

Jude - Defending the Faith

by Mariano Di Gangi

The sermon emphasizes the importance of defending the faith, which is biblical Christianity, and provides practical ways to do so, including meditating, discriminating, communicating, and validating the faith through good works and a righteous life.

Duration: 25:57

Scripture: Matthew 5:16, Matthew 22:37-39, 1 Corinthians 4:1-2, 1 Peter 3:15, 2 Peter 1:20-21, Jude 1:3-4

Topics: "Apologia"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of being prepared to share the hope of Jesus with others. He encourages believers to approach this task with humility, knowledge, and sensitivity, rather than arrogance or abrasiveness. The speaker also highlights the significance of living out one's faith through good works, as a way to glorify God and draw others to Him. He warns against teaching or promoting anything that deviates from the original message of the Gospel. The sermon concludes with a prayer for clarity of mind and a commitment to proclaiming the truth of Jesus for the growth of the church and the advancement of His kingdom.

Transcript

On these summer Sunday mornings, our texts are taken from the brief but powerful letter of Jude, the brother and servant of Jesus Christ. The letter of Jude, beginning to read at verse one. Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James.

To those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ, mercy, peace, and love be yours in abundance. And now the text for this morning. Dear friends, although I was very eager to write you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.

For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only sovereign and Lord. Jude states his original intention.

What he had wanted to do was to get a good-sized grant, go to a university campus, preferably one that has ivy-covered towers, and there, browsing in a library at his own leisure, to come up with a great compendium of the salvation we share. Something like the Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas, or

the Institutes of the Christian Religion by John Calvin, or the massive three-volume set by the old Princeton theologian Charles Hodge, complete with juicy Latin footnotes, or like the great Dutch scholar G.C. Burkhauser to produce about a 20-volume set on Christian dogmatics. That was his original intention, to produce a learned treatise surveying the whole of Christian truth.

But then something happened. An emergency arose. A crisis situation suddenly struck the young churches, and instead of writing a lengthy treatise, he decided to send a short, sharp telegram.

And in the text, which is at the very heart of the urgent message that he directed to the resolution of this crisis, he says, My dear friends, although I was eager to write you about the salvation that we share and to do it with fullness, I now feel that I have to write and urge you to contend for the faith once for all entrusted to the saints. What is this faith for which we are to contend? What is this faith once for all delivered to the saints? The word faith in the Bible is used in a variety of ways. The most common use of the word faith is synonymous with trust, confidence, reliance upon another.

And so the Westminster Shorter Catechism of 300 years ago defined that kind of faith as a saving grace, a gift from God by which we receive Jesus Christ and we rely on him alone as he is freely offered to us in the gospel. We must have faith in Jesus Christ. We must receive him with an open heart.

We must rely on him leaning on the everlasting arms. We must renounce all other help and rely on him alone for our salvation. Faith in that sense is an attitude of mind by which we pass a vote of non-confidence in human merit and we rely completely on the sufficiency of Jesus Christ to save us from our sins and to give us a life that shall be everlasting.

Faith, trust, confidence, reliance on Jesus. And unless we have that kind of faith and unless we receive Jesus and unless we rely on him as our Savior, we cannot and we will not ever be saved. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Stake your entire future for time and for eternity on him and you shall be saved. Faith as subjective trust in Jesus. Faith as subjective trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But there are times when the word faith is used to signify not the attitude of trust in Jesus, but that body of truth which is at the very heart of what we call the Christian faith. And in that sense, it has to do with the doctrines that we accept and the implication of the duties that we are to perform. There are quite a few passages in the New Testament where the faith is defined in clear, sharp terms.

For example, at the end of First Thessalonians chapter one, Christians are reminded that they have accepted the Christian faith whose fundamentals include a belief in Jesus who came, who died for our sins, who was raised from the dead, and who will deliver us from the wrath to come. The faith for which we are to contend is that body of doctrine with the implications of duty that we call biblical Christianity. This faith has been delivered to the saints.

This faith has been entrusted to the saints. This faith is a sacred treasure that we must guard and conserve. Sometimes it's said by some people, sneeringly, that Knox is a different kind of church.

In an age of skepticism and agnosticism, we had better be a different kind of church. We are theologically conservatives because we have a treasure to conserve, and we're not going to barter it away for a birthright of a pottage, a mess of pottage, of mere secular humanism. We are different because we do take our stand for the faith that has been entrusted to us.

We must guard it as a sacred treasure and never give it up. A treasure to be conserved. That's why we're theologically conservative.

And a treasure which has been entrusted to us, and we are to entrust to others. I hope that none of us felt that having the children sing and recite scripture was an unwelcome blip, was an unwelcome interruption in the flow of worship. That's what it's all about.

You won't have continuity in the choir, and you won't have continuity in the congregation unless you have children to whom we, who have been entrusted with the faith, can transmit that faith. 2 Timothy 2, verse 2, puts it plainly. What you have been taught, you must now transmit to those of the next generation that the line of truth may continue intact.

We have been entrusted so that we may transmit the treasure to the next generation. The faith, the body of doctrine, the duties that flow from that doctrine, we have received, we value, we treasure, and we transmit. And this faith has been given to the saints once and for all.

What does that mean? It means that there is a finality to the Christian faith, and it does not need any additions, and it does not need any subtractions. It has been delivered once and for all, and we dare not amend it in any way. It has come to us from the prophets and the apostles who spoke as they were moved by the guided by the Holy Spirit, and therefore we do not add to what they have given, and we do not subtract from what they have given, but we regard it as something that comes to us with finality.

Now, that doesn't mean that we cannot get new insights. The world of the 18th century was going along in its comfortable, complacent, congregational lifestyle until a Baptist shoemaker hit upon a truth of Scripture and reminded the church that it had a missionary obligation, and William Carey started what we now consider the era of modern missions. He got the insight.

For centuries, people figured that slavery and apartheid were a good thing, and then some people began to study the Scriptures and apply the truth of the Bible to the question of race and to see that these things are utterly incompatible with what the Word of God teaches. We can get and we should get new insights from the Scripture as the Holy Spirit opens our minds and enlightens our eyes. But as for the truth itself, there can be no addition to that, no subtraction from it.

It is given to the saints once and for all. So what is the faith? It is biblical Christianity, which we have received, which we treasure, which we transmit without adulterating the message. Why should we defend the faith? There's got to be a reason for the sense of urgency, for the alarm, for the alert that is sounded by Jude.

Why should the faith be defended? He gives us the reason. He said a development has taken place almost imperceptibly. And now we see that some are teaching something that is totally different from the original message.

Let me illustrate that by southern Ontario. You come to a little town called Brooklyn, not the Brooklyn in New York where I was brought up, but the Brooklyn in southern Ontario, a quiet, unturbulent little town. And there Highway 7 and Highway 12 begin to run together.

And you go past the town of Sunderland and they're still going along together. And all of a sudden, one continues northward and the other branches eastward to Lindsay and Peterborough and Ottawa. They go along together for a while and then begin to deviate.

And the deviation isn't that great. But if you continue to the logical conclusion, you'll find that there is a great distance between Highway 7 and Highway 12. And so it has happened in the history of the church that people ran along together and seemed to be saying the same thing and believing the same thing.

And then the divergence began to appear and the distance became insurmountable between truth and error. In the beginning, all elders were overseers and all overseers were bishops and all bishops were presbyters. But over a period of time, a divergence developed and you began to develop monarchical bishops.

And of those, the urban bishops considered themselves more important than rural bishops. And those in imperial centers of power considered themselves more important than those in merely urban centers of power. And in 500 years, gradually, like a glacier making progress, but slowly, you develop the idea of the papacy.

In the beginning, every believer had the inestimable privilege of going directly to God and speaking to Him as Heavenly Father. And over the course of time, a priestly caste was developed to come between God and man and to develop a very elaborate system of mediators without whose ritual incantations you were doomed to be distant from the deity. And so it goes.

At one time, you were saved by faith in Jesus receiving the grace of God and then gradually the idea crept in that you had to do works to earn merit in order to get right with God. These things begin imperceptibly, run alongside of, and then deviate from the truth. And the servant of Jesus says, This has happened imperceptibly.

Falsehood has been smuggled in. It has passed for truth and people have been deceived. And then the distance and divergence begins to appear.

These people, says Jude, are guilty of perversion. They have taken the grace of God and perverted it. How have they perverted the grace of God? The grace of God says that when we earnestly repent, we are forgiven of our sin.

The grace of God says that God takes our debt and with one bold stroke cancels it. And it is paid in full. And from that doctrine of grace, some people began to come to the unwarranted conclusion that if you sin, God shows grace.

Therefore, continue in sin and give God a wonderful chance to exercise his grace. If God is some super indulgent grandfather up there in the skies, letting us get away with everything, then why shouldn't we? And it is a perversion of the doctrine of the grace of God to listen to the indicative of scripture when it speaks of forgiveness and to fail to heed the imperative of scripture when it speaks of holiness. Cheapening the grace of God, cheapening the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

God forgives, forgives, forgives. God forgets, forgets, forgets. But we do not remember that he demands from us a life of moral integrity, of righteousness and holiness in response to his redeeming love.

And so they perverted the grace of God and made it the excuse for continuing in sin rather than a powerful motive for engaging in righteousness and holiness. Above all, says Jude, they deny our Lord and sovereign Jesus Christ. Sin is inevitably a contradiction of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

For sin means that instead of bowing before the majesty of Jesus and letting his will be the direction for our life, we displace him from his place of centrality and we put ourselves at the center. Sin is essentially a denial, a contradiction of the sovereignty and majesty and Lordship of Jesus Christ so that instead of saying, yes, Lord, we utter no and persist in going everyone to his own way. No wonder the Apostle Paul told Christians that the elders must first of all begin by taking care of their own souls and then looking after the souls of the flock.

For the time would come when wolves and sheep's clothing would come in and wreak havoc among the flock. How we need an emphasis not only on the grace of God, but on the truth of God's moral law on his forgiveness and his demand for holiness. What is the faith? It is Christianity based on the Bible.

Why should we defend it? Because it's threatened by those who make a mockery of grace and live a life that is disgraceful, disobedient to the Lordship of Christ who wills righteousness and holiness. One final word, how should we defend the faith? Back in the early years of the 16th century, a German monk by the name of Martin Luther had begun to send shockwaves through Christendom by calling for reformation and daring to differ with the papacy. And there was a monarch in England who wrote a treatise against the ideas of Martin Luther.

And Pope Leo I was very pleased. And so he conferred on Henry VIII, yes, the same fellow who had a multiplicity of wives and who saw some of them put to death with some satisfaction, Pope Leo I conferred on Henry VIII the title of Defender of the Faith. That title has now come down for 400 years to various British monarchs, kings and queens, and they are all declared to be defenders of the faith.

Today it may be the Protestant faith, but in 1521 it was the papal faith. Each one of us is called of the Lord to be a defender of the faith. How do we defend the faith? Let me very briefly and in conclusion today suggest at least four ways that you and I can defend the faith.

First, meditate. Meditate on the contents of the Christian faith. Come to know what we believe and know why you believe.

The primary textbook is the Bible, but there are many other good paperbacks that have been produced along this very line. We must love God with our mind as well as with our heart and soul and strength. So the first way of defending the faith is to meditate on it, to become acquainted with it at first hand.

Second, to discriminate. To discriminate between what is true and what is false. To discriminate between those things which are essential and those things which, like barnacles, attach themselves to the boat but contribute nothing to its seaworthiness.

We need to distinguish between things that are personal and things that have to do with principles. We do not defend the faith when we attack personalities. We defend the faith when we stand up for principles regardless of the personalities involved.

Meditate, discriminate. Third, communicate. It's not enough for us to know the faith.

We must be able to communicate it with clarity and with charity, putting it into terms that other people can understand. We must not only be intelligent but intelligible in our communication of the Christian faith. Meditate, discriminate, communicate, and validate.

What good is it for us to present a learned argument on God as creator and then do our insensitive part to continue the pollution of this planet? What good is it for us to uphold the truth of creation over against evolution and then fail to see that people who are not of our culture nor of our race or of our national origin are just as much made in the image of God as we are? What good is it for us to discuss the doctrines of justification by faith and then be utterly oblivious to the lack of justice in the social order? What good is it for us to speak about the faith and not to show the works that are the loving and righteous expression of that faith translated into human relationships? It is not alone the words that we say but the quality of the life that we live that will in the end prove to be the most irrefutable defense, the most irrefutable apologetic for the Christian faith. I close with two words. The first is a word from Peter and he says, be ready to give to everyone who asks you an answer for the hope that is in your heart, revering Jesus as Lord and doing it with meekness, not with arrogance, doing it knowledgeably and sensitively and not abrasively, repellingly.

And then the word of Jesus who said, let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and by the validation and authentication of your verbal testimony, by what they see in your life, glorify your Father who is in heaven. Brothers and sisters, let us go forth as defenders of the faith, translating it into the language of righteousness, holiness and love. Let us pray.

Lord Jesus Christ, grant that with clarity of mind we may know the truth that sets men free and that we may proclaim that truth with clarity and with love that others may be drawn to you as Savior and Lord for the growth of your church and the advancement of your kingdom, we pray. Amen.

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