

For fifteen months... journalist Sebastian Junger... followed a single platoon of U.S. soldiers... stationed in a dangerous part of Afghanistan. Living and working in the midst of a warzone... made Junger realize how much the soldiers had to rely on each other. What you do or don't do as a soldier affects everyone else in your platoon. Junger writes:

Margins were so small and errors potentially so catastrophic that every soldier had a kind of *de facto* authority to reprimand others—in some cases even officers. And because combat can hinge on [small] details, there was nothing in a soldier's daily routine that fell outside the group's purview. Whether you tied your shoes or cleaned your weapon or drank enough water or secured your night vision gear were all matters of public concern and so were open to public scrutiny.

Once I watched a private accost another private whose bootlaces were trailing on the ground. Not that he cared what it looked like, but if something happened out there—and out there, everything happened suddenly—the guy with the loose laces couldn't be counted on to keep his feet at a crucial moment. It was the *other* man's life he was risking, not just his own There was no such thing as *personal* safety out there; what happened to you happened to everyone.

Three weeks ago... we began our current sermon series through the book of Jude. We have seen that Jude calls his readers to arms... as a military general would... to ready the troops. “*Contend for the faith*” – he exhorts us.

Jude 1:3 (ESV)

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

What does it mean to "contend for the faith"? ... The Greek word is an athletic term that gives us our English word *agonize*. ... It is the picture of a devoted soldier... fighting for his life on the battlefield in hand-to-hand combat... stretching his nerves and straining every muscle... (agonizing) to do his very best to win. ... You can never "*contend for the faith*" from a soft chair or living room couch. Christian soldiers must concentrate on doing their best and giving their all. ... There must also be teamwork... believers working together to attack and defeat the enemy. What you do or don't do as a soldier... affects everyone else in your platoon... ah... I'm sorry... Did I say "platoon"...? ... I mean "church." ... What you do or don't do as a soldier... affects everyone else in your church.

Week number one of this study... the sermon was our call to arms. I agree with Warren Wiersbe... who says "*The church is always one generation short of extinction.*" Jude 4 reveals that spiritual imposters sneak into the church unrecognized... and their goal is to add to... or take away from... the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

Week number two of this study... the sermon was "how to recognize spiritual imposters." ... Although they try to sneak in... and do their work stealthily... there are common characteristics of the plants of Satan. Last week we studied Jude's multiple descriptions and illustrations about their character... and their very certain destruction. Take a look at the final verse where we ended last week.

Jude 16

Spiritual imposters come into a church... and they immediately start grumbling. "*Well... this isn't the way a church should operate...*" And they

work at arousing discontent in the hearts of others. Jude had provided illustrations for how they stir discontent against God's leadership. Division is what they are after. Then they boast about what they could do... They will use great swelling words to impress the less informed. Verse 13 compares them to loud crashing waves of the sea... that only leaves foam and useless debris... on the shore after a storm. He also compares them to a shooting star that looks spectacular – but only for a few seconds... and then disappears into darkness.

Verses 8-11 emphasized how they rely on visionary experiences (what I would call "God-told-me messages") OVER and ABOVE God's Word. Jude compared it to being like an animal instinct... not the Holy Spirit leading them.

This week... as we pick up with verse 17... we are dealing with our strategy... or "battle plan." ... Just how are we to contend for the faith... against these spiritual imposters... who sneak into the church... pretending to be just like us... when they first start out.

As Christian soldiers... we must not fight each other... or go around looking for trouble. ... But when attempts are made to add to... or take away from... the faith that was once delivered to all the saints... we cannot sit idly by... nor can we ever hope to win the victory by wearing kid gloves.

We must always speak the truth in love... and the weapons we use must be spiritual. ... At the same time... we must dare to take our stand for "the faith" even if our stand offends some and upsets others. ... We are not fighting personal enemies... but the enemies of the Lord. It is the honor and glory of Jesus Christ that is at stake.

1 Timothy 6:12 (ESV)

Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

So... here is what we are to do... Here is how we are to contend...

Jude 17-23

Jude wants us to be on our guard. ... We should not be surprised when we find people in our churches who try to add to or subtract from the faith once for all delivered to the saints. ... Being on our guard does not... of course... mean that we are to become critical and suspicious... probing everyone's life... and immediately pouncing on anything someone says... that we think is a bit off-center theologically. ... But neither are we to be naïve... assuming that because people use speech that sounds as if they have made a profession of faith... or if they attend all the church's events... or even if they are given a position of leadership... - that they must be above reproach.

Simply consider... for instance... all of the (once faith-filled) main-line Christian denominations over the last generation or two... in America. Some were entirely orthodox just sixty years ago. They were true to "the faith once for all entrusted to the saints" and effective in evangelism and missions. ... But over the decades... they have drifted to the point that their leaders deny many of the essential truths of the faith — no longer seeing them as essential... including the need for missions and to evangelize! ... Yet these same churches are still filled with many dedicated... Evangelical-leaning Christians.

I have mentioned in the past that we have a church here in Central Oregon... that was associated with the Conservative Baptists of the Northwest. The pastor graduated from the same seminary that I did. But that pastor is teaching and writing books... saying that there is no such thing as eternal damnation... in other words Hell is not forever... and everyone who is condemned will be given yet another chance after they have died.

We must not be naïve... and refuse to see the need to be on our guard. It is here. It is close. And it is entering churches just like ours!

Part of the problem... is that we live in an age in which truth is not very important. ... We are interested in whether something works. Truth... does not have enough "bottom-line" value for us. ... "Pragmatism" (or what is the most effective way to get what I want)... is all that really matters in church after church today. So... who really cares if the pastor sometimes preaches that there is no eternal condemnation...? His sermons are entertaining... the church has great programs and great music! And I finally got my spouse to attend with me..."

As Michael Green says, "We have largely lost any sense of the diabolical nature of false teaching, and have become as dulled to the distinction between truth and falsehood in ideas - as we have to the distinction between right and wrong in behavior."

We desperately need this teaching from Jude. He specifies three things that we need to do:

1. Remember the apostolic warning about heretics (verses 17-19);

2. secure your own faith (verses 20-21); and
3. reach out to rescue people in spiritual danger (verses 22-23).

Each exhortation is as relevant today as it was two thousand years ago. Let's take them one at a time. ... FIRST... Remember the apostolic warning about heretics.

Jude 17-19

Sometimes the scoffing is verbal. ... I think... for instance... of a "Christian" theologian who mocked (in his writings) at the idea that Jesus might have walked on water... or multiplied loaves and fishes to feed five thousand men. ... But I think we more often face people... who may speak quite piously about God and their faith... but who mock Him with their behavior. For people who consistently pursue a lifestyle marked by sin are... in effect... mocking God. ... They are willfully ignoring His requirements to be holy as He is holy... and they are treating lightly His threat of judgment for such behavior.

The spiritual imposters (according to verse 19)... want to divide the church and lead people out of the true fellowship... into their false fellowship. Their appeal is usually... "*We have a deeper knowledge of the Word than what you or your church has! ... We have a better understanding of prophecy... or of the Christian life...*" They offer a "*higher quality*" religion than that of the Apostles.

The Apostles prophesied that... in these last days... mockers would come who would deny the Word of God. ... Jude echoed what Peter had written (2 Peter 3:3ff)... but Paul and John also warned their readers about the

spiritual imposters (1 Tim. 4; 2 Tim. 3; 1 John 2:18ff; 4:1-6). When a warning is given so many times... it behooves us to take it seriously!

FIRST... Remember the apostolic warning about heretics.

SECOND... Secure your own faith.

"Contending for the faith" does not mean only fighting against heretics to preserve Christian truth. It also means fighting against our own weakness and temptation... so that we can maintain our own faith. ... So... the second part of contending for the faith... is that we must take a good look at our own condition.

Jude 20-21

These two verses offer three points that are particularly significant.

(A) Moving ahead in the Christian life... often involves looking to the past. The growth that Jude calls for... is growth in "your most holy faith" (that "faith once for all entrusted to the saints".) ... The foundation must be secure before the building can go up.

We can never grow *away* from our roots. ... We can only grow through them. ... In the church today... seems to have a love-affair with what is new. ... We want to hear what Christianity has to say about the latest fad... or issue. ... We want to learn new things. ... Times are changing so fast! ... and if we want to reach our generation for Christ... we simply must be "the church-of-what's-happening-now"... (We must stay cutting edge.)

But in our (legitimate) eagerness to push ahead... to stretch our understanding... to make the church relevant to a new age... we must always be careful to "secure our rear" as a military general would put it. Solid understanding of Christian doctrine... (the faith once and for all delivered to the saints) — this is something we can never grow away from.

(B) Jude's use of building language is... as we have seen... drawn from the metaphor of the church as the new temple. ... This means that Jude is urging us to be engaged more in a corporate experience... than an individual experience with our Christianity.

We in the West have a hard time with corporate ideas. ... Our culture and traditions are all about making sure we live life as "rugged individualists." And we inevitably come to treat our spiritual experience... as a basically private matter.

In many ways... of course... this seems justified. After all... every person must make a decision for him... or herself about Jesus Christ. ... And we will all have to give an account of our individual lives to the Lord.

But spiritual experience... (the Bible makes clear)... is never a purely individual matter. ... God always works within... and through... a people... (plural)... and "Building yourselves up," calls on us... not just to see that our own experience with Christ is growing and strengthening... but to make sure that the church... the body of Christ as a whole... is growing and becoming stronger. ... None of us can mature in our faith without the encouragement... advice... and admonition of fellow believers.

The Christian life can never stay in one place. It either moves forward... or it moves backward... But it never can stand still. ... Furthermore... a house left to itself falls apart.

The apostates are in the business of tearing down... but each Christian must be involved in building up. ... First... they are to build up his or her own spiritual life... and then his local assembly.

The Word of God is certainly central in spiritual growth. I have yet to meet a strong, fruitful Christian who ignores his Bible. We must daily spend devotional time in the Word, seeking the mind of God. We must also study the Word regularly, in a disciplined way, so that we better understand what it teaches.

The power for building the Christian life (we see in verse 20)... comes from prayer: "praying in the Holy Spirit." ... The Word of God and prayer go together in spiritual growth. ... If all we do is read and study the Bible... we will have a great deal of light... but not much power. ... However... if we concentrate on prayer and ignore the Bible... we may be guilty of zeal without knowledge.

(C) We should note from verse 21 that we are to keep ourselves in God's love. ... Such a command raises a question in our minds: If God's love is unconditional, why do I have to do anything to "keep" myself in it? Go back... and look with me again at Jude verse one...

Jude 1

So... if I am being "kept by Jesus Christ"... why do I have to exert effort to "keep" myself in God's love?

(The bottom line is this)... The problem isn't God losing His love for us. It is us losing our love for Him. ... This has nothing at all to do with a possibility that we might lose our salvation. ... He did not write, "*Keep yourselves saved!*" because he had already assured them that they were "preserved in Jesus Christ" (Jude 1). ... Jude wrote, "Keep yourselves in the love of God."

Jesus gave a similar exhortation in John 15:9

John 15:9 (ESV)

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.

Both Jesus and Jude are warning us to put our relationship with God first and foremost. ... Because there is such a great danger of our love for Christ growing cold and stagnate we are warned... **Keep yourselves in the love of God...**

The word **keep** comes from the Greek "tereo" and means to "*watch*" or "*guard over*." ... It is a military word that speaks of keeping an eye on a prisoner lest he escape. ... Our love for the Lord might wander off. ... We must set up a watch and guard our love for the Lord.

1 John 2:5 (ESV)

but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him:

We guard our love for God... as we listen to His Word... obey it... and delight in doing what pleases Him. That is how we keep ourselves in God's love.

We also keep our love for the Lord strong by "*waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.*" ... The believer's eyes must be lifted heavenward. ... "*Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ*" (as Titus 2:13 tells us). Or the way Peter 3:12 states it – "*waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God*".

The word translated "looking" (Jude 21) means "earnestly expecting." It describes an attitude of life that is motivated by the promise of our Lord's return. The apostates can only look for judgment, but God's people are looking for mercy.

Our passage today is telling us how to "contend for the faith!"

FIRST... We are to Remember the apostolic warning about heretics.

SECOND... We are to Secure our own faith.

THIRD... We are to Reach out to rescue people in spiritual danger.

Jude 22-23

Jude presents three different kinds of people and ways that we are to contend for the faith with them. He lists **(A)** the doubting... **(B)** the burning... and **(C)** the dangerous.

(A) The doubting... These are people who are wavering. They are probably converted... but they haven't been grounded in their faith.

Our responsibility is to have mercy on them... or show compassion toward them... by seeking to lead them away from the influences of the apostates. This kind of ministry demands a great deal of love and patience... and we must keep in mind that immature believers are like little children... who think they know right from wrong. ... If you say "no" to them... they will only rebel... and become more stubborn!

One of the best ways to draw them away from the false teachers is to magnify all that they have in Christ... and to share His love for them in practical ways. ... Show them that their salvation is so wonderful... and the Word of God so exciting... that they see that they did not lack anything... and will eventually lose interest in the teachings of the spiritual imposters. It is not enough merely to refute the false doctrines. There must also be a warmth of love that assures the young believer, "We care for you."

"Showing mercy" to these kind of people will probably take an active form... as we spend time with them... trying to understand the struggles they are having and at the same time urging them to recommit themselves fully to the faith as taught by the Lord and his apostles. ... We can identify such people as those who are young in the faith... not certain what to make of claims that Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses are making. ... Or they may be people further along in the faith... who are strongly tempted to get involved in sex outside the marriage relationship. ... As long as these people are still questioning... Jude suggests... we are not to react to them with horror or shun them but treat them with compassion.

Next are those who are more deeply influenced by false teaching... and who are very close (we might say that they are seriously flirting with the idea) of completely leaving the faith they have proclaimed.

These are **(B)** the burning... They are permitting the flames to flicker all around them... and with these Jude would have us take a more direct approach. ... They need to be snatched from the fire.

As his imagery makes clear... Jude considers people who have strayed into heretical ideas or who are pursuing an unbiblical lifestyle as being genuinely in danger of hell. ... They are poised on the brink of the abyss... and believers are to "snatch" them away from the edge before it is too late. The kind of person Jude has in mind here might be one who has just told us that she has decided to embrace "New Age" theology... or to convert to Islam... or to renounce biblical morals in favor of a sinful lifestyle. ... His or her commitment to these false "faiths" is not yet solid. This person is teetering on the brink. ... Our job is to urgently plead with such a person not to take this step. We are to go over the truth of the gospel with them... and to pray earnestly that the Spirit intervene before it is too late.

We have... then... finally... the hard-core devotees of the false teaching... **(C)**... The dangerous.

Somewhat surprisingly... Jude says we are to "have mercy" on them also. Probably Jude means that we are not to be rude... obnoxious... or ugly toward them. We don't need to slam the door in their face or call them names. We ought to pray for them... though it is doubtful whether mercy here takes any more of an active form than that. For the rest of the verse... with its warning that we "fear" the teaching and "hate" the sin that they are

engaged in suggests that we are to separate ourselves from them. ... He does not want believers to become so involved in trying to rescue people committed to the false teaching... that they themselves succumb to it. ... We must always be aware of the danger... that we ourselves are in... and not presume that we will be immune from the false teaching... or the sin we are trying to rebuke.

Jude 24-25

Jude closes with praise... and the emphasis is that... for all the danger that spiritual imposters present... by coming into the church... God is able to keep believers secure and persevering.

The enemy is subtle and the dangers are great... but you don't have to stumble.