take a stand for the perfect gospel. The gospel that we have - that every man, woman, and child is a sinner by nature and by choice and deserving of eternal punishment. But that in his unimaginable love, God the Father sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to live a righteous life and die an atoning death on the cross only to rise again from the grave in victory 3 days later - all so that hell-bound sinners who trust in Jesus's death alone - and not their own works - to forgive their sins could have an eternal life of peace with God, freedom from guilt, ability to live righteous lives in the joy of Christ.

That is the perfect gospel message. And what I want to remind us on the eve of the 500th anniversary of the reformation is that that message is worth fighting for. In fact, it's worth dying for. And I want to show you that from here in Jude.

Last year about this time I preached a sermon called The 5 Solas of the Reformation - I posted that sermon online in case you're interested. When people look back on the Reformation there were 5 truths, 5 themes, that continually came up. And they are called solas because sola means "alone."

So there was Sola Fidea - faith alone. The Reformation recovered the biblical teaching that salvation is not just by faith, but by faith alone. It is a free gift, not earned by giving money or doing good.

Second, there was Sola Gratia - Grace alone. Grace is the other side of the equation. If faith is what we have, grace is what God gives. Put another way, God owes us nothing in salvation. God's favor toward us is a simple gift.

There was Sola Christus - Christ alone. It is through faith in the merits of Christ alone that saves us. It's not just that on the cross our sins were accounted to Jesus. It's also that the righteousness that we have to have in order to stand before God is Christ's righteousness that has been accounted to us.

There was Soli Deo Glory - to the glory of God alone. All that we are and do is not for our glory or the glory of any man, but solely for the glory - the fame - of God.

But it's the final sola of the Reformation - Sola Scriptura, Scripture alone - that was the foundation for all the others. It was an understanding that the Scriptures are our final and highest authority that ignited the reformation. Luther wrote the 95 Thesis because he practices of the Catholic Church were *unbiblical* - and they still are.

Every great movement of the church, every great person in the church has always been marked by exactly 1 thing: faithfulness to the Word of God. To Scripture alone. The OT prophets who called the nation of Israel to repentance did so in light of what God had told them - in light of Scripture.

Jesus continually called people to uphold what was written. The apostles continually cited Scripture. The early church fathers cited Scripture. In fact, if you read some of the early church fathers you realize just how much of the Scripture they had memorized - it's phenomenal. The reformers called people to look at Scripture. In fact, the greatest contribution of the saints in all the ages has been their work on the Word of God. Those who translated the Bible were often called heretics by the Catholic Church - many of them killed. Martin Luther's greatest achievement was the German Bible. John Wycliffe's greatest achievement was an English translation of the Bible. William Tyndale's greatest achievement was an English translation of the Bible. John Calvin's greatest achievement is the Institutes of the Christian Religion which is a systematic theology: it's a catalog of what the Bible teaches about every subject.

If you will learn Scripture, follow Scripture, teach Scripture, uphold and defend Scripture your eternal legacy for God's glory will not be wasted. You might not be remembered like Luther or Calvin, but you will be remembered by God for upholding his Word.

And in light of that I want to spend some time talking about the need to fight for the Word of God, which is found in the gospel.

Here in Jude I want us to see that when it comes to the Word of God, there are really only two sides of this fight. Those who are for the Word of God and those who are opposed to it. There are those who fight for the Word, and those we fight against. It's very binary.

Either a person is for God and his Word or he is against God and his Word.

Luke 11:23: Jesus said: Whoever is not with me is what? Against me.

No middle ground. No fence sitting. Even the person who is searching out Jesus, who wants more information is not on the fence.

If you're standing in front of a 5 star general with all of his soldiers, all of his tanks, all of his fighter jets, bombers, air craft carriers, nuclear arsenal and you think, "I'm not sure just yet if I'm on your side." You better figure it out quickly.

What we're going to do is look at 5 characteristics of those who uphold the Word of God and 5 characteristics of those who deny it. Let's start with those who uphold the Word of God:

1 - They are eager to talk with anyone about the salvation they have in Jesus. **Read 1a**

When you understand what God has done for you in Christ, how your sins have been forgiven, how you are a new creature in Christ, you can't help but talk about that.

Now, I know some of you are a little more vocal than others. Some of you are shy, and that's fine. But even shy believers, if they're around close Christian friends, delight in the Lord Jesus. They are eager to talk about him.

I mean, if you got a letter in the mail this week that a long-lost uncle died and gave you \$400k, that'd change your week. Let's say a few days later a good friend came up and asked, "How's your week going?" And you say, "Same old, same old." Either you have amnesia or you didn't really count all those zeros. No, you'd be eager to talk about this uncle who seemingly out of nowhere gave you this great gift.

In the same way believers are eager to talk about Jesus - whom God gave to us as a gift. We're not eager to talk about morality, though we can. We're not eager to talk about theology, though we do. But even that is all in light of what Jesus has done for us personally.

2 - Make a distinction between essential and non-essential doctrines. **Read 3a-b**

So initially, he was planning to write one letter to these believers but apparently he got word that false teaching was coming in and, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, he wrote this letter. Jude makes a distinction between what he was eager to write about - their common salvation - and what he actually writes about - defending the faith. In Jude's mind there are 2 levels of importance here.

There's "their common salvation" - which is probably elaborating more on the truths about the gospel message. The book of Hebrews is an elaboration on our common salvation. Jesus is our High Priest, of the Order of Melchizedek, he is the true and better Moses, the true and better Aaron, gives us a greater covenant. It's really 13 chapters devoted to elaborating more on who Jesus is, and the common salvation we have in him, through the lens of the OT.

But Jude says, "No, we don't have time to elaborate." There's something so urgent that the very basics, the very fundamentals, of the gospel are at stake. So he writes to get them to content for *the faith*. We'll look at this more in a minute. But the faith is the essential gospel message. And what I want to point out is that Jude expects his readers will know the difference between

Let's say your car all of a sudden started making some grinding and screeching sounds. And you call your mechanic to make an appointment to get it checked out and he asks you what kind of car you have. And you say, "Well, it's blue and has leather seats and new tires and a

sunroof.” Is that what he’s looking for? No, of course not. He wants year, make, and model. He wants the essentials, not the elaborations.

That’s what Jude’s talking about. With the gospel there’s a difference between our view on the resurrection and substitutionary atonement and our view on old earth versus young earth or spiritual gifts. Jude wants to make sure what we’re willing to fight for are core doctrines. So we should be able to make a distinction between essential beliefs and non-essentials and fight for the right ones.

3 - They fight for the once-for-all-delivered faith. **Read 3**

Now, there’s a lot we could say here. First, of all, the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Sometimes the bible talks about faith generically. We believed - had faith in - the gospel. But sometimes the Bible talks about *the* faith, which is actually another way to say the gospel.

Gal. 1:23: Paul preached *the faith* he once tried to destroy.

Eph. 4:5-6: Paul says there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

So the faith is the gospel. Second, it was once for all delivered to the saints. Once for all delivered means that by the time of Jude’s writing the gospel message was cemented. There was a body of doctrine that everyone recognized as the core of what a person had to believe and it wasn’t growing. It had been delivered.

This truth that the faith has been delivered and cemented as ultimate truth is under constant attack. Jews and Mormons want to say that more needs to be added. The Catholic Church says that the Pope can add to the divinely inspired canon when needed. Islam gives lip service to the first 5 books of the Bible but tosses the rest. American millennials say that there really is no truth, God hasn’t given us a message that has to be believed or else a person is under God’s wrath.

Jude says, “We have all we need - no more, no less.” It’s been delivered to us.

Third component of this is that we are to fight for that once-for-all-delivered faith. The ESV says contend earnestly, others say fight, defend. This is a term often used in athletics or warfare. We are called to fight for the gospel. As one person said “We’re not simply to resist the false teachers perversion of the faith, we are to actively and energetically fight for it.” (Moo. 2 *Peter, Jude* (The NIV Application Commentary).

See, the problem is that some people will fight about everything, some people won’t fight about anything. Both are problems. Not everything an unbeliever says about the Bible needs to be addressed.

2 Tim. 2:24: The Lord's servant - that's us - must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

Our conduct and speech around unbelievers needs to be gracious. We don't need to respond every ridiculous thing they say. Frankly, not every ridiculous thing *a believer* says needs to be addressed either. Sometimes we get wrapped around the axle over the most ridiculous things.

But there are times when fighting is necessary. That fight is almost exclusively when someone claims to be a Christian, who is involved in the congregation and they turn out to be a wolf. That's when we fight.

Jesus said there will be wolves wearing what? Sheep's clothing. Paul said to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 that fierce wolves will rise up among them - among the elders - and they destroy the folk unless the elders are on guard.

Frankly, everyone needs to be on guard. If you read the rest of Jude, what you realize is that the false teachers he talks about are involved in the local church. **Read 11-12**

These guys are at love feasts - pot lucks - feasting on the sheep. There are a million threats Christians have to be on the lookout for. The biggest ones, the ones we drop everything and fight for, are wolves - false teachers - in our midst.

4 - Related to that, those who uphold the Word of God appeal to others to fight alongside them.

Jude writes his letter to the beloved - the whole church. We don't know exactly who this is or where they were located. But we do know that the whole church is called to fight against these false teachers. It's not enough for the pastors to fight false doctrine and the rest to sit idly by. If you hear someone teaching others false doctrine - there is no Trinity, salvation requires baptism, the Bible isn't really the Word of God - you are called to fight for the truth.

5 - They understand who they are in Jesus. **Read 3**

I want to touch on that word "saints" for just a moment. Saints literally is "holy ones" - ἁγίοις in the Greek. Saints are not super spiritual people who we hope to one day be like. No, everyone who has faith in Christ is a saint. Everyone who has faith in Christ is viewed by God as being perfectly holy and pure and righteous, not because of their own good deeds,

but because the righteousness of Jesus has been credited to their account through faith in him. If you trust in Jesus, you are a saint - a holy one. That is who you are.

And the implication is that if you are a saint, a holy one of God, then you have everything you need to fight against any false teacher. No one is exempted. “Well, I’m a new believer, what can I do?” Jesus says you’re a saint and no matter how long you’ve been in the faith you know faith and can defend the faith and fight for the faith.

“Well, I’m not very outspoken, what will I say?” Jesus says you’re a saint and you can simply speak what the Word of God speaks. In fact, if you’re shy that’s probably better because you probably won’t say things you shouldn’t say. That’s the problem with those of us who like to speak - we speak too much. “

“Well, I still have sin in my life, and who am I to speak against others?” We all have sin in our lives - we should be repenting from it - but again, if you are covered in the righteousness of Christ no charge of sin will ever stand. If someone says to you “Who are you to talk, I know you steal/gossip/lust.” You know what you can say? “You know what, you’re right. I do struggle against those things and am trying to put them to death in my life and strive to love God with all of my heart, soul, mind and strength. But he has counted me righteous and called me to defend the faith.”

Rom. 8:33: Who will bring any charge against God’s elect?

No charge against us will ever stand, so we can confront false teachers as the saints of God who know and trust the faith once-for-all-delivered to us.

What about those who we fight against? What are their characteristics? Jude gives us 5 for them as well.

1 - The most dangerous attacks on the gospel are subtle ones. **Read 4a**

One of the things we need to keep in mind is that the most dangerous attacks on the gospel are not usually the big, bold denials of the Bible. Not too many false teachers say, “Well, I think the whole Bible is a bunch of gobbledygook.” No they usually say something like, “I believe the Bible, but we can’t know for certain if Paul really condemned homosexuality because we weren’t there.” They’ll say, “The whole Bible is the word of God, but we need to pay special attention to what Jesus said in the gospels, because that’s the core of what we believe” - as though somehow the rest of the Bible is less inspired. They’ll say, “I believe in the gospel of free grace so if you call people to turn from their sin and live lives of holiness that’s legalism - that’s adding to the gospel.” No it’s not, the Bible calls us to righteousness. It calls the saints - holy ones - to live holy lives.

Rarely are the most severe attacks obvious ones, they are subtle and usually in the form of questioning the Bible rather than simply stating what they believe.

In fact, the Bible usually talks about false teachers as wolves. National Geographic and tree huggers want us to believe wolves are this beautiful part of nature. No, wolves are sneaky and deadly dangerous and the Bible uses them to describe false teachers who destroy people.

Matt. 7:15: Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but are really ravenous wolves.

Wolves are dangerous because they are sneaky. They are basically the same size as sheep, so they blend in. Sheep are often scared and confused when wolves are around so they don't know what to do. And usually wolves come when no one is looking. And a few wolves can destroy and entire flock of sheep in one night while everyone is asleep.

With false teachers the issue is usually their motives are unknown. Unfortunately people don't walk around with a billboard on their back telling us why they're here. Maybe yours would say "looking for genuine Christian friends" or "wanting to find a local church that's faithful" or "this is my last shot at church." For the wolves their sign would say "looking for a flock that I can easily manipulate and destroy."

Except there's no sign, is there? Sometimes wolves hang out a long time, endear themselves to us, become our friends, invite us into their homes, have their kids play with our kids, invite their families. They creep in unnoticed and as one guy said ""working in secret so the faithful are not even aware of them.they hide their real nature and purpose." (Moo. 2 Peter, Jude (The NIV Application Commentary) (Kindle Locations 5366-5367)

Listen, we don't need to be paranoid - thinking everyone is out to get us. We simply need to be cautious. Always on the lookout and remembering many times waves are those we'd least expect.

2 - The Bible consistently condemns false teachers. **Read 4**

We don't like to condemn anyone, it's hard for us to call people out. But that is the consistent witness of the entire Bible.

The ESV says "men who were designated for this condemnation." The NASB says they were "marked out." Some of you know this brings up issues of predestination and God choosing. But actually I don't think Jude is talking about that at all.

The ESV Study Bible has a helpful note that says “this word really just means ‘to write or designate beforehand.’ The false teachers did not take God by surprise, for he predicted their coming and their **condemnation** long before they even existed” (note on Jude 1:4).

So the point is that these false teachers are nothing new to God, in fact they’ve been around since the dawn of time. God has always opposed them, always written about them, and who they are and the hell the face has always been the same. God never says to cuddle up with false teachers, or to put up with them, or ignore them. No, we are to be reminded of the eternal condemnation that awaits them unless they turn from their sin. Heaven and hell are on the line for these people.

3 - Those who undermine the Word of God are ungodly. **Read 4**

This is something we need to always remember - false doctrine always leads to false living. Theology is not just an intellectual exercise where we disagree with them, they disagree with us but everything else works out okay. It’s not true that a person can deny the Trinity, deny the resurrection, deny the gospel of grace alone and their lives are essentially the same as those who hold to the true gospel.

No, what we believe will always affect who we are. And the three things we see warned about over and over again with false teachers is greed, sexual immorality, and power. Even in this verse, Jude lists sensuality. **Read 4, 7, 18**

He also lists greed. **Read 11, 16**

Wherever someone denies the gospel message - denies the fundamentals of the faith - there is always ungodliness. There has to be. The only motivation for doing it is for gain. You look at any false religion that denies the fundamental tenets of the Christian faith and there’s a wake of immorality, greed and power. Joseph Smith, Muhammed, the Popes down through the ages, everyone - it comes back to fueling their ungodliness.

4 - Pervert the grace of God into sensuality. **Read 4**

This is along the same lines as fueling their ungodliness, but this is more the sobering reality of what they do with the gospel. They pervert it.

See, the gospel is this beautiful thing. The gospel is a free gift of salvation through faith in Christ. And when I say free, I mean free free. Like, as in we contribute less than zero. Someone once said the only thing we contribute to our salvation is our sinful need for it. God gives it to us absolutely free.

But here's the danger: People can say, well God will forgive me for whatever I do so I'm just going to live a life of sin.

I was talking to someone just this last week who said "I don't believe in all that once-saved-always-saved" business. You know why? Because they said it gives people a reason to just go off and sin. I said, well, I do believe in that once-saved-always-saved business but someone who thinks the gospel of grace is a license to sin is not a believer.

Let me ask you: If you had just got a job and you had been working hard to please the boss but one day you messed something up. You made a \$40k mistake. And the boss is going to find out so you go to the boss and fess up anyway. You know he's probably going to fire you. You text your friends to pray for you because it's that bad. But instead he says: I'll tell you what, I'm going to let this go. I like you, I'm going to keep you. Get back to work. What's your attitude going to be? You're going to work all the harder for him in love knowing that he was gracious. That's what people who truly believe the gospel do - they strive all the harder for Jesus because they know his grace.

See, the gospel message will always cause unbelievers to justify their sin and revel in it - they will always pervert the gospel. We can't help that. But the true gospel will always cause true believers to repent from their sin and cling to Jesus all the more.

5 - Characteristic of those we oppose is that they deny the Lord Jesus Christ. **Read 4**

At the end of the day this is what it all comes down to. If a person denies the Word of God - Scripture - they deny our only Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. It's not that they would ever verbally deny him. Oh they'd say they love Jesus - lots of people say they love Jesus. But their lives deny him because they are denying his Word.

Titus 1:16: They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

Listen, the Word of God is all we have. I love history, I love commentaries, I love listening to big name pastors on the radio or podcasts talking about the Word of God.

But Scripture calls us to uphold Scripture as our highest authority. This was the legacy of the Reformers. The reason they understood that salvation was by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone to the glory of God alone was because their rock, their anchor, their highest and ultimate authority was Scripture alone. And we, like them, are called to fight for it.

Pray