

## CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH

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*"And exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints."* Jude, verse 3.

In the latter days of Peter and of Jude terrible evils sprang up in the professing church of Christ; evils which were contrary to the gospel, which bore no relation to the principles and practices of vital godliness; and Peter and Jude were raised up by God to bear their testimony against these evils and, as here, to exhort to an earnest contention for the "faith which was once delivered unto the saints." You remember that when the apostle Paul was speaking to the elders of the church of Ephesus at Miletus he warned them of things which would shortly come to pass in their history; for he said to them that there would arise, even from themselves, after his departure, "grievous wolves....not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." but that was not only true of the church at Ephesus, but from the testimony of Jude, who wrote to all the churches, it is evident that the canker had spread through the churches, bringing dishonour upon the Name of Christ and causing confusion and impoverishment of spirit among the godly. Therefore the apostle was led to express himself as he does in this epistle.

These things are evident still today. In the professing churches, speaking generally, what terrible evils are sanctioned under the name of Christianity: errors and practices which are absolutely contrary to the teaching of the word of God and the experience of the children of God; while in the churches professing the doctrines of grace there are evident signs which make the words of the apostle to be necessary even in our day, for how little light or love, or power, or discernment, or contention for right things there is. Coldness and apathy seem to have settled upon us, so that it cannot be said that the words I have read for a text are unnecessary. They were necessary then; they are necessary today.

Jude, in commencing his epistle, refers to himself as a servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James. He reckoned it a greater honour to be a servant of Christ than a brother of James; and indeed it was, for there is no greater honour that a man can have in this life than to be a servant or disciple of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. You may have noticed that Solomon, when he commences that book of Ecclesiastes, does so by saying: "The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem." Now if men, actuated merely by human reason, had commenced that book, they would have put the order in reverse; they would have put the "king in Jerusalem" as the title of eminence; they would have spoken probably of being the son of David, while to be a preacher would have been, in their estimation, the very least that could be said. But not so the children of God; not so the servants of Christ. Whatever natural blessings they may possess, whatever offices they may fill, there is nothing greater than this, to be a servant of Christ, a minister of the gospel, a child of God; for this has the promise of the life to come.

Jude realised that the things that he was about to give utterance to would be in the nature of a trial to God's people, for they would fear, with hearts as deceitful as they knew them to be, that they, like others, though armed, would turn back in the day of battle and dishonour their profession. The Saviour said to Peter: "Will ye also go away?" And that word has come with some application to us. We have feared, as Newton has expressed it, that we should prove as faithless and fickle as they were.

In order to fortify their spirits, and to give them direction in the matter of this exercise, he refers to their standing in the covenant of God's grace. He speaks of them as "sanctified by God the Father, preserved in Jesus Christ, and called." Now if the child of God has an interest in the grace of God in election, in the redeeming work of God's dear Son, and is the subject of the Holy Spirit's operations, whatever the nature of the trials through which he may pass, and whatever fears may possess his mind, nothing can ever destroy his standing in a "covenant ordered in all things and sure." It is a wonderful mercy to be enabled in times of stress and anxiety to go back to the realities

of covenant grace. For these the apostle desired mercy and peace to be multiplied. He knew that the living people of God were possessors of this blessing, but he wished for them a gracious increase, and these mercies are the fruits of God's favour towards His people in their souls.

In these two passages, the first and the second verses, we have a reference incidentally to the doctrine of the Trinity twice mentioned; for the sanctifying of the Father, preservation in Christ, the calling of the Spirit, is also traced to the mercy of God in Christ, and the peace which flows from an experience of the Saviour's atoning sacrifice and the love which the Spirit of God imparts to and maintains in the hearts of His people. I never like to overlook a reference to the Trinity, because all true religion is built upon this fundamental truth. What is religion apart from the Trinity? What is it indeed? It is simply nothing, it is empty, it is uncertain, it is sure to come to utter confusion. But where the Trinity is in our hearts, in the truth of the gospel, we have that by which we may be assured that at last we shall be found among His people, debtors to His grace.

In the first part of the verse that I have read for a text, he speaks to them as "beloved" when he says: "I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation," for he felt it needful that he should so write to them; for Jude could not discharge his ministerial duty and responsibility without diligence. Diligence is ever necessary in the service of Christ; but is not diligence also necessary in our hearers? Our heartless, formal, uninterested hearing of the word is unprofitable to us. We need a gracious diligence in our souls to give attention to the things that are spoken, to compare them with Scripture, and according to the analogy of faith seek God's blessing to prosper what is spoken to our soul's present and eternal welfare; for the soul of the diligent shall be made fat; and Peter says: "Giving all diligence to make your calling and election sure."

Now, seeing that these terrible evils were in the church of Christ, and were there for the trial of faith, this is the word of exhortation to them: "That ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." In this exhortation, as I see it, there are two things: the matter of the contention, and the nature of it.

In the first place, the matter or the subject of the contention - the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. That is to say, the apostle exhorted to hold fast and profess and maintain the glory of gospel truth in its authority and in its application to the souls of His people. It was necessary then; it is necessary today. But the exhortation is full. It may assist us if we look at the subject matter of the contention, word for word, or at least, thought for thought. In the first place we have here the faith that was the matter of the contention; nothing else but that which belonged to the faith. In the New Testament this expression is applicable either to the doctrine of faith or the grace of faith; and here it is applicable to both; and indeed where the latter is the other must be of necessity. The Scriptures speak of the gospel, the word of faith, as the "mystery of faith", "the gospel of your salvation"; and the gospel of Jesus Christ in all its gracious simplicity and fulness and blessedness, is the only gospel that a believing sinner can fully receive into his heart in the power of that faith which the Spirit gives and exercises toward it. And indeed that faith which is saving in its nature, which is given of the Holy Ghost, which is exercised by His gracious teaching, must have a foundation upon which to build; it must have a "Thus saith the Lord" for its warrant. We dare not build upon the sandy foundation of our own notions; we dare not profess to build, as to salvation, upon the word of a man. We must have God's Word in our conscience, and it must be of such a nature as to warrant our trust in a precious Christ. Nothing less than this will meet our need. The Object of our faith must be suitable to our case as guilty, undone sinners. It must be adapted to our impotency, our unworthiness, and our helplessness; and it must be sufficient to warrant our soul's salvation and everlasting happiness in the Person and work of Christ.

Now where can such a gospel be found in this world? Nowhere, except in the Person and work, grace and truth of our adorable Redeemer, which is presented to us in the word of faith. Here is the only gospel that can meet the cases and supply the necessities of perishing and exercised sinners; and it is their mercy that as faith is brought into exercise the word of faith is presented unctuously to them to build upon. Here, in the word of faith we have a testimony to God's love to His people in the

acceptable gift of His dear Son to take the room and place of His people, procuring salvation for them. The word of faith testifies to the substitution of Christ in the place of the sinner, the acceptance and justification of the sinner in the imputed righteousness of Christ. The word of faith speaks of the efficacy of the blood of Christ, the satisfactory character of His sacrifice, so that that sacrifice for sin never needs again to be repeated because its efficacy, like its Author, ever remains; for in the word of faith there is everything that His people need. It embraces every blessing which will carry a child of God safely through life and in death preserve him from its sting and land his soul with God. There is nothing that is wanting in the word of faith to minister to the encouragement of believing souls to venture their all upon Christ Who is able to save even to the uttermost.

The word of faith is contrary to the law, for the law of God can never save a guilty sinner, neither can the notions of men ever minister relief to the soul that has been pricked or cut to his heart by the arrows of conviction. The word of faith is distinct from the law of God which, when it is applied by the Spirit of God, cuts us down, robs us of our props, and takes away our prospects of heaven through our own works. It brings us low, and lays us at His footstool helpless, lost and undone. But the apostle has a very beautiful word in writing to the Galatian believers. He is speaking about the law being a "schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, and this is what he says: "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come we are no longer under a schoolmaster." (Gal. III, 24, 25.) When the word of faith enters the conscience with authority and gracious influence, and the principle of faith is exercised upon it, then we have liberty in the truth, in the forgiveness of our sins, and in the robe of Christ's righteousness as our salvation.

Then the apostle speaks here not only of faith, but he has two expressions which are very significant, the first of which is: "which was once *delivered* unto the saints." That is a wonderful discovery of truth, the faith delivered unto the saints. It was first of all delivered to Christ, and Christ delivered it to His apostles, commissioning them to preach the gospel of the grace of God,

the only truth which, in the power of God's Holy Spirit, can save the sinner. Hence the apostle, when writing to the church at Ephesus, speaks of the saints as being "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone." (Eph. II 20.), by which the apostle intended to show that the prophets bore testimony to Christ, and the apostles preached only those truths which were given them by Christ to preach. And when the apostle wrote to the Corinthian Church about the order of the Lord's Supper he said to them that he delivered unto them that which he had received of the Lord Jesus. Now that was not peculiar to the Lord's Supper. It belonged to every part of the truth, for the gospel preached by the apostles was what was delivered to them, and they spoke of it to the people.

It is delivered still to the saints; that is, those saints whom God the Spirit has called out of nature's darkness, uniting them in faith to the Person and work of Christ, setting them apart as vessels of mercy, as trophies of grace, devoted to the fear and service of Christ; to these the Spirit of God is pleased to deliver the faith, here a little, there a little, line upon line, precept upon precept. We are not capable of receiving all the truth at once. It must be unctuously and graciously applied to our souls as we are enabled to bear it; and mercifully the Spirit does give us grace to receive it. He does, by His discipline, bring us into places where we can, with gratitude and in faith, receive what is delivered by the Spirit, often through the ministry, to our souls.

What do we know about receiving what is delivered to us? Has anything been delivered with a "thus saith the Lord" to our souls? Have we been blessed to receive into our affections believingly those things which are spoken? If we have, it has done something for us, for, as the apostle says in his Epistle to the Romans: "God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you." (Rom. vi. 17.) If the gospel has been delivered to us unctuously it has done something for us; it has wrought in our hearts that grace by which our trust is placed alone in the Lord Jesus Christ, and we seek to know and do His will.

The other expression which I said is significant is: "the faith

which was once delivered unto the saints." In the Old Testament dispensation the purpose of God concerning His dear Son and a New Testament church were gradually unfolded to the Jewish nation; but now Christ is come, and God has spoken to the Church by His Son in these last times, the gospel is once and for all delivered to the church, to every individual member of Christ's mystical body. There is no question of the gospel being supplemented at different periods in the history of the church by men uninspired of God the Holy Spirit. Modernists would teach us that there is more light and understanding in respect to what is truth than ever there was. Well, if there is light it is but from sparks of their own kindling; and if it is knowledge it is not the knowledge of Christ and Him crucified of which they speak; for when the doctrine or word of faith was delivered to the saints, it was once and for all delivered. There is no necessity for it to be supplemented, for no addition to the word of faith can ever make the salvation of a child of God more sure and certain than it is. Hath He said, and shall He not do it? because there are no deficiencies in the faith once delivered to the saints, there is no necessity for anything to supplement it, no additional light of human reason, for the Scriptures are self-evidencing by the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Let us hold fast to this, that the gospel of our salvation has been delivered to us once and for all, and that no further addition is necessary; for the word of truth is able to make wise unto salvation, and this truth is the only truth that God the Holy Spirit will bless.

In the exhortation we have, in the next place, the nature of it; the word exhorts us earnestly to contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints. There is, of course, a great deal of contention which is unnecessary. It is often nothing more than a striving after the flesh. A contentious spirit is never profitable to its possessor. But that does not mean that there is to be no contention for the faith once delivered to the saints. Men may contend about words and about things but the only contention justifiable in the Scriptures is that which has relation to the glory of Christ in the gospel of His grace, and this contention springs not from the flesh but from the Spirit. Where the fear of God is in living exercise we shall be concerned for the glory of Christ in His truth, and everything which is contrary to that we can but

frown upon, and contend for that which puts the crown upon the Saviour's head. If the Lord has blessed us with a gracious experience of the truth and we know what our sinnership is, and know what has translated us from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God's dear Son, we shall have to contend for that truth which is the only remedy that has met our case. To have experience of the grace and mercy of God in the redemption of our souls will make us feel, as John Kent expresses it:

"Triumphant grace and man's freewill  
Shall ne'er divide the throne;  
For man's a fallen sinner still,  
And Christ shall reign alone."

This contention for the faith is in this sense: the believer is exhorted to contend for it as being vitally essential to salvation. No child of God can ever admit that any part of the gospel plan is unessential, that we could do without repentance, that we could do without confession, that we could do without supplication, that we could do without faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. These things, with others of a kindred nature, are vital to the glory of Christ in His truth. We do not say that everything in "the faith" is essential to salvation, but we do say that there is nothing that is unimportant. For instance, it is not essential to salvation that a believer should be baptized, but it is certainly important that he should be; it is necessary to yield obedience to the Saviour's will and to express the love which we trust we feel. But beware of that influence or suggestion which would say of anything in the truth that it is unimportant. Its counsels, its precepts, its admonitions, its warnings, its prohibitions, as well as its sanctions, are all important to the promotion of vital and practical godliness in the soul. So while we can never contend for good works as the foundation of a sinner's hope, we must contend for them as evidencing that there is life in the root of our religion, for it is "by their fruits ye shall know them."

But how may a child of God contend earnestly for the faith? Certainly it is to be in all tenderness and prayerfulness. A harsh

contention for the truth defeats its own end, but the tenderness of grace in the soul, prayerfulness for divine influence and teaching, help and blessing, are necessary to give us wisdom and strength and ability rightly to contend for it. It is not only the work of the ministry to do so; it belongs equally to all God's people. There is not a child of God that is released from the responsibility. In a profession of his faith, in a godly consistency of life, in soberness of word, in uprightness of spirit, in a gracious tenderness in the fear of God, he does by word and by example, contend for those things which God in His grace has delivered to the saints. But O, the needs-be for grace! for it requires in us a willingness to suffer reproach, to suffer the stigma of being narrow-minded, obsolete and antiquated. But let men say what they may, if the truth of God is in us, may we ever contend for it, for God will defend His own truth and supply the needs of His people.

The exhortation is necessary. We grow weary in well-doing. Many a time I have felt in my heart: "I will not make mention of Him nor speak any more in His Name"; (Jer. xx. 9.) but then His word is as a fire in our bones and we cannot refrain, but must contend for these things. You may feel, in a private capacity, how much easier it would be, and what peace it would create, (as it is suggested to you), if you took an easier line of things, if you allowed things which your conscience condemns, and if you browbeat your conscience into believing that, after all, it is not essential, it is not important. But my friends, this exhortation belongs to you. It is not thus that we get peace in our conscience, it is not thus that we get the approbation of God, when we walk contrary to Him. But seek, in the fear of His Name and because of the truth, so to contend for these things, and God will be with you to bless you and to do you good. We really need to be like Nehemiah's men who laboured with a trowel in one hand and with a sword in the other; and you have this in this Epistle: "Building up yourselves on your most holy faith", this is what Jude exhorts to, as well as with the sword of the Spirit, "to contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."

May God add His blessing for His Name's sake.