

## Our Great Guardian of the Soul Jude

### Introduction:

*Often in life, we hear the words, either from loved ones or friends, "Is such and such a thing really worth fighting for? Will it really bring the peace, fulfilment, and happiness that we think it might bring, if we continue to pursue and fight for it?" Often this kind of a statement is made, when issues such as time, money, and physical health and energy are involved. Well, more often than not, we take this advice, and prefer to give up on our private moral crusades, and pay that fine, or take no further action in what we thought was a worthy cause or course of action. Of course, there are examples of those rare individuals who have pursued their private moral crusades to the very end, and as a result, have blessed themselves, and in many cases, have blessed many others with results that have contributed to the wider society as well, especially on issues such as domestic violence and abuse, as well as law reform. In our passage today, Jude is equally convinced that there is something worth fighting for to the very end, which will not only prove a blessing to those involved, but will also prove to be a blessing to those who have decided to wander from the truth, that was once and for all entrusted to God's holy people. Let us now examine this thought under three headings.*

### 1. A Most Extraordinary Introduction (verses 1-2)

*First of all, we encounter a most extraordinary introduction to Jude's short letter in his opening two verses of this letter. To begin with, if Jude, together with James, is a brother to our Lord Jesus Christ, then why begin this letter in this way? Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ, and a brother of James. And when we compare this opening with the book of James itself, we find the same kind of opening, when James says: "A servant of God, and of the Lord Jesus Christ." (Matt. 13:55). Neither of the brothers capitalize on that family relationship with Jesus, in order to write with, or to appeal to, the issue of authority. They could have said, "a brother of the Lord Jesus Christ." Surely that would have carried all the weight in the world!! But rather, they called themselves "servants" of the Lord Jesus Christ, which would have the reverse effect of exalting the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as drawing attention to his divinity, Lordship, and power. But what we must remember, is that when representing Christ, a slave or bondservant was an honourable and authoritative position in its own right, used by Paul at Romans 1:1; and Peter at 2 Peter 1:1, both before the reference to "apostle" in each instance. In the Old Testament, figures like Moses, Joshua, David, and Elijah, were called "servants of the Lord." Then Jude uses a cluster of three terms, typical of this book, when he then speaks of his readers as "called", and "loved" by God the Father, and "kept" by Jesus Christ, in order to set his readers apart from the false teachers who have secretly slipped in among them, in order to take them away from the faith. Let us never forget, that we are first of all "called" into the faith that we possess, when Jesus said at John 15:16: "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and appointed you, that you should go forth and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain." Secondly, that process is made possible because we have been "loved" by the father, and finally, we are "kept" by, in, or for Jesus Christ (the Greek preposition can carry all three meanings), as we await our final salvation at the second coming of Jesus Christ. And so, full security is ours, if we keep our faith within the truth already given. Then in verse 2, Jude gives us a unique*

greeting, with the words, "Mercy, peace, and love be yours in abundance." First of all, this is the only greeting in a New Testament letter that does not mention the word "grace" (although this may be covered by the word "mercy"), and it is the only one that mentions "love" in its greeting. As a possible solution to this greeting, it could be a link to the triad of verse 1 - (God's call brings mercy, His love surrounds His people, and his keeping power brings peace ). Or it could be read as a Trinitarian formula (God the Father brings mercy, the Son effects peace, and the Spirit gives love). Or, as a third possibility, it may reflect the call upon the Christian's life at verses 20-21, where the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ finally brings us to eternal life, as we keep ourselves in the Father's love, and build ourselves up in our most holy faith, by praying in the Holy Spirit. Finally, "mercy" may have been given the predominate position in this opening benediction, because it is not only God's "mercy" that calls us into his most marvellous grace, but it is finally "mercy" that will not only save us as sinners, but it is God's "mercy" that must be offered to others as well in order that they too may be snatched from the fire, in order to experience God's love in Christ. Never let us forget the challenge of Micah 6:8 = He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, and love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. Often we appeal to the last part of this verse as our standard brand of spirituality, to walk humbly with our God, but how often do we pursue the first half of this verse - to act justly, and love mercy?

## **2. The Real Purpose for Writing Illustrated (verses 3-16)**

As we come to the centre of this short letter, we discover Jude's real purpose in writing in verses 3-4. In these verses, Jude would rather have written a positive letter about "the salvation we share", but like a good pastor and Shepherd of the sheep, he focuses on the wolves that have secretly slipped into the church, and as a result, are threatening the flock from within. And so, this is not a case of persecution from outside. And at this point, Jude's main concern in verse 3 is to urge his readers to "contend" for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people. The word "contend" means to exert intense effort. The word was applied to athletic contests, such as wrestling matches. The Faith that was once and for all entrusted to God's holy people underlines a fixed and recognized body of teaching, focusing on the finality of God's revelation in Christ, handed down through Christ and the Apostles. And so mental effort is needed to understand and teach God's Word aright, and moral effort is required to apply that understanding to every day behaviour. The behaviour of these false teachers is also outlined in 2 Peter 2, and their condemnation, written about long ago, may refer to a passage like Jude 14-15 quoting 1 Enoch 1:9. Jude describes these false teachers in verse 4 as ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality, and deny Jesus Christ as our only Sovereign and Lord. Jude then backs up his argument with three examples from the Old Testament which show that status by itself is no guarantee of salvation. First, Israel was delivered from Egypt, but unbelievers died in the wilderness. Therefore, don't think that because God has decisively rescued us from sins our that we can presume on his grace and mercy. Secondly, angels (possibly referring to Genesis 6:1-4; cf. 2 Peter 2:4), have a special calling from God, yet those who were disobedient met sure punishment. Thirdly, Sodom and Gomorrah (2 Peter 2:6-8) were cities of the promised land, with God's servants in them, and yet they were destroyed because of sexual immorality and perversion practiced there. The judgment visited on Sodom and Gomorrah with its lingering sulphurous odours, smoke, and desolate appearance, was a judgment that foreshadows a far worse judgement according to Jude, of the punishment of eternal fire. Then in verse 8, Jude applies the three examples in verse 5-7, to three ways in which the false teachers were sinning. In the same way, on the

strength of their dreams, which possibly means that they claimed to receive some of their teaching through visions, they practiced these sins. (1) First, they polluted their own bodies, following examples 2 and 3. (2) Secondly, they rejected authority, following all three examples. (3) Thirdly, they heaped abuse on celestial beings (angels). Here we may contrast in verse 9 the actions of the archangel Michael, when disputing with the devil about the body of Moses. This particularly follows example 3. Michael is known from the Book of Daniel (10:13,21;12:1) and Revelation 12:7 as the leader of the Heavenly Host. The Apocryphal Assumption of Moses tells how Michael was sent to bury Moses. The devil opposed him, claiming that Moses' body, as a material object, belonged to him. But even here, Michael simply responded with the words of Zech 3:2: "The Lord rebuke you." And so his behaviour contrasts strongly with that of the false teachers. The Sodomites also disrespected angels who were visiting Lot. Then elaborating on the third example, verse 10 tells us that they slander what they don't even understand, and the very things they do understand by instinct, as irrational animals do, will destroy them. Their sexual sins are out of control, and they no longer have any moral compass. Then in verses 11-16, Jude in verse 11 compares the false teachers to three further examples of notorious Old Testament sinners whom God judged. Cain, Balaam, and Korah, illustrating the sins of jealousy, leading to the first murder, greed, and pride. This is then followed up in verses 12-13 where Jude cites four examples from everyday life and nature, emphasizing their inability to make good on promises and their instability. After stating that they are "blemishes" (or hidden reefs) on your love feasts, and shepherds who feed themselves, the four examples from everyday life and nature include "clouds" without rain, "autumn trees" without fruit and uprooted - twice dead (both spiritually and physically), "wild waves" of the sea, foaming in their shame, only producing deadwood and debris on the shore, and "wandering stars" for whom the blackest darkness has been reserved forever. Finally, Enoch (seventh in line from Adam), prophesied judgment against them, and Jude concludes this section in verse 16 with a further four sins against these false teachers. They are grumblers and faultfinders from the exodus story, they follow their own evil desires, they boast about themselves, and flatter others for their own advantage.

### **3. The Call to Persevere, Save, and be Kept from falling (verses 17-25)**

Finally, the Christian anti-dote to false teaching and waywardness is to oppose natural desires and instincts with life lived in the Holy Spirit, and prayer. And as a frame to the exhortation at verse 3 to "contend for the faith", Jude concludes on a similar note in verses 20-21 to "build yourselves up" in your most holy faith, and keep yourselves in God's love, as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. This is far from a passive, arm-chair style of Christian faith, and must provide a balance to the keeping power of God, the Guardian of our souls, in the concluding doxology to follow. Further, we are called to extend the hand of mercy to those who doubt, and save others by snatching them from the fire, and finally, to show mercy to those who are caught in doctrinal error, without at the same time being stained by the clothing of their false and enticing sins. Now we can fully see why "mercy" stood in the predominate position in Jude's opening greeting in verse 2 of this letter, where he asked that mercy, peace, and love, be ours in abundance. Finally we may see this call for "mercy" illustrated in the Parable of the Good Samaritan at Luke 10:25-37, when Jesus finally put the question to the expert in the Law, about who finally proved "to be neighbour" to the man who was beaten and robbed. The answer came back to Jesus, "the one who showed mercy", to which Jesus replied, "Go and do likewise." Love of God and mercy toward neighbour, stand at the heart of authentic Christian faith.

**Conclusion:-**

*Finally, Jude concludes with a powerful word of reassurance to his readers and to us. It is a doxology of praise "to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you before His glorious presence without fault, and with great joy (verse 24). What an incredible promise that though we fight against heresy and immoral living, it is God who keeps us and protects us. And although false teachers and treacherous temptations are all around us, we need not be afraid, if we trust in God and are grounded in him. God is the Guardian of our souls. Let us thank Him for this today. Amen.*