

CHRISTIANS MUST CONTEND FOR THE FAITH

Christianity was born in a crucible of controversy. Real flesh and blood men bravely crisscrossed the pagan Roman world, preaching the gospel. They planted congregations of Christians in every community that would receive them. They encountered hostile enemies without and subtle deceivers within. Either of which would surely have destroyed the infant church had they not boldly resisted their assaults. The little epistle of Jude is a classical defense of the true faith of Christ. The author urges the disciples to rally in defense of the sacred cause of Jesus against false teachers. "I was constrained to write unto you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in privily...ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (Jude 3-4). In these words we see the following lessons:

I. The Faith is Something Which is Delivered to Us. Our faith was passed down to us from past generations. We did not discover its great principles and truths all by ourselves. The Christian faith originated with Jesus. He then entrusted it to his apostles (Heb. 2:3-4). The Holy Spirit brought to their remembrance all he had said to them (John 14:26). The apostles first taught and then recorded "the faith" in their books and epistles and placed it in the hands of the various congregations. The things they wrote were the commandments of the Lord (I Cor. 14:37). Loyal churches continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42).

Each Christian has the duty to teach and protect the faith and pass it on to the coming generation. This principle has always been true. Moses taught Israel to "make them (God's truths) known unto thy children and they children's children" (Deut. 4:9). We continually look back to the stream of truth which flows down to us from ancient Jerusalem (Is. 2:3).

II. Our Faith Was Delivered Once and For All. The Christian faith is an unchangeable commodity. It is permanent and enduring. It never needs revision as men's creeds do. It is always relevant, never obsolete. These facts are true because of its divine origin. Jesus is the author and perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:2). He is eternal and unchanging (Heb. 13:8) and so is his word (Matt. 24:35). Christianity is a completed system and allows no additions or deletions. We are forbidden to go beyond what is written (I Cor. 4:6 ASV). Those who go beyond the doctrine of Christ have not God (II John 10). Curses rest upon those who either add to or take from the faith of Jesus (Rev. 22:18-19). Such writings as the **Book of Mormon, the Watchtower, Science and Health With a Key to the Scriptures**, and those of Ellen G. White are excluded and condemned as spurious.

III. The Christian Faith Was Entrusted to God's Saints. Saints are those who are saved by Jesus and members of his church. The Corinthians Christians were addressed as saints (I Cor. 1:1-2). They were sanctified when they were washed in the name of the Lord Jesus (I Cor. 6:11). We are washed in the name of Christ when we are baptized to wash away our sins (Acts 22:16). The faith is not the exclusive possession of any one individual or group. Anyone, anywhere, with a Bible in hand can know and do God's will and be acceptable to him. Scripture is not of private interpretation (II Pet. 1:20-21). Nor is it the private property of any church such as the Roman Catholic Church. God has given every saint the sacred privilege and responsibility to study the faith, teach and defend it. When the early brethren were scattered abroad, they went everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:1-4). Selfish men would seek to restrict these privileges to a professional clergy.

IV. The Faith of Christ Must be Defended. Paul was set for the defense of the gospel (Phil. 1:16). Our faith is always under fire by unbelievers, false teachers and hedonists. Sadly the church suffers from heretics within her midst. Every Christian should be a defender of the faith. Each one should be ready to give an answer to any man that asks a reason for his/her hope (I Pet. 3:15). All must be prepared to fight the good fight of faith (I Tim. 6:12). We must prepare ourselves to defend the faith against the hosts of wicked spirits in heavenly places (Eph. 6:12). There are such enemies as militant atheism, evolutionary dogma and the promoters of immorality such as homosexuality, pornography and abortion. There are heathen religions and denominations and cults with which must contend. We must also be concerned about those who attack church or seek to corrupt her with their own ideas and opinions. We must oppose both legalism and liberalism within the church.

Our methods of defense are numerous. Men must be trained to both preach and teach the truth in love (Eph.4:15). We need soldiers to write tracts and articles, letters to editors and books setting forth the case for the Lord's true gospel. We need to talk about God's ways in our daily associations, whether at home or at work (Deut. 6:6-9). Capable men are needed to publicly engage the enemy on the forensic platform (Prov. 25:9). Elders must exercise careful oversight to protect their congregations against false teachers (Tit. 3:10).

We are blind and foolish if we think we are immune to the poison of false doctrine. Only those willing to contend for the faith will survive the conflict.

Kings and queens of England wear as one of their titles, "Defender of the faith," but this honor is not for them alone. Each soul that wears the name Christian is privileged to contend earnestly for the holy faith of Jesus. JHW