

# The Message of Jude

by G. Campbell Morgan

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of contending for the faith, defined as the whole system of truth centered in Jesus Christ, and provides practical guidance on how to do so through passionate and determined effort, constant loyalty, ceaseless caution, and courage and confidence.*

**Scripture:** Jude 1:3-4, Jude 1:12

**Topics:** "Apostasy", "Contending for the Faith"

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## Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes the urgent message of Jude regarding the peril of apostasy, defining it as a moral failure rather than mere intellectual doubt. He illustrates the nature of apostasy through examples from Israel, angels, Sodom and Gomorrah, and figures like Cain, Balaam, and Korah, highlighting the consequences of turning away from faith. Morgan calls for a passionate and determined effort to contend for the faith, urging believers to build themselves up, pray, and remain in God's love while helping others in doubt. The sermon concludes with a powerful doxology, reminding the church of the importance of loyalty, caution, and confidence in defending the truth centered in Christ. Ultimately, Morgan asserts that true faith is demonstrated through a life of obedience and commitment to God's will.

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## Transcript

### A. THE PERMANENT VALUES

#### I. The Central Teaching. The Peril of Apostasy

##### i. Apostasy defined.

##### a. Its Character. (Verse 4.)

##### b. Its Characteristics. (Verses 12, 16, 19.)

##### ii. Illustrations of its Nature and Issue.

##### a. Israel. Unbelief. Destruction.

##### b. Angels. Rebellion. Kept in Bonds.

##### c. Sodom and Gomorrah. Fornication. Age-abiding Fire.

d. Cain. Self-righteousness.

e. Balaam. Greed.

f. Korah. Presumption.

Note.--All these contrary to Faith.

II. The Abiding Appeal

i. The inclusive Command. (Verse 3.)

a. Passionate and determined Effort.

b. The Abandon and Cautiousness of the Athlete. (Verses 20-23.)

ii. The Exposition.

a. Keep yourselves.

Building.

Praying.

Looking.

b. "Some." . . .

ii. The Inspiration. The Doxology.

B. THE LIVING MESSAGE

I. To the Church

The Faith for which we are to contend.

i. The System of Truth.

ii. That Truth centred in a Person.

iii. That Truth operating in Grace.

II. To the Individual

The Contending which defends the Truth.

i. Constant Loyalty.

ii. Ceaseless Caution.

iii. Courageous Confidence.

This letter is one of the briefest of the New Testament writings; but it is by no means unimportant. It is characterized by great and grave solemnity, making appeal to "them that are called, beloved in God the

Father, and kept for Christ Jesus." It is catholic, and has perpetual application to the people of God.

Its purpose is evident. We have to spend no time in seeking to discover its message; it is in itself a definite message. Its solemnity is increased by the fact that the writer declares that whereas he had purposed writing on an entirely different subject, he turned aside from that original purpose, in view of the urgency of the need, as he saw it, for solemn warning.

Glancing at the early verses of the letter, let us notice first the reason for the writing; secondly, his own declared purpose in writing; and then, before turning to the statement of the message, let us notice the method he adopted in the writing.

The reason is declared in verse four; there were certain "ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." When Jude was giving all diligence, that is, making careful preparation, to write a treatise on the subject of our common salvation, there was borne in upon his spirit the necessity for writing this letter, because there were certain men within the circle of the Church, who had crept in privily, and were being received and listened to, and whose influence was affecting the life of Christian people. They were "turning the grace of our Lord into lasciviousness, and denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ."

Jude gave with equal clearness the purpose for which he wrote the letter in the words, "I was constrained to write unto you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints."

The method of the letter is that of giving illustrations of apostasy, showing its nature and results; and also instructions for fidelity.

Here again, in another way, and from another view-point, and with other emphasis, the great theme is that of the Hebrew letter, the two great values of which were the revelation of the perils of apostasy, of how death comes through apostasy; and of the powers of faith, how the righteous man lives by his faith. The same two underlying thoughts are in this brief letter.

The central teaching of the letter is that of the peril of apostasy.

Apostasy is first defined as to its character and its characteristics. Secondly, illustrations of its nature and issue are given; Israel, Angels, Sodom and Gomorrah, Cain, Balaam, Korah.

The abiding appeal consists of an inclusive command; an exposition thereof; and finally an inspirational Doxology.

The central teaching has to do with apostasy; which is first defined.

When I speak of apostasy being defined, I am referring of course to apostasy within the Christian faith and fact. The illustrations are taken from the Scriptures and history of the Hebrew people; consequently they touch the underlying principle, rather than the immediate fact of the apostasy of which Jude was afraid as he wrote this letter to Christian people.

Apostasy is not finally intellectual; it is volitional; but it is closely united with the intellectual. It may be very difficult for us to say whether apostasy from Christ, the denial of faith, the turning of the back upon the Lord Himself, begins with intellectual doubt, or moral declension. If I were asked personally for an opinion

which I shall only give as a personal opinion-I should be inclined to say that the very order in which Jude has stated it is a revelation of the order in which it happens. First some moral declension, some disobedience to the Lord Himself, some turning of the grace of God into lasciviousness, the outcome of which is some denial of the Lord and Master Himself. My own conviction is that heresy within the Church is almost invariably the outcome of disloyalty to the teaching of the Lord at some point in the life. When a man turns the grace of God into lasciviousness, when he consents to act upon the idea that because he stands in grace, therefore his conduct is of very little moment, he is apostatizing. That is the most terrible of all apostasies. There have been periods when that apostasy has been formulated into a definite doctrine ; the antinomian heresy declared that because a man is in Christ he cannot be lost. and therefore it matters little what his conduct may be, because nothing he can do can sever as between Christ and himself. That is apostasy in its worst form. No man can hold that doctrine without denying the Lord and Master. That is to deny everything for which He stood ; to deny the real meaning and purpose of His dying, to deny the whole purpose of His heart, as He came to destroy the works of the Devil, in order to make possible to man a life of purity, to save man not merely from the punishment of sin, but from sin itself. To continue in sin that grace may abound is to deny the perfection of His Person ; the passion of His heart that bore Him through the Cross ; and His purpose for the establishment of the Kingdom of God in righteousness and holiness through the whole world.

Doubt is not apostasy. I believe there are a great many who, passing through a period of honest doubt and difficulty and inquiry in the presence of the great mystery of our Lord's Person, do not apostatize because they remain true to the measure of light they have, and they do not turn the grace of God into lasciviousness. In other words, apostasy, according to this first definition and whole argument, is not intellectual mistake, but moral failure on the part of those who name the name of Christ.

In verses twelve, sixteen, and nineteen, we have the characteristics of apostasy; they each begin with the same words. Perhaps there is no more forceful passage in the whole of the New Testament than that of verses twelve and thirteen. It is figurative but graphic. Reading it, one is conscious of the awfulness of apostasy. In verses sixteen and nineteen we have a description of those who apostatize, what they are in themselves, and what they do in the assemblies.

Between the declaration of the character of apostasy and the description of its characteristics, we have a series of very startling illustrations. In Israel the form of apostasy was that of unbelief; and the issue of it was that they were destroyed. The nature of the apostasy of Angels was rebellion; they kept not their proper habitation, they moved out of their God-appointed orbit; choosing for themselves, they wandered out of bounds; and the issue was that they are kept in bonds. They wandered out of the bounds of His law, and therefore they are kept in bonds, reserved in darkness until the final day. Sodom and Gomorrah afford a startling illustration, in its recognition of the solemn fact that there light is given in some measure to every nation and man, and that men are judged by God according to the light they have. The apostasy of Sodom and Gomorrah consisted in their giving themselves over to all manner of lust and fornication. The issue was that of the age-abiding fire.

Then three persons are given as illustrations; Cain who was self-righteous; Balaam whose sin was greed; and Korah whose sin was presumption. All these are contrary to faith.

Go over the ground again. In the first illustration it is plainly stated, the sin of unbelief. The angels when they left their first estate, their proper habitation, did so as the result of unbelief. In the case of Sodom and Gomorrah it was failure of faith. The sensual life is the opposite of the life of faith. Sodom and Gomorrah,

when they gave themselves to fornication, were answering the clamouring call of the carnal and sensual which is always a contradiction to faith. Cain's attitude was devoid of faith; his was the self-righteous attitude of life. Balaam's attitude was in contradiction to faith. In a sense Balaam had faith; he had belief intellectually. He failed in faith in that he did not obey. So also with Korah's presumption.

Where faith fails, morality fails. I pray you interpret that word morality in its widest sense, not as it is interpreted by the man in the street or by the magazine writer. The immorality of the angels was the denial of the government of God, and rebellion against it. Wherever you find it, immorality is denial of faith. Not the ending of intellectual conviction, that is not immorality. Immorality is refusal to obey the truth of which I am convinced, and that is also apostasy.

Where there is such apostasy, inevitably the judgment must fall. It is contained in germ within the apostasy. "My righteous one shall live by faith." If faith fail, God is not unfaithful; which does not mean that He will maintain the promise when the conditions are broken; but that He cannot maintain the promise when the conditions are broken.

Turning to the abiding appeal; we have first the inclusive statement. Jude wrote exhorting us to "contend earnestly for the faith." The one word translated "contend earnestly" occurs nowhere else. The root of the word is found in the New Testament in other applications; where it is said for instance that Epaphras strove in prayer, we have the same word, which might be rendered agonizes. Here the word is intensified by its context, consequently our translation is, "contend earnestly." There is not the slightest suggestion of argument. We are not asked to defend the faith by arguing for it. What then is the thought of the word? It is that of passionate and determined effort. The word really has in it the thought of the abandon and cautiousness of the athlete. "Contend earnestly for the faith." The apostle did not mean, Lecture on Christian evidences. That may be a perfectly proper thing to do in its place. He did not mean, Form a league for the defense of the Bible. He did not mean, Argue with every man you meet that these things are so. The final argument for faith in the world is not the argument of words, but the argument of life. What he meant was this: Put into the business of your defense of this great faith passionate and determined effort; let there be the abandon and cautiousness of the athlete.

In the closing verses we have the exposition of the way in which we are to obey the command to contend earnestly for the faith, "building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." We are to keep ourselves in the love of God; not to put ourselves there; we are in the love of God; being there, we are to keep ourselves in that love; which again does not mean that we are to remain there, but seeing that we are there, we are to behave as we ought to behave. We are in that love; therefore we are to respond to it, obey it. How are we to do that? By building, praying, looking. "Building up yourselves on your most holy faith," that is by answering the claim of the faith we possess, carrying it into all the activities of our every-day life so that we become stronger and grow perpetually. "Praying in the Holy Spirit." If our personal effort is that of building; our perpetual consciousness is that of dependence, praying. All this with the goal in view, "looking," the eye ever fixed upon the ultimate consummation, the glorious issue.

If we desire to contend for the faith that is how we are to do it. The profoundest argument, indeed the only argument in favour of faith, is life homed in the love of God, building itself up on faith, forever praying in the Holy Spirit, and forevermore looking for the mercy of our Lord unto age-abiding life. Find the man or woman, youth or maiden, boy or girl, professing faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, holding in that sense the faith of Christianity, who stays in the love of God, builds up the life upon faith, never undertaking any

enterprise save as it is conditioned by the underlying facts of Christianity, living forevermore under the Holy Spirit, in dependence upon that Spirit's coöperation, looking ever for the ultimate perfecting; such an one is doing more for the defense of the faith than all wordy argument. The faith is contended for by the whole business of life, by consecration characterized by caution and courage; the putting out of our lives of all the things that are contrary to the will of the Lord and Master, refusing to turn the grace of God into lasciviousness; never denying, but forevermore affirming in life, the Lord and Master of us all.

There is something else. We cannot contend for the faith and keep ourselves, save as we help others. How are we to help them? "On some have mercy, who are in doubt; and some save, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh."

Finally, what is the inspiration of this life in which we contend for the faith? "Now unto Him that is able to guard you-as with a garrison-from stumbling, and to set you before the presence of His glory without blemish in exceeding joy, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and power, before all time, and now, and forevermore." The inspiration is the certainty that the Master is able to guard us from stumbling, and at last to set us before the presence of God with exceeding joy and without blemish. But He cannot guard us from stumbling if we deny Him. He cannot guard us from stumbling if we are apostate, if we deliberately continue in unbelief as in the case of Israel; in speculative attempts to act on our own behalf as in the case of the angels; in descent towards sensual things and fornication as in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah; in self-righteous satisfaction even in our worship as in the case of Cain; in greed as in the case of Balaam; in presumption as in the case of Korah. If in any of these things we are guilty of apostasy, He cannot guard us from apostasy. If we are abiding in the love of God, building on faith, praying in the Spirit, looking for mercy, then all hell cannot make us stumble, because He is able to guard us as with a garrison from stumbling.

A final word by way of application. First to the Church. What is the faith for which we are to contend ? The faith once for all delivered to the saints; that is, the whole system of truth. What is the system of truth? That truth is centred in a Person. That Person is the Person of these New Testament revelations; the Person of the Gospels, the Acts, the Epistles. The Person is seen in the flesh in the first four pamphlets; but is interpreted by the Spirit in the apostolic writings. That is the faith. It is that truth embodied in a Person, operating in grace and holiness, for which we are to contend.

Then to the individual. What is the contending which defends the faith? Constant loyalty to Christ; ceaseless caution in the presence of things contrary to His will; courage and confidence. By these things we shall indeed defend the faith. It is possible for a man to attempt to defend the faith by argument, and successfully by argument to state the facts of the faith, while instead of defending it, he is actually destroying it by his own life, by his own character. Faith, and contending for the faith by obedience to the claims of the faith will forevermore make apostasy impossible.

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