

CONTEND FOR THE MESSAGE NOT THE PACKAGE

Reflections on Jude 3, 4

Jude's exhortation in the first century to "earnestly contend for the faith" is still very relevant today. We stand on the same faith foundation on which the first century brethren stood, and though the political social and religious landscape has changed radically from their time to ours, the essential threats to the purity of the divine revelation have certainly not been eliminated.

Jude's concern was for the purity of the faith threatened by those he called "certain men". These men were neither harmless nor illusionary. They were as real as the certain water, into which the eunuch was baptized (Acts 8:36). The danger posed by these men was seen in the way Jude described their entrance among the brethren. He said they had crept in. They had not knocked on the front door, introduced themselves and state their business. Obviously, they were a part of a covert operation masterminded by one of the greatest military generals who has waged war- Satan. Not only had they crept in, but their presence had gone unnoticed by those who had the charge of protecting the infant church. Because of the insidious nature of these threats, the purity of the faith and the perpetuity of the church were endangered. This sad reality is made worse in that their leaders were like foxes guarding the hen house.

It is no wonder that Jude had to change his script. His original intention was to write casually about the common salvation shared by him with brethren whom he hoped were standing solidly in the faith. However Jude's

awareness of impending danger caused him to change his posture to a more appropriate militancy. He sounded the alarm and rallied the brethren into offensive action for that sacred deposit – the faith once delivered to the saints.

The urgency and intensity of the situation is seen in what Jude tells them to do. He tells them to contend for the faith. The word “contend” embodies conflict. It suggests that the Christians would encounter opposing forces, committed to their evil agenda, as the Christians were to theirs. The Christians were not to think that protecting the faith would be a “cake walk”. Satan- the real power behind the low-creeping men has demonstrated many times over that he has no scruples. Hence, they were to be prepared to shoot and expect to be shot at. Further, the adverb “earnestly” speaks to the manner in which they were to contend. Their senses were to be keen, their focus sharp and their determination resolute. The expression conjures up picture of an Olympian, summoning all the strength in his core, taxing his muscles to the limit as he reaches forward to the finish line. Christians are to match the earnestness of Olympians in their quest for the gold that fades not away.

All this energy was to be expended for the faith - that body of teaching which constitutes Christianity. This body of teaching is a whole and is unique. There is only one of its kind. Its unique nature ensures that it is both recognizable and capable of reproduction. Because it is made from a mold, changes to it can be easily detected, but only by those familiar with the divine mold from which it came. It is God’s will that the same things heard from Paul, and committed to Timothy, be committed unchanged to faithful

men, who would themselves reproduce the process (II Timothy 2:2). In a relay race, the same baton gets passed on to different team members running different legs. The same is true of the baton of the faith in the relay race of Christianity.

It has to be so since the baton was “delivered”. This speaks to the fact of its divine origin. The faith was neither fabricated nor invented by over-zealous men looking to make a name for themselves. It is not the compilation of smart catchy sayings, dispensing nothing greater than human wisdom. The delivered faith has within it God’s remedy for the redemption of Adam’s fallen race, and how to stay healthy once the disease of our past sins has gone into remission. It worked perfectly well in the first century and its potency has not been diminished. The delivered faith is not only effective, but it is also authoritative. It has behind it all the power of God. It is as immutable and durable as every other utterance from heaven. It is more changeless than the law of the Medes and Persians which changes not. Hence there must be a greater degree of respect for it than the most ardent patriot has for the constitution of the United States of America.

The delivered faith however, has come tied with the ribbons of first century customs, and wrapped in the folds of middle-eastern culture. It is incumbent on us to be able to distinguish between what God sent down from heaven and the packaging with which it first came. The package becomes old and worn but the message remains fresh and ageless. How else will we be able to heed the divine call in the 21st century to earnestly contend not for the faith rather than the package?

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