

# **Contend for the Faith**

## **The Call to Contend**

*Jude 3*

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# The Call to Contend

## Scripture

Two weeks ago I began a new series of studies on the Letter of Jude, which I have titled, “Contend for the Faith.”

The first week I introduced you to the Letter of Jude. I briefly touched on questions that arise whenever we begin a new study of God’s Word, such as: Who wrote the letter? To whom was the letter written? When was the letter written? Why was the letter written? And, what is the letter’s message?

Then, last week we looked at the opening greeting, and we examined Jude’s background, Jude’s audience, and Jude’s prayer.

Today, we begin to study the reason for this amazing letter. Jude was going to write a letter about the wonderful truths of our common salvation. However, word reached him that error and heresy was creeping in to the church, and so he found it necessary to write appealing to God’s people to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

So, let us study the call to contend in Jude 3. Let’s read Jude 3-4, although I will only focus on verse 3 today:

**<sup>3</sup> 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.** <sup>4</sup> 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. (Jude 3-4)

## Introduction

In 2007 pastor and author John MacArthur wrote a book

titled, *The Truth War*.<sup>1</sup> In the introduction to his book MacArthur asks, “Who would have thought that people claiming to be Christians—even pastors—would attack the very notion of truth?” Unbelievably, they are.

You may be familiar with a movement in our day known as the “Emerging Church.” This is the name for a worldwide group that is seeking to reform the Church, revamp the way that Christians interact with their culture, and remodel the way we think about truth itself. It is a very postmodern way of thinking.

An article in *Christianity Today* a few years ago featured a story about Rob and Kristen Bell who founded a large and growing Emergent community in Grand Rapids, MI. According to the article, the Bells

found themselves increasingly uncomfortable with the church. “Life in the church had become so small,” Kristen says. “It had worked for me for a long time. Then it stopped working.” The Bells started questioning their assumptions about the Bible itself—“discovering the Bible as a human product,” as Rob puts it, rather than the product of divine fiat. “The Bible is still in the center for us,” Rob says, “but it’s a different kind of center. We want to embrace mystery, rather than conquer it.” “I grew up thinking that we’ve figured out the Bible,” Kristen says, “that we knew what it means. *Now I have no idea what most of it means.* And yet I feel like life is big again—like life used to be black and white, and now it’s in color.”<sup>2</sup>

As John MacArthur notes, “One dominant theme pervades the whole article: in the Emerging Church movement, *truth* (to whatever degree such a concept is even recognized) is assumed to be inherently hazy, indistinct, and uncertain—perhaps even ultimately unknowable.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur, *The Truth War: Fighting for Certainty in an Age of Deception* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2007). I am indebted to MacArthur for much of the material in this sermon series.

<sup>2</sup> Andy Crouch, “The Emergent Mystique,” *Christianity Today*, November 2004, 37-38, emphasis added.

<sup>3</sup> John MacArthur, *The Truth War: Fighting for Certainty in an Age of Deception* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2007), x.

The *Christianity Today* article profiled several of the leaders in the Emerging Church movement. One of the stunning points is that each leader expressed a high level of discomfort with any hint of certainty about what the Bible means, even on something as basic as the gospel itself.

For example, Brian MacLaren, who is regarded as one of the leading figures in the Emerging Church movement, is quoted in the article as saying, “I don’t think we’ve got the gospel right yet. . . . I don’t think the liberals have it right. But I don’t think we have it right either. *None of us has arrived at orthodoxy.*”<sup>4</sup>

In his book titled *A Generous Orthodoxy* MacLaren likens the conventional notion of *orthodoxy* to a claim that we “have the truth captured, stuffed, and mounted on the wall.”<sup>5</sup> In a similar way he disparages systematic theology as an unconscious attempt to “have final orthodoxy nailed down, freeze-dried, and shrink-wrapped forever.”<sup>6</sup>

This kind of thinking is a very popular and *postmodern* approach to certainty and truth.

And although those in the Emerging Church movement are seeking authenticity, we have to say with clarity and conviction that what they are proposing is *not* authentic Christianity. Not knowing what you believe (especially on a matter as crucial as the gospel itself) is by definition a kind of unbelief. As John MacArthur puts it:

Refusing to acknowledge and defend the revealed truth of God is a particularly stubborn and pernicious kind of unbelief. Advocating ambiguity, exalting uncertainty, or otherwise deliberately clouding the truth is a sinful way of nurturing unbelief.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Andy Crouch, “The Emergent Mystique,” *Christianity Today*, November 2004, 37-38, emphasis added.

<sup>5</sup> Brian MacLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing Company, 2004), 293.

<sup>6</sup> Brian MacLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing Company, 2004), 286.

<sup>7</sup> John MacArthur, *The Truth War: Fighting for Certainty in an Age of Deception* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2007), xi.

Every Christian should know and love the truth. The Bible says that one of the key characteristics of “those who are perishing” (i.e., unbelievers on their way to hell) is that “they refused to love the truth and so be saved” (2 Thessalonians 2:10). The clear implication is that a true and genuine love for the truth is built into saving faith. In fact, one of the distinguishing characteristics of every true believer is that he or she is a lover of the truth.

## Lesson

Jude’s letter is a call to Christians to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. In today’s lesson I want to observe the call to contend for the truth against heresy.

### I. Jude’s Original Purpose (3a)

So, first, let’s begin by looking at Jude’s original purpose.

Jude said in verse 3a, **“Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation. . . .”**

Jude addressed his readers as **“beloved.”** The Greek word (*agapetos*) is defined as “one who is in a very special relationship with another.”<sup>8</sup> I mentioned to you previously that Jude had engaged in an itinerant ministry, and so it is quite likely that he personally knew the Christians to whom he was writing. But, even if he did not know them personally, he certainly had a deep and sincere pastoral concern for them. They were in a special relationship with one another because they were brothers and sisters in Christ.

Jude said that he was **very eager to write** to them. The Greek stresses “swiftness of movement or action.”<sup>9</sup> He was anxious to communicate with those whom he loved.

And what was it that he wanted to communicate to them?

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<sup>8</sup> William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 7.

<sup>9</sup> William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 939.

Jude said that he wanted to write **about our common salvation**. He wanted to communicate to his Christian brothers and sisters the glorious truths that bind us all together as brothers and sisters in Christ. Having being converted and transformed by the grace of God he wanted to share with us what it means to know his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ savingly.

One gets the sense of his eagerness and excitement about writing to Christians about the wonderful salvation we all enjoy.

But something happened to him. Something caused him to change his original purpose for writing.

## II. Jude's Revised Purpose (3b)

So, second, let's look at Jude's revised purpose.

Jude said in verse 3b, "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.**"

I want you to notice two facts about Jude's revised purpose.

### A. *Jude Was Compelled to Revise His Purpose for Writing*

First, Jude was compelled to revise his purpose for writing.

Jude said, "**I found it necessary to write. . . .**"

As a traveling minister, and also as one of the leaders of the early Christian Church, Jude would have heard news of what was going on in the many churches that were being planted in the years after Jesus' death and resurrection. And the news coming in to him by the time he wrote this letter was very discouraging.

You may recall that I said that Jude wrote this letter before the Fall of Jerusalem, which took place in 70 A.D. I am increasingly persuaded that the apostle John wrote the book of the Revelation prior to 70 A.D. That being the case, Jude would have heard about false teaching and heresy creeping in to the churches in Asia Minor. Of the seven churches mentioned by John in Revelation, only

two not receive a rebuke (Smyrna and Philadelphia). Five of the churches mentioned in the book of Revelation receive a rebuke:

1. Ephesus—for a loss of first love (2:1-7);
2. Pergamum—for false teaching (2:12-17);
3. Thyatira—for a lack of discernment and a toleration of heresy (2:18-29);
4. Sardis—for dead works (3:1-6); and
5. Laodicea—for being spiritually blind, bankrupt, naked, and lukewarm (3:14-22).

Within a generation of Jesus' death, the church was already being infiltrated by false teaching and heresy. Oh, the church was growing by the thousands. People were coming to faith in Christ. People were being attracted to the message of the gospel. But within a generation there were serious problems in the church.

That is why Jude **found it necessary to write** to Christians to address this very serious problem that was coming in to the church.

### *B. Jude Called Christians to Contend for the Truth*

And second, Jude called Christians to contend for the truth.

Jude said, “I found it necessary to write **appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.**”

The Greek word for “**contend**” (*epagonizomai*) means “to exert intense effort on behalf of something.”<sup>10</sup> The root word is *agon*, from which we get our English word “agonize.” It has to do with a struggle, a trial, or the action of a battle. In fact, the word originally meant “a stadium,” which served as a place of contest. By adding the preposition *ep* in front of the word *agon* served to intensify its meaning. So, Jude called Christians “to fight for, to fight strenuously for, to fight intensely for” the truth.

The apostle Paul used the word with the same root in:

1. 1 Timothy 6:12—“*Fight* the good fight of the faith. . .

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<sup>10</sup> William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 356.

.” Contending involves fighting for the faith, defending the faith, and engaging in a mighty struggle to fight to the death with the forces of error and heresy.

2. Colossians 1:28–2:1—“Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, *struggling* with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. For I want you to know how great a *struggle* I have for you. . . .” Paul was struggling, agonizing, fighting, contending to bring the Colossians to maturity in Christ.

But what exactly did Jude call Christians to contend for?

He said, “I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend **for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.**” Literally, the Greek reads, “the once-for-all-delivered-to-the-saints faith.”

In referring to **the faith** Jude is not referring to our subjective belief. **Faith** here is a noun and not a verb. So, Jude is not referring to our action. Instead, **the faith** refers to an objective body of truth. It is the sum and substance of Christian truth. It is the gospel. It is God’s objective truth that is contained in the Word of God. As John MacArthur puts it:

Rather, **the faith** constitutes the Christian faith, the faith of the gospel, God’s objective truth (i.e., everything pertaining to **our common salvation**).<sup>11</sup>

It is what Luke wrote about in Acts 2:42, where he stated that the very first Christians in Jerusalem “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

The apostle Paul urged young pastor Timothy to protect that body of truth when he wrote to him in 2 Timothy 1:13-14, “Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the

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<sup>11</sup> John MacArthur, *2 Peter and Jude* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2005), 156.



faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.”

Jude called Christians to fight for the truth, to contend for the faith. To manipulate and distort that truth, to mix it with error, is to invite God’s eternal wrath. That is why the apostle Paul so passionately told the Galatians in Galatians 1:9, “As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.”

And the apostle John told his readers in 2 John 9-11, “Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.”

Jude also said that **the faith** was that which **was once for all delivered to the saints**. The Greek word that is translated as **once for all** (*hapax*) refers to “something that is accomplished or completed one time, with lasting results and no need of repetition.”<sup>12</sup> God revealed his truth—the faith—to the prophets and the apostles and their associates. They wrote down what God revealed to them. And this is the body of truth—the faith—which we now have in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

## Conclusion

Let me conclude with three points of application.

### A. *We Live in an Age that is Confused about Truth*

First, we live in an age that is confused about truth. I mentioned the Emerging Church movement in my introduction. That is only a recent example of confusion about truth. Every generation of believers has had to deal with confusion about truth. But that

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<sup>12</sup> John MacArthur, *2 Peter and Jude* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2005), 156.

confusion seems to be growing.

Let me give you another example I heard about recently when I attended the Twin Lakes Fellowship in Florence, MS. Dr. Ligon Duncan read the following to us:

They came by the droves for a chance to win televisions, furniture and used cars, just for showing up to Easter services.

A few lucky winners took home the big prizes. Most left with at least a prize pack with \$300 worth of free goods and services. Some left with nothing. Some left with a new church to call home.

Bay Area Fellowship gave away millions of dollars worth of prizes, including 16 cars, at its Easter services from Thursday through Sunday. Pastor Bil Cornelius' plan to attract potential new members worked—more than 23,500 attended services at Bay Area's main campus in Corpus Christi or its six other branches. The church's average weekly attendance is about 7,000.<sup>13</sup>

I came back and shared with some people what I had heard about this church in Texas. Then someone informed me that a local church had done something very similar the following week. Apparently a local church had given away \$1,000 at each of its services! Now, before you run up to me after this morning's worship service to find out what the name of the local church is, let me tell you that I read that "right now, the church has no definite plans to offer the money again."<sup>14</sup>

It is a sad day when the truth is cheapened by gimmicks.

*B. If You Are a Christian, You Are Called to Contend for the Truth*

Second, if you are a Christian, you are called to contend for the truth. Jude did not write his letter to the other apostles or

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<sup>13</sup> Denise Malan, "23,500 attend church's Easter services featuring 16 free cars, millions in prizes" (<http://www.caller.com/news/2010/apr/04/churchs-giveaway-attracts-thousands/>).

<sup>14</sup> Yolanda Fernandez, "Tampa church gives away cash" (<http://www.caller.com/news/2010/apr/04/churchs-giveaway-attracts-thousands/>).

church leaders. He wrote this letter to Christians. And so he was calling all Christians in all places at all times to contend for the truth.

Like it or not, you and I are in a war. Ever since the Garden of Eden we have been engaged in a battle with the enemy of our souls, the Devil. He will do whatever he can to keep us from the truth. And if we have come to an understanding of the truth, then he will do whatever he can to distort the truth.

So, you are in a war. And you must contend for the truth.

*C. You Must Know the Truth*

And third, you must know the truth.

If you are going to contend for the truth, you must know the truth. If you don't know the truth, then you need to get to know the truth. You need to read the Bible. You need to memorize Scripture. You need to be in a group that meets regularly to study the Bible such as a Adult Christian Education & Fellowship, a Growth Group, or a Bible Study.

God does not deliver his truth to his people in vague, mystical, religious experiences. God has given his truth to his people in his Word, the Scriptures. There is such a thing as a certain body of truth that can be known and apprehended.

God's Word is all-sufficient. It is all that we need in our battle for the truth in a world that is deceived and deluded.

May God help each one of us to believe the truth, love the truth, defend the truth, and contend for the truth. Amen.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and **membership** in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,  
equip them for their **ministry** in the church  
and life **mission** in the world,  
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons)
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**PRAAYER:**

Our Father, thank you for your Word. Thank you that your Word is the word of truth. We don't have to guess at what truth is. You have revealed it to us in the Scriptures.

Help each one of us here today to know the truth, love the truth, defend the truth, and contend for the truth.

And all of this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

**To you who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ:**

**May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. Amen.**