

Jude

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Jude identifies himself in two ways. By calling, by choice and by commitment he is a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and by birth he is a brother of James, the recognised and respected leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:12-13). In his description of himself there is no familiarity in Jude's attitude, for he refers to Jesus as the Christ, an acknowledgment of His Lordship by divine right. Even though Jude was a brother of Jesus, he regarded Him rightly as Saviour and Lord, no doubt recalling the days when, with the rest of the family, he was a radical unbeliever. Read Matt. 13: 53-56; John 7:5; Matt. 12:46-50; and Mk. 3:21 where 'friends' (AV) are 'family'. In 1 Cor. 15:7 we learn that James was a believer at that time but we do not know when the light of truth finally dawned on Jude, possibly the youngest brother in the family of Mary and Joseph. One thing is clear: he is now the bondslave of Jesus Christ as is his brother James. The reference in Matt 13:55 referred to Jude as a brother of the Lord, but Jude himself was content to play second fiddle to his well-known brother. Andrew was content to be Simon Peter's brother and Barnabas was gladly in the shadow of Paul. This is true greatness, not inferiority.

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With wisdom as he begins to deal with a dangerous and demanding situation, Jude lays a great foundation of encouragement on a three-fold description of what it means to be a Christian: called, loved and kept. The A.V. translates the description, "sanctified ... preserved ... and called," and the N.E.B. has it "those whom God has called, who live in the love of God the Father and in the safe keeping of Jesus Christ." Since all this is true, we should be able to cope with anything and everything, and count nothing too hard or extreme in order that we might contend for the faith. Jude's words, so accurate in theological terms, are a great source of encouragement and inspiration. He described Christian believers as having been called. This is much more than having been "invited" to respond to Christ. It signifies God's intervention for our salvation and emphasises that the work of the Spirit in salvation is not suggestion but enabling. The answer to Question 31 in the Shorter Catechism is glorious: "Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the Gospel." This demonstrates salvation to be gloriously and sovereignly the work of God and therefore to be something sure, secure and absolute, something in which to rest and on which to stand, ready to fight for the truth.

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Salvation is God's work and nothing He does is defective in any way. This is our confidence. But it is not a de-personalised thing as if God was merely executive power. God is love, and Christians are the objects of and recipients of His unqualified love. It is something so immense it is difficult to grasp it and we need to allow ourselves to be staggered by our Lord's own words to the effect that the Father loves us *as* He loves Him (John 17:23). Verses of Scripture crowd into the mind. Behold what manner of love (1 John 3:1) ... God commended His love toward us ... (Rom. 5:6-8) ... God spared not even His own Son ... (Rom. 8:32) ... He that touches you touches the apple of God's eye ... (Zech. 2:8) ... how can I ever give you up ... (Hos. 11:8). He loved us from the first of time, He loves us to the last. Those who are called according to God's purpose (Rom. 8:28) are beloved of the Father and are kept for Jesus Christ as His precious possession (1 Pet. 2:9-10; cf. John 10:27-30). If the phrase should read, "preserved in Jesus Christ," then it refers to that continuous preservation that Christ's keeping power effects for His own. Think of how we sing:

"We are His people, we his care,
Our souls and all our mortal frame:
What lasting honours shall we rear,
Almighty Maker, to Thy name?

"Wide as the world is Thy command,
Vast as eternity Thy love" (Isaac Watts)

We are kept, in every sense of the word, for a destiny of glory with Christ. It is conviction regarding this heavenly truth that makes us of real use down here on earth.

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What a wealth of gracious truth Jude has crammed into this introduction. Even when he speaks of the three-fold blessing of mercy, peace and love he prays that they may be ours in multiplied measure (AV and RSV). The thought is of an overflowing and ever-increasing measure of each and all of these blessings. The word 'mercy' has a far wider meaning than just forgiveness in relation to sins. Throughout the Bible it is linked with thoughts of God's loving-kindness, goodness and compassion towards those in need or distress. It speaks of the heart of God full of affection as well as favour. God is the Father of mercies (2 Cor. 1:3-4; Exod. 34:6; Neh. 9:16-25; Ps. 103:8-14). To live in multiplied mercy can lead only to glorious and increasing peace. This peace is not negative; it is not just the absence of trouble or turmoil. It is deeper than that. It is peace in the midst of storm because God is our refuge and strength (Ps. 46). It is peace with God (Rom. 5:1-2) and it is the peace of God (Phil. 4:4-7). Of course it can never be merely private and individual peace, for at the heart of it is love which must find expression in relation to others as well as to God (1 John 4:19-21). These three "graces", mercy, peace and love, are the constituent elements of fellowship, and it is in partaking of them together in coming to church that we find such blessing, help and comprehensive therapy. "Mercy from God, peace within, love for men - all in fullest measure. Could one imagine a more comprehensive prayer of Christian greeting?" (Green) This second verse brings a deep sense of well-being and encourages us to rest in God and in His sure acceptance of us in Christ. It eases tension, guilt and inhibition. And this kind of relaxation of spirit is the best preparation for those who are about to be summoned to wage warfare in the interest of the Gospel.

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We will never really know what Jude had intended to write about in this letter. It may have been a "fellowship" letter sharing thoughts about the "common salvation" he shared with friends. But certain things kindled an urgency in him to summon his friends to contend with great earnestness for the faith once-for-all delivered to the saints. Jude is not calling for a defence of the faith in the sense that the Christian position is not tenable on a basis of spiritual, intellectual and moral integrity. It is a call to stand against the distortions and denials of the fundamental message of the Christian gospel, and we must recognise that distortions are more dangerous than out and out denials. The Devil's technique is always to bring forward something that *looks like* Christianity, but which is, on closer examination, a denial of it. In our day, as in Jude's, we need to be careful not to be taken in by the easy use of the word "evangelical" because too many "evangelicals" hold unorthodox views with regard to basic biblical doctrine, not least to the doctrine of the inspiration and authority of Scripture. The note being emphasised here is that the Christian message is not an "open-ended" adjustable thing to be fashioned and qualified according to current theological or psychological ideas. God has spoken and made plain "what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man," (Westminster Catechism). We must live by what God has said regardless of those teachers who change their position every time a new and popular theological book is issued. To break away from the sound word of Scripture as "the supreme rule of faith and life" is not liberty, progress and enlightenment. It is confusion, because it leads to God being made in man's image.

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The truth of the Christian gospel is not a phase in the general evolution of religious belief and behaviour as some say when they depart from Scripture. It is a body of truth which stands complete (Heb. 1:1-3) and the way to proclaim it is to follow the apostolic pattern, and reason it out of the scriptures (Acts 17:2-3; 18:4). It has to do with salvation, and that word pre-supposes the fact of sin and its consequences, else there is nothing to be saved from. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to convince people of their need (John 16:8). The Gospel then declares God's sufficient provision for salvation by His grace in Jesus Christ. It is total provision, needing nothing to be added, and the ground of salvation is the death of Christ on the Cross. We receive that salvation by faith alone (Rom. 5:1), and the fruit of it is life eternal. There are evidences of salvation in the things that accompany it (Heb. 6:9) namely spiritual and moral integrity and continuance, and the expression in human character and behaviour of grace and truth. It is a salvation for the whole person for time and for eternity. If we forget about the salvation of the soul (as is the current fashion) and concentrate on this world as opposed to the next, we have in fact departed from the faith. Our Lord made plain that even if a man gains the whole world, for others as well as for himself, the end result is tragedy if he loses his soul. The hypnotic fixation on the material things of this world which is the mark of our generation is without doubt a work of Satan, the arch-enemy of the souls of men. This is why Jude is concerned that there should be a defence of the faith. Of course, you cannot defend it without being committed to it.

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An example of contending for the faith is found in Gal. 1:6-12 and it makes plain that "contending" is, as the Greek word (agonising) signifies, a costly stand and activity which may well cost a man some of his closest friends. Jude does not state what this "delivered (entrusted) faith" is, but it signifies a body of salvation truth and practice already existing in the church by the authority of the apostles Acts 2:42. Christianity has never been a free-for-all, have-your-own-ideas, do-your own-thing system in which every man does what is right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25). There is a recognisable "basis of faith" delivered and handed down (1 Cor. 15:1-3) and those who depart from it are no longer entitled to call themselves "Christians". God has spoken, and His revelation of Himself is sovereignly given and preserved in Scripture. To break away from Scripture is not, as is often claimed, liberty, enlightenment and progress, but confusion, bondage and uncertainty, because the opinions of people are constantly changing and can therefore never be a sure word to the world. The Bible itself speaks very bluntly about this in, for example, 2 John 9-11. The Christian message is firmly grounded in historical facts which may not be manipulated. There is a position to hold to (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:13-14; 2:1-2; 4:1-4). At the same time we must guard "against the cheapening of Christianity until it becomes a set of propositions assented to, of acts performed, of shibboleths observed, rather than the vibrant, vital personal relationship with Jesus which inflames, invigorates, and permeates every aspect of political, social and personal life." (Green, quoting Bonhoeffer)

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Following yesterday's note we ask *how* we are to contend for the faith. It is not primarily by demonstration, denunciation or by excommunicating all those who do not agree with us in every minute point of doctrine or practice. Granted we have to know the truth and expound it in terms that our contemporaries can understand. In doing this we must be careful to hold to biblical terminology lest by carelessness of language we both confuse the truth and evacuate our preaching of content. We must be persuaded that the truth of God stands even if no-one responds to our declaration of it. We must hold to competence of doctrine, know what we believe and be ready to speak of it (1 Pet. 3:15). But soundness of doctrine must be backed up by competence of life, so that our lives commend Christ to others (Phil. 1:27-28; 1 Thess. 1:5; 2:1-12; 2 Pet. 1:5-11). We are to supplement faith with virtue, as Peter says, because our lives are watched, and they speak loudly even though at times no words are actually spoken (1 Pet. 3:1-2). We have already referred to 2 Tim. 2:2 and we must learn to see ourselves as spiritual "securicor" agents in the interest of generations to come. It is no hole-in-the-corner thing we are committed to but part of God's strategy for salvation covering the whole course of history. Seeing then that we have this ministry committed to us, we must show no weakness (do not lose heart), have nothing to do with what is

unworthy, and having committed ourselves to the truth we commend ourselves to every man's conscience (2 Cor. 4:1-6ff). We stand in, by and for the truth once-for-all delivered to the people of God.

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Here is the dangerous situation which caused Jude to write this epistle. Certain people had wormed their way into the church and into places of influence, and from that inside position they were working against the gospel. This is a perennial problem and we face it in our own generation in the increasing number of "evangelicals" who, privately rather than publicly, hold "off-beat" positions, not least with regard to the inspiration and final authority of Scripture. Of course what they believe at heart will influence their preaching. Even though at first it will be subtle and concealed, in time it will become plain that they are no longer preaching the faith once delivered to the saints. "How many are there whose minds have been secretly loosened from what seemed convictions, who have been intellectually estranged from the Gospel, who would create a sensation if they stood up in the midst of Christian worship and revealed their whole thoughts about God and Christ, about Church and Bible, about prayer and sacraments?" (Denney) Paul spoke about such and called them enemies of the Cross whose motives were deeply suspect (Phil. 3:17-19). Jude seems to be aware of how this minority of powerful and plausible men were in fact deceiving the saints, not least because they *seemed* to be so positive and so spiritual (2 Cor. 11:13-15). This is alarming. But it is no new thing. For long, Judas was accepted among the disciples apparently without suspicion, and in the apostolic church Ananias and Sapphira were accepted as "dedicated" believers although in fact they were lying to God (Acts 5:3). We continue this theme tomorrow and we remember that God looks on the heart (1 Sam. 16:7; Lk. 12: 1-3).

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The presence and activity of false prophets and concern about them are no new things in the experience of the people of God. The phrase "designated" or "marked out" for condemnation should not be understood in terms of rigid predestination. The metaphor may come from the practice of posting up a list of those who had to appear for trial, and if that be so it comforts us in the thought that God is neither unaware of nor unmindful of what evil men are doing. Jude gives a salutary reminder that the whole history of the people of God testifies to the incursion and activity of false prophets whose one concern, inspired by the Devil, was to corrupt the people and the work of God. When will we really believe that we are involved in spiritual warfare and that truth and error cannot live together? It is not religious bigotry, unnecessary and sub-Christian, to stand by God's truth and to say where and why we disagree with others. Of course, truth must be spoken with grace, and this is not always done. But error is pernicious and Jude speaks devastatingly about it, having first reminded his readers of the long history of the people of God facing this very problem. Consider Deut. 12:2-11; 1 Kings 22:13-23; Ezek. 13:1-3, 6-7; Mk. 13:21-23; Matt. 7:15-23; John 10:1; Acts 20:28-31; Gal. 2:4 (spiritual spies are despicable creatures.); 2 Tim. 3:1-9; 2 Pet. 2:1-3. We have no need to be taken by surprise, but we must watch and pray lest we be seduced away from that close adherence to and walk with Jesus that is of the essence of Christian life and service. We do well to consider carefully whom we follow (Eph. 4:14; 1 Cor. 4:15-16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17-19).

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Plain speaking about evil men who claim to be Christian believers is not easy, and yet the danger of the situation compelled Jude to speak in radical terms. He described them as ungodly: the word here could be read as "impious" or "godless" and relates to their attitude to God rather than to their moral lives. They may be competent, influential, intellectual, but they are not God's men. They are not with God and He is not with them. They are not men of prayer, men of submission, nor men of the Spirit. They are like the man in Acts 8:9-24 who wanted holy things in order to advance his own will and power. They have no part in and with God. They are men who regard the amazing grace of God towards sinners as an excuse for living lives of unrestrained vice, failing to recognise that pardon and holiness go together. The Jesus who refused to condemn was the Jesus who commanded to go and sin

no more (John 8:11). The man who is truly forgiven will be the man who prays that the Lord will "take away the love of sinning." There is only one thing to do with sin. Keep clear of it, because it wages war against your soul (1 Pet. 2:11; 2 Tim. 2:19, 22; 1 Thess. 5:21-22). By attitude and practice these men denied the Lord that bought them (2 Pet. 2:1; Titus 1:16). Perhaps they also had secret reservations about the true nature and identity of the Son of God. Perhaps their denial took the form of an arrogant independence that scorned all church authority and discipline, going their own way, comparing themselves with themselves (2 Cor. 10:12) and concluding that there were none quite like them. They would not care for a preacher or letter-writer like Jude! Perhaps they were more specific, saying, as men have done in all generations, that Jesus was a mere man on whom the Spirit came at His baptism and from whom the Spirit departed before the crucifixion. This denies the whole Christian gospel. If He is not God the eternal Son, He is nothing.

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Note the realism of Jude and how this letter develops. He recognised the fundamental conflict between light and dark, truth and error. First he describes the Christians, then he exhorts them to contend for the clear substance of the faith. He then explains why such contending is necessary and makes plain that all who are within the *professing* church are not God's men. Indeed some are deniers of God and enemies of His cause. Now, Jude wanted to deal with this before many were deceived and at the same time he wanted to keep the believers from over much discouragement. To do this he rehearses the activities of God, giving illustrations of His intervention in the affairs of history, speaking of God's activity in the realm of angels, spirits and the Devil as well as among men and nations. We need to read here in 1 Cor. 10:1-12 and Numbers 13 and 14, the story of the spies on the borders of Canaan. It is the story of a redeemed people being led into life, hope and inheritance but rebelling at the borders of the land of promise and being turned back by God into the wilderness. The point is that the majority of the spies, a group of influential men in Israel, by their defeatist words and attitudes created disaster for the people who listened to them (Num. 14:4). It could be that these same men were the ones who repeatedly caused dissension (Num. 14:22) and provoked God. There are some people whose only contribution to the fellowship is to cause trouble. That is a sign of Hell. In the story of Israel God acted in the plague, the spies were punished, and the people who had listened to them lost their inheritance (Num. 14:36-38). Be careful whom you listen to and whose advice you follow, and when giving advice make sure it is from God.

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Jude pursues his theme of warning to the ungodly and comfort to the godly, by insisting that God is not mocked nor is He ever by-passed or over-ruled in the affairs of the world, even when these affairs are being manipulated by the spiritual powers of evil. It is one of the lies of the Devil that he is strong and free to act as he chooses. He is not. He is a creature and therefore always under the control of the Creator. We may regard with awe the fact of "principalities and powers, mastering their unseen array," and we may be staggered by the thought of the spiritual hosts of wickedness in high and heavenly places (Eph. 6:10ff). We read of war in Heaven (Rev. 12:7-9, 12) and of the strange "marriages" spoken of in Gen. 6:1-6 and, even if we do not interpret the latter passage in terms of the demonising of society, we are faced with sinister forces at work among men and nations. We have not yet learned to be realistic in grasping the fact that the world is fallen and in no sense neutral in its attitude to the things and people of God (1 John 2:15-17). We read of the pride, rebellion and fall of the angels in such passages as Isa. 14: 12ff. (Lucifer, son of the morning) and Isa. 24:21-23. We read of "the god of this world" (this age) in 2 Cor. 4:4. In connection with that verse James Denney speaks of how we have to reckon on "the omnipresence, the steady persistent pressure, the sleepless malignity of the evil forces that beset man's life." But Jude's point is that while pride and arrogance caused the angels to rebel and to take initiative against God, these angels were, are and ever shall be, kept under chained control until their final judgment. If God does that with proud angels, will He not also do it with these evil teachers who are working against Him in the church?

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If God deals with His church (5) and with spiritual "beings" (6), so He deals with cities and nations and His sovereign power is such that there are many judgments before Judgment Day. There is an immediacy about God's executive actions just as there is a mysterious and miraculous longsuffering in His providence (2 Pet. 3:8-10, 15). There is indeed a mystery in iniquity (2 Thess. 2:7AV) and in the operation of lawlessness, and at times it seems as if evil powers and persons carry all before them. But appearances are deceptive and never for a moment is the situation a crisis one, in the sense that it has passed out of God's control. He chooses His moment and His power is effortless (2 Thess. 2:8). The story of Sodom and Gomorrah declares the end result of moral permissiveness and perversion. There is a natural harvest of confusion as well as a divine judgment of righteousness, and the two belong together. Even when evil has brought about its full harvest in society there is still the judgment of God to come. Sin begins with our departure from God and ends with God's departure from us, as Paul teaches in Rom. 1:24, 26, 28. Sin always gets out of hand and leads its participants far further than they ever intended at the beginning. This is how it was with Lot in Sodom and just as time ran out for the city, so it ran out for Lot. God came down to see (Gen. 18:20-21) and what He saw set in motion His judgment, and there was no remedy. Cf. 2 Chronicles 36:15-16.

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In these three illustrations of God's competent supervision and inescapable judgment Jude has emphasised the unnaturalness of the way people had chosen and he urges his readers not to follow the men now troubling them. It was unnatural for a redeemed people such as Israel to doubt God and to rebel against His ways; unnatural for the privileged angels to choose to rebel; unnatural for the citizens of Sodom to pervert their human functions; and in each case dire consequences followed, and the stories make grim reading. That is why we must be careful whom we listen to and whom we follow. Jude seems to be challenging the Christians to think of what they may become if they go after these men. After all, who knows what hidden potential of fallen personality may assert itself if once we are out from under the preserving shadow of the good will of God? Israel once walked with God. The angels once held privileged position. The cities were once rich and prosperous enough to attract a man like Lot. To rest in how we *once* walked with God is a very insecure shelter for life and no way to go forward into eternity. It is the man who endures to the end who is saved. Think of all this in respect of our own generation in which even secular commentators are taken aback by the proliferation of films and books about Satanism and the brashness of the cruder and baser appetites of human nature. God has many 'times' in history and His judgments are manifest on the face of the earth. We are not to be afraid of evil nor are we to be taken in by it, taking it at its face value. Jesus never argued with evil. He spoke with authority (Lk. 22:53b). This is our peace.

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Jude is devastatingly frank in his words regarding men who are a danger to the church. He draws a direct parallel between them and the three significant instances of God's judgment given in v.5-7. Jude's point is that it is quite astonishing how, in spite of the lessons of history, experience and the Word of God, there are those who do exactly what evil men have always done. They defile the flesh as in Sodom; they reject authority as the angels did and indeed as Israel did in murmuring against Moses and God; and they revile the glorious ones. The latter may refer to the contempt of the men of Sodom for the visiting angels or to a tendency to deride and devalue the holy and the sacred, an attitude which usually accompanies spiritual backsliding. Granted there is such a thing as false piety, but those who mock the devotion of others are themselves suspect. Note how Jude refers to these men as "dreamers". This may suggest that they appealed to "visions" as their spiritual authority. This is very crafty because you cannot check up on visions. Those who claim to have had visions cannot be contradicted and they become their own ultimate authority, if not claiming infallibility, certainly claiming the right to act without being questioned. On the other hand Jude may simply be saying that their whole theology was speculative and fanciful, sounding impressive, but having no historical or biblical basis. Their thinking was human rather than divine; based on reason rather than revelation. This is still the crunch issue in our own day.

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Jude uses three significant phrases to describe those who by their activities are bringing them selves under the judgment of God. As we consider them, do not fail to find comfort- in the thought of God's total supervision of the whole situation. He is not mocked. He cannot be pushed and He will not delay. The influence of the false teachers led to lowering the whole tone of life and the demolishing of standards of behaviour. They are to be compared with the present day apostles of permissiveness who, in the name of humanity, demand opportunity for and encouragement of moral indulgence which destroys nations. They also reject authority in a deliberate way, resenting anyone who challenges their right to do as they please. It is a spirit of insubordination, towards both civil and ecclesiastical authority. It is a rejection of all forms of discipline, but at heart it is a refusal of the Lordship of Christ. These are men who utterly fail to see that the fulfilment of all that is meant by humanity is found in submission to the Creator God who is the Redeemer God. Not only do they take the attitude of having nothing to learn (rejecting authority), they "revile the glorious ones" or "slander celestial beings", whatever that may mean. The A.V. reads that they "speak evil of dignities," and this seems to refer to angelic powers (fallen or unfallen?), rather than to civil or ecclesiastical rulers. The meaning here could be that the evil teachers were ridiculing the whole idea of "guardian angels" and the thought of the supernatural powers that work on behalf of the true church of Christ. We who take the Devil seriously must not forget that he and his demons are not the only workers in the unseen realms (Judges 5:19-20; Heb. 1:14; Dan. 9:20-23; 10:18-21).

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The reference here to the archangel Michael, the guardian angel of Israel (Dan. 10:21; 12:1), and his contending with the Devil suggests that the reference in the previous verse was to fallen "glorious ones". Certainly we are here dealing with principalities and powers (Eph. 6:10ff; Rev. 12:7) and with the unrelenting conflict between what is of God and what is of the Devil. If we would only grasp this elemental fact we would not be so taken aback when sore difficulty and fierce trial beset us and the church in our Christian lives and service. Conflict is to be expected (John 16:33; Acts 14:22). It is one thing to challenge evil and to stand against it in the faith of Jesus Christ because of His victory (Rom. 8:37-39). But it is also of immense assurance and encouragement to remember that in the heavenly places, out of sight of the clash of human experience, the Devil and his cohorts have by no means undisputed sway. Think of the first two chapters of the Book of Job and recall how answerable and restricted the Devil is. He can do only that which is allowed to further the glorious purposes of God. But Jude insists that even Michael, in dealing in righteousness with regard to Moses' body (whatever traditions there were about Moses' burial), did not rail against the Devil, fallen "glorious one" though he was. It is God who deals with Satan and our appeal must always be to Him (Zech. 3:1-2). The lesson is very practical. Men are made in the image of God and this must not be forgotten, even when they are in rebellion against Him. In our dealings with people therefore, let there be no railing. Look to God, and let Him take action, as He certainly will.

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The reference to the body of Moses is obviously something that was well known to the people Jude was writing to. Tradition has it that Michael was the guardian of Moses' unknown grave (Deut. 34:5-6). We cannot tell if Jude believed this as "fact" or whether he speaks of it by way of using tradition to serve as an illustration. If Jude is using an unhistorical story to make a point, this does not cast doubt on the inspiration, authority and reliability of Scripture. In 1 Cor. 10:4 Paul speaks of the "rock" that followed Israel in the wilderness. This was a Jewish tradition or legend and Paul was not insisting on its "literal" fulfilment. What he was doing was to transfer to Christ the name "Rock" and all the hallowed associations of that name (Deut. 32: 15; Ps. 18:2). The rock spoken of (in Ex. 17:6 and Num. 20:1-9) was localised and therefore limited. But Christ is ever present, vital and living, to quench the thirst of His people and give them life-giving water. But to return to Michael and the Devil, what did the Devil want with the body of Moses? Was it to use it as an object of idolatry and so to ensnare Israel? He

could have been successful. The same principle operates when people venerate a building (or a person) so that they are forever anchored in the past and made blind to God. Perhaps the Devil was claiming the body of Moses as his right because Moses had been a murderer and therefore had no right to peace or blessing in the unseen world. The Devil always underestimates the great salvation of God. The Devil can never understand why God wants to be so good to sinners. Neither can we, but we love such passages as 1 John 1:3-2:2.

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Jude is devastating in his comments on these evil men operating inside the church. They rant, declare and denounce things they do not understand, namely the heavenly powers and their designs. This is usually the case. The most vocal people are often the most shallow, and their problem is not their spiritual advancement but spiritual ignorance. Jude says that they understand natural appetites and inclinations (a capacity they share with the animal world) and living by these "natural" impulses, separated from the saving truth which they have rejected, they are destroying themselves. The best comment on this is in Rom. 1:18-32, which is a searching indictment of faithless humanism and on the blindness of spiritual pride, by which a man becomes his own god. Of course, believing men can likewise succumb to the wiles of the Devil and, by failing to distinguish things that differ and by making ill considered public statements, they can erect barriers to the very gospel they are seeking to proclaim and defend. We need to pray for wisdom so that we will not "rush in where angels fear to tread." Some may react against Jude's strong denunciatory language, but this can be defended on two grounds. We are dealing with a serious issue, and there are none so bitter and ferocious as those people who have departed from an evangelical and biblical position they once held with much public fervour. Indeed the renegade can be more bitter than someone who has never held to the truth. The man who now feels he is "enlightened" can be exceedingly patronising and his whole manner will seek to undermine believers. It is a spurious spirituality that believes less and less of the faith once delivered to the saints.

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Christian life is spiritual warfare and we are not dealing with sporadic and localised outbursts of devilish activity, nor even with Satan's malice against our persons. In a very real sense Satan is not interested in *us* as people, only as pawns, so that when we have served his evil purposes (if he can get hold of us - 1 Pet.5:8-9) he will cast us off without mercy as he did with Judas (Matt. 27:4-5). The Devil thinks big. He is aiming at the contamination of the whole of society in order to take it over and make the world his own throne (Isa. 14:12-14). The most effective way for the Devil to start is inside the church and the best way to proceed is by appearing as spiritual as possible (2 Cor. 11:13-15). Jude is determined that the Christians will think in long-term categories and he declares without qualification that the way these evil teachers are leading can bring them and those who follow them to destruction. Read Rom. 8:5-8 and compare with 1 John 2:16-17. These false teachers were corrupting men's minds away from spiritual truth and principle and "if a man is persistently blind to spiritual values, deaf to the call of God, and rates self-determination as the highest good, then a time will come when he cannot hear the call he has spurned, but is left to the mercy of the turbulent instincts to which he once turned in search of freedom. And these instincts, given free reign, are merciless. Lust, when indulged, becomes a killer." (Green) Consider such passages as 2 Pet. 2:12-14; Gal. 5:16-24; Jas. 1:13-15.

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1:11

Jude turns again to the Old Testament story to illustrate his point and to warn these evil men of what they were doing, of what the end will be, and to warn Christians against being taken in. Of course, this method assumes that people will have a working knowledge of the Scriptures, which is something not to be taken for granted these days even inside the evangelical church. Jude says these men were doing three things which marked them out as not being Christian. We do not go in for this kind of categorical description these days and far too many are accepted as spiritual believers who have no right to be so accepted, in spite of their competence with Christian

vocabulary. It is not *words* but signs of grace that signify spiritual life. The point of the illustration about Cain (Gen. 4:1-16) is not the murder of his brother or his jealousy. Nor is Jude speaking of Cain's attitude that outrages humanity by holding life so cheaply that you lash out whenever anything displeases you. ("Be angry and sin not" is a high standard of Christian behaviour Eph. 4:26). The murder was the expression of Cain's heart of pride in which he refused God's way of acceptance by faith through appointed sacrifice as the only way of salvation. To walk in the way of Cain is to turn aside from the Bible's clear message of salvation through the blood of the Cross (Col. 1:20). It is to walk your own way and to do so with such arrogant confidence, ignoring God, that you take others with you. But God will not hold guiltless those who hinder the salvation of another. Jesus made that very plain in Matt. 18:5-6.

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1:11

The story of Balaam is in Numbers 22-24 where the man's greed is manifest. Some are greedy for money, some for success, some for popularity and acceptance, so that all they do is qualified and geared to that end. They live for their own glory and advancement. They are their own god and they are not afraid to make use of the church of Jesus Christ, its fellowship and activity, to gain their end. Such people are, of course, living for the wrong world, and it is here that we see the error of Balaam. He was sacrificing eternal riches and a place in God's work and kingdom for the sake of immediate gain. But what shall it profit ...? (Mark 8:36). Some people live as if they had no souls; as if they would never give account to God; as if they would never die. It is in this frame of mind that people live their lives running counter to God's will and purpose for them. Just how conscious they are of their true motives it is hard to say. But this much is sure. Their activity will never be merely individual. They will take others with them. This is the condemnation of Balaam. He made Israel to sin (Num. 31:16) by leading them to presume on God's grace, suggesting that they were so firmly ensconced in God's good favour that their manner of life was really quite unimportant. Balaam fostered an easy attitude to sin and a casual attitude to forgiveness. Rev. 2:13-14 makes it plain that Balaam caused Israel to deny their separation and sanctification and to compromise themselves with moral wrong. Balaam, and those who listened to him, brought soiling and confusion into the holy family and work of God, and they did it arrogantly, for base gain. This is sin indeed!

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1:11

The story of Korah is in Num. 16 and Jude uses it to emphasise the lesson that unwillingness to submit to the authority of God-appointed leaders is of the essence of the spirit of apostasy. God had spoken through Moses, had led the people by Moses, and the people had been blessed and enriched through Moses' influence. Under the leadership of Moses the people had been brought to where they were spiritually, and in that sense Moses' person and work needed no further defence or justification. But Korah and his colleagues (and you will always find discontents if you want to drum up support) reacted against such leadership, taking the attitude that since all were God's people then all were entitled to their own opinions, their own decisions, their own independence of action. In order to do this, of course, Korah had to denigrate as well as challenge Moses' leadership. There were severe consequences, as the Old Testament story makes plain. It shows Korah "to have gathered a mob around him in rebellion, to have assumed an unwarranted liberty, to have invented his own way of worshipping God, and to have taken to himself functions to which he had no right, while falsely claiming holiness for himself and his followers. In general, here was a man who delighted to kick over God's traces." (Green) It is not difficult to apply the story of Korah to contemporary situations. Most congregations have people like this, who are only happy when they are causing dissension. This is nothing new and it should not unduly distract us. Think of the warnings in Titus 1:10-11; 3:10-11; 1 Tim. 1:19-20; 2 Tim. 3:1-9. Jesus' words are of great significance: "By their fruits you shall know them," (Matt 7:15-20)

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1:12-13

If we think Jude's words have been strong or even extreme up till now, these two verses are devastating in their vividness and in their denunciatory power. These men are described as blemishes on the love feasts of the believers, as they gather for the family meal associated with the Lord's Supper. Paul refers to this same danger in 1 Cor.11:17-22, 33-34. All you need in a social gathering of Christians is for one or two with a poisoned mind or disaffected spirit and the whole tenor of the gathering can degenerate into a shallow and carnal display of the worst elements of human nature. Peter speaks of the same kind of situation in 2 Pet. 2: 13-14, and the potential for waywardness on such occasions (human nature being what it is and there being a Devil always ready to capitalise) is such that Jude describes the evil element as "sunken rocks" (blemishes). These evil characters are like hidden reefs, sharp and dangerous, and a particular menace to drifting, careless Christians. The ship that hits the reef is first torn open and then battered to pieces by the waves. It is often a very good thing to consider carefully what a person leaves behind. That is a good guide to his influence and to the spirit motivating him. Jude goes on to speak of those so-called spiritual leaders "living it up", bold in their defiance of Christian morality and convention alike. They care nothing for anyone; they are totally self-centred; and their main objective in life is to look after themselves. It is self first, last and all the time. It is their main topic of conversation. Their speech does in fact betray them (Matt. 26:73).

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1:12-13

Jude heaps up descriptions to make it plain that he has no respect for these empty egotists who try to parade their vast spirituality. They are empty clouds, full of promise but bringing no rain and serving only to hide the sun. They have the appearance or form of godly spirituality but are powerless (2 Tim. 3:5). They are carried along at the behest of every current wind of opinion (Eph. 4:14) and they give nothing for the nourishment of their fellows (Prov. 25:14). They are fruitless trees (Rev. 3:1; Lk. 13: 6-9) and, as in autumn, the growing season is past and there is no hope of betterment. Their leaves are being stripped and soon they will *look* dead as indeed they *are* dead. The reference to "twice-dead" may indicate something of "the last state worse than the first" or to the deadness and hardness usually found in backsliders. Such trees are uprooted, because they cumber the ground (Lk. 13:7) and this is God's work, not man's. Think of Jesus' words in John 15:1-6. They are like wild waves, impressive in noise and movement, and indeed in power, but they leave a tide mark of debris. They are restless (Isa. 57:20-21). They are wandering stars which have lost their light and are soon to fade out into darkness. They change position so often they are no use to anyone for plotting a course. They cannot guide to Christ because they are off course themselves. All this means we must be careful whom we listen to and whom we follow. Read Rom. 16:17-20 and 1 Cor. 11:1.

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1:14-16

As these verses pile up denunciation we may be tempted to think that Jude is being unnecessarily severe and bitterly intolerant. Now, while there is no place for bitterness in our devotion to and defence of the faith, there is such a thing as Christian intolerance. Prof. James Denney said, "Neither the Old Testament or New Testament has any conception of a religion without this intolerance If God has really done something in Christ on which the salvation of the world depends, and if He has made it known, then it is a Christian duty to be intolerant of everything which ignores, denies, or explains it away." We stand by and for the truth, and we do so from the ground of faith not fear. This is very important because it is *fear* of error and falsehood that breeds bitter, sectarian strife. The surer we are of our position the less we need to shout and denounce. The truth stands, and will do so regardless of men or devils (2 Cor. 13:5-10). The Lord of the field is utterly confident and will not give way to panic re-action (Matt. 13:24-30). Besides this the whole of Christian service and warfare is set against the backcloth of the coming again of our Lord in power and great glory (Lk 21:25-36). This seems to be the point of the reference to the apocryphal Book of Enoch which Jude refers to as being well-known without giving it any semblance of authority in the sense that Scripture has authority. The fact of the Second Coming of Christ is made

plain throughout the New Testament and it is without question a day of reckoning and judgment. More of this tomorrow.

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1:14-16

The glorious hope of the personal return of our Lord Jesus Christ in all His glory is a tremendous note in Biblical Christianity. It marks the glorious culmination of all things and will be a day of great rejoicing. Read Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Thess. 4: 13-18; and Rev. 1:4-8; 22:10-21. One clear element in the Second Coming is the bringing to reckoning the people of unrighteousness. This seems to be Jude's point. Time runs out for the evil-doer and the false teacher. This is something we must remember when evil seems in full flood and unchecked. In Rev. 10:6 the declaration comes that there will be no more delay; in Rev. 9:15 we are told of perfect timing; and in Rev. 12:12 we are told that the Devil knows he has only a limited time. This is immense encouragement for it tells us that justice will be done and will be seen to be done. God is no detached God but one who is present and participating in all the affairs of history, and He is even now working to bring His righteous judgment to fruition. There are many judgments before the great Judgment Day. Now, to emphasise this is to bring forward a great incentive to holy living (1 John 3:3). It means we must learn more and more to live in the light of eternity and to evaluate things in eternal rather than temporary categories. This is what Paul says in 2 Cor. 4:17- 18. This is how the heroes of the faith lived (cf. Heb. 11:5-6, 13-16, 23-27). To live in the light of the Second Coming is not only an incentive to holy living (2 Pet. 3:11-14), it is the kind heavenly-mindedness that makes you of great earthly use.

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1:14-16

Note in these verses the repeated reference to the ungodly. They are ungodly by nature, in practice and in manner. This is comprehensive. God is not in their thoughts (Ps 10:4) because they are not disposed to have Him (Rom. 1:21). There is no fear of God before their eyes (Ps. 36:1) and they have the arrogance of Pharaoh who demanded, "Who is the Lord that I should obey Him?" (Ex, 5:2) There is something so total about their attitude, so defiant, and their speech is so harsh that they mark themselves out as evil. Of course these men would deny that they were speaking against God or being critical. Indeed such men are often so absorbed in their own assumed spirituality that it never crosses their minds that they might possibly be in the wrong. It is always the others, especially their leaders, who are wrong, shallow and non-spiritual. This is how it was in the story of Israel, where so much bitterness stemmed from a murmuring spirit starting in some and poisoning the whole people. Let it be said clearly that those who go about inciting and encouraging dissatisfaction in a church that is manifestly being blessed by God are doing Devil's work. They are best described in Jude's words in v.16. Note how utterly negative the description is. They give nothing. They do nothing. They are not happy themselves and do their best to make everyone else unhappy. They are great talkers, but their theme is mostly themselves. The sad thing is that so many are taken in by their speech which is calculated to gain advantage for themselves. Flattery is a false thing but gratitude is a godly grace.

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1:17-18

Jude is a good teacher and a worthy shepherd of the flock. He does not panic himself, nor does he undermine the confidence of others by being too anxious about evildoers and their schemes. He directs the Christians back to apostolic teaching which warned of these very dangers. Consider Acts 20:28-36; 1 Tim. 4:1ff; 2 Tim. 4:1-5; and Matt. 24:23-26. What all these false teachers do is to cast doubt on God's Word, replacing the authority of the Word by their own notions (2 Pet. 3:1-5ff), and when the objective standards of God's Word are denied then the standards of behaviour also go. Think of our own generation . These are the two things that stand out. Even unbelieving administrators are worried by the falling standards of behaviour and the increasingly bestial and indeed demonic nature of human actions that hold life so cheaply. This is the fruit of the disappearance of godliness from society . Even the deep seated, largely forgotten residue of Christian influence is largely expended. Evil teachers who have stolen God's word from a whole generation have to be charged with accountability. In such a situation

the need is for the reinstatement of the Word of God first in the church and then in the nation. It is by this means that a nation is saved from its sins and from the judgment of God. This is how it was in the days of Samuel (1 Sam.3:1, 19-4:1). This is how the tide was turned in Israel. One man given over to God became a saviour of the nation. How we need to know, learn and love God's Word! It is rich (Ps. 119:1-3, 9, 11, 27, 44-45, 49-50, 89, 93, 97, 105, 111, 129-136, 161-168).

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1:19

It seems that the Christians had been over-awed by "these men" as Jude calls them, and the good man is concerned to cut them down to size. They had *a* spirit about them, giving them drive, determination and power. They had indeed *a* "charisma" (as the Devil has, else he would not be so attractive to so many) but it was not a gift or blessing or fruit of the good and holy Spirit of Jesus. If their "spirit" had been from God then they would have manifested the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-26); they would have grown increasingly like Jesus; and their influence would have been to point away from themselves to Jesus, being content themselves to be nothing and to fade into the background so that Jesus might be all (John 3:25-30). But it was not so. Instead of uniting the fellowship in the love and service of Jesus they set up divisions. They "separate themselves" (AV), detaching themselves from the main body of the work as well as the worship, being different and making it obvious that they were different. The fellowship walked with God and rejoiced in His blessing but they were out on a limb, dissatisfied with everyone and everything, discontented, a law unto themselves, unteachable and therefore unusable. They considered themselves the elite. They were the new Pharisees, but separated from the God whose special people they claimed to be. They were so exclusive, they had excluded themselves, and marked themselves as belonging to the world, in attitude and practice. They were devoid of the Spirit. They were counterfeit Christians. After all, if salvation is of grace, then a life of graceless manners tells its own story.

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1:20

Having exposed and disposed of these evil influences, Jude now gives a glorious exhortation to the Christians to get on with the business of real Christian life and to do it with all the power at their disposal, which power is mighty indeed, as Paul told the Ephesian church (Eph. 1:19-22; 3:14-21). Remember that the epistle began with an exhortation to contend for the faith. How is this to be done? Jude answers on three levels. The first need, he says, is for Christian maturity. The demands of the age are such that childish playing at Christian soldiers is no use at all. Indeed immaturity is a sin, a danger and a hindrance to the work, as Heb. 5:11-6:3 makes plain. Note the elements of maturity. Jude lists four in v.20-21, and the first concerns building ourselves up in or on our most holy faith. Take good note of the spirit of reverence that is manifest in Jude's words. We are dealing with holy things that are to be respected and never trifled with. But how do we build up our selves? It is by grasping more and more from the Scriptures what God has done *for* us and given *to* us in Christ. Think of passages such as Eph. 1:3-23, and that is only the introduction to the epistle! Read Col. 1:11-20; 2:6-10. All that God is and has is in Christ and Christ is in you. This is indeed the sure hope of glory. Read 1 Pet. 1:3-5; 2 Pet. 1:3-11. Think what we have in Christ. Think what God has made us in Christ. Think of the fact that His salvation cannot be reversed and that nothing has the power to separate us from God's love (Rom. 8:35ff). This is the salvation in which we stand and on which we build.

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1:20

Jude's second emphasis is that neither Christian maturity nor the defeat of evil teachers is accomplished by mere argument. It is by prayer. Too often we resort to cleverness as a substitute for prayer. Too often when we feel we have got on a bit in Christian life (or in business life) we feel we can leave the prayer business to the younger folk, or the older folk. This is why there are so many adult evangelical believers who humanly and spiritually are still adolescent. There is a suggestion that the false teachers Jude refers to had in fact given up prayer and prayer meetings, possibly because they felt they had gone beyond that simple stage in spiritual things. It is always

significant when Christians do not like prayer meetings, and even more significant when they give them up. Pray in the Spirit. Don't make this a "pentecostal" text. There is no need to do so. If "it is suggested that prayer in 'tongues' is indicated.....it is hinted at very obscurely. The man who has the Spirit of God within him (that is to say, every Christian, Rom. 8:9), the man who is led by the Holy Spirit in his prayers as in all else (Gal. 5:18) will certainly pray in the Spirit. It is He who utters within us the distinctive Christian address to God as 'Abba' or 'Father' (Rom. 8:15)." (Green) It is the Holy Spirit who urges us on and enables us, guiding and correcting, instructing and rebuking. We have every cause to be encouraged. "Every virtue we possess, and every victory won, and every thought of holiness, are His alone." (Auber) He is indeed comforter, counsellor, encourager and enabler, and He dwells within.

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1:21

The third element in Christian maturity concerns keeping ourselves in the love of God. Is that a hard thing to do? It is practical. Read the plain but searching words of Jesus in John 14:15-21 and 15:9-11 where obedience is spoken of as the heart and dynamic of progress, blessing, fellowship and fruitfulness. Jude is reminding us that we are in fact beloved of God and that we need constantly to bring ourselves back to God's love. We must be resolute to let nothing shadow or spoil our beneficial enjoyment of the love of God. Sin and disobedience can deaden our hearts to the love of God but cannot ever quench God's love for us (Hosea 11:8-9). Trifling and neglect, presumption and casualness can mar any relationship, and where love is not expressed, where communications are not kept open and fresh, then the relationship withers. It does not mean that the essential bonds are changed but the enjoyment and benefit are reduced and dried up. If we would keep ourselves in the love of God then we must allow the love of God to warm our hearts and this can be done only as we consider the amazingness of that love. It is indeed, "Love beyond all thought and wonder, perfect love that casts out fear." (Bonar) Fear has an element of torment in it and the only corrective is the love of God (1 John 4:18). It is right that we should desire our love for God to grow, but that is something that cannot be worked up. It must be the natural response to the love of God and to the wonderful position that is ours because He has loved us. Consider Eph. 2:17-22 and see how richly we have been brought right into the family fellowship of God and made to feel that we belong. Stay there, says Jude. Keep yourself in the love of God.

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1:21

The final element in Christian maturity is concerned with the forward look to the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ. This also is a practical exhortation. It concerns the deliberate disposition of life. We are to look to the future. We must not be anchored in the past, whether in its successes or failures. We must not allow ourselves to be trapped in the present by the pressures of circumstances or limitations of experience. In Christ we belong to the future and the future belongs to us. It is not for nothing that Paul insists in Rom. 8:24 that we are saved in hope, and that hope is indeed an anchor of the soul and of the whole of life. We must learn to thrill to the things we sometimes sing: "This day the noise of battle, the next the victor's song." (Duffield) No matter the present and continuing battles, the victory has in fact been won. This is the message of the death and resurrection of Christ, and God gives us that victory. In a very real sense the best is yet to be. What we have and enjoy now by faith will be ours in unclouded enjoyment when Christ comes again. Note how Jude emphasises mercy. We live by the mercy of God all along the line right to the end.

"Thy mercy will not fail us,
Nor leave Thy work undone;
With Thy right hand to help us,
The victory shall be won." (Plumptre)

To live in this truth is to guard our expectation of heart; to maintain a sense of urgency and responsibility in the Gospel for time is running out; and to encourage our hearts in God. We are dealing with certainties. Let nothing cloud the fact.

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1:22

The second level on which we are to contend for the faith is that of evangelism, dealt with in this verse and the next. Now, we must be careful never to drive a wedge or an artificial gulf between the two emphases of Christian maturity (concerned with our own lives unto God) and evangelism (the outgoing witness to others). The two belong together and this emphasises the fact that evangelism is not primarily for the spiritual novice. It is too dangerous because in the service of the Gospel you meet all manner of entrenched evil which will resent and resist the intrusion of the Christian message. All soldiers need to be well trained before being sent to the front line, and many casualties in the evangelical world result from young converts being thrust into public prominence and active service before they know what it is all about. It is sad to find so many Christians still in their early twenties who are in fact spiritually "spent", having burned themselves out in constant Christian activity in the interest of a narrow Gospel message, when in fact they should have been building themselves up in their holy faith. There is another danger in immature Christians engaging in narrow evangelism. People may well get a false impression of the Christian message and be subsequently inoculated against the real thing. If we give the impression that the Gospel is something interesting for young, impressionable people who have still to come to grips with the realities of earning a living and carrying responsibility, then we do the cause no good. Youngsters grow up and the Gospel they need is one that works for a life-time. This is important.

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1:22

Spiritual immaturity is a limiting and dangerous thing in the business of evangelism (cf. Heb. 5:11-6:3). It lays us open to the tendency to get drawn down to the level of those we seek to evangelise and the message gets confused. It also makes us vulnerable to extreme disappointment when our message is spurned and rejected, and we can become quite desolated by a sheer lack of success that wears us down. Think of Elijah's depression, largely because he expected a national revival in his time and it did not come (1 Kings 19). Think on the other hand of Jeremiah who ministered for a life-time, virtually with no converts, and finally saw his country go down in the necessary judgment of God (2 Chron. 36:15-16 ff.). The pitfalls are many and you need to know your own position before you can convince the doubters and waverers. This verse seems to refer to people who are in two minds and who seem to be tending to be taken away by false teaching. We must not be swift to categorise such as heretics or backsliders, but we are to argue or reason them out of their error while they are *still open* to persuasion. The time comes when people will not listen and there is nothing you can do. Of course, we must earn the right to speak; we must remember we are in the rescue and reclamation business, not demolition agents; and we must be people who have a care and concern for others. When we hear of drug-pushers we are angry with evil men who are stealing and destroying personalities. In like manner we must feel strongly about those who are agents of the destroyer in the context of salvation. We must be wise as to time and method and approach and attitude. We are to be paracletes, called alongside to help. Think of Gal. 6:1-2.

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1:23

Some who are in spiritual danger are quite different cases from those spoken of yesterday who are beguiled and seduced. These are people who have gone off the track and are accelerating, possibly in wilfulness, certainly in indifference, carelessness and over-confidence. They are in danger spiritually and need a direct approach with urgency. Jude may well have been thinking of Amos 4:11-13; Zech. 3:2; or the story of Lot's forced rescue out of Sodom in Gen.19:12-22. The story of Lot demonstrates that strange unwillingness or lack of decisiveness that marks those who have become entrapped in spiritual wrong and who are too proud, wilful or weak to face up to their predicament. It takes very strong and wise measures to help such persons but at least there is the hope that

they will be rescued. The last category referred to here are those whose persons and condition bring an awe to the heart. They are "those on whom profound pity is all that we dare bestow, and that in fear and trembling, lest by contact with them we may be brought within the influence of the deadly contamination that clings to all their surroundings. Abhorrence must be shown to the very externals of pollution." (Ellicott) This verse reminds us of the need to have "a godly fear of sin". This is healthy and realistic for it recognises not only the potency of evil but our own potential for involvement. We need to know our danger areas and keep well away from them. Foolishness and bravado are not part of Christian life and service.

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1:23

Link the solemn tones of this verse with such passages as 1 Cor. 9:19-23; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; Eph 5:1-11; and Luke 15:1-2. It is right and necessary that as Christian witnesses we should get alongside sinners in their need. There is no justification for Pharisaical aloofness that tends to despise and condemn. But at the same time we should always be sober in the presence of sin and grieved when we see the ravages of sin in human lives. We need to be angry with sin and we need to learn to hate sin. But we must also keep our thinking and feeling clear. We will never be evangelists of the good news if we have a secret sympathy with sinners in their sin; nor if we envy sinners their worldly and self-indulgent lives; nor if we begin to toy and trifle with sin. "Who can fight for truth and God, enthralled by lies and sin?" (Hughes) It cannot be done. Remember that Jesus was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," (Heb. 7: 26 AV). How we need to learn that holiness is good, true, wholesome and happy. How we need to believe Scripture when it speaks of that "holiness without which no man shall see God". (Heb. 12:14). No one knew this better than Paul, and his words in 2 Cor. 4:1-2 are salutary. The A V. renders them . . . "We have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty," and this attitude is well expressed in the words of the hymn,

"Perish policy and cunning;
Perish all that fears the light." (Macleod)

Basically this is the attitude that puts God first and is more concerned to please Him than anyone else. This kind of life has impact. It shines like a light in a dark place, and points people to God. It has a warmth in its holiness that draws others to Jesus.

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1:24-25

This epistle has proved to be practical and contemporary and has caused us to face up to the facts, challenge and encouragement of contending for the faith in a godless generation. Jude has faced all the dangers, disappointments and devilishness of the situation, but at the end shows no discouragement, is not disheartened and is certainly not demoralised. The reason for this positive attitude and expectation is that he has an authentic doctrine of God. In this doxology he not only expresses his confidence in God, he describes or expounds the God in whom his confidence rests. He is the God of salvation who saves His people to the uttermost (24). He is the God to whom belongs glory (splendour and light), majesty (position of kingly dignity), dominion (ability to carry out His sovereign will) and authority (the right to act which cannot be questioned). All this belonged to our God before, still belongs now, and will for ever (25). Jude has faced the world with its woes, worries, trials and temptations. He has spoken of men with their slanders, pride, hurt, hate and unbelief, and he has warned of the Devil with his malice and intense enmity against all that is of God. Now, in positive conclusion, he turns to the God who is able to make us stand our ground, the God who is able to keep us from stumbling in this world of uncertainty, and is able to make us stand in the presence of His glory with rejoicing. This is indeed the assurance of being "in Christ" and of having "Christ in us, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). With a God like this, what right have we to be cast down? He is the God who saves us, as Psalm 43 makes plain. We sing the Metrical Version of this Psalm; it is time we really believed it.

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1:24-25

Jude's theme is not simply that in Christ we stand before God justified by faith so that we are secure on great day of judgment. His message is that in the whole of life's experiences and service we have the God who makes us say, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31) This is the glorious assurance of *faith* grounded in *fact*. "The eternal God is our refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." (Deut. 33:27) Think of the glorious references to God as a wall of fire round His people; regarding them as the apple of His eye (Zech. 2:5, 8). Think of the unseen host of God encircling His servant and driving away fear (2 Kings 6:15-17). He is the God who goes before His people, is their rearward guard, and the glory in the midst of them (Zech. 2:5). He is the rock and refuge of His people (Ps. 46:1-3). In every sense and circumstance He is the El Shaddai God, all-sufficient and never-failing One (Gen. 17:1). Now, with a God like this why do we stumble? The answer is unbelief. When Peter walked on the water it was only when he took his eyes off Jesus and let them be obsessed with the storm that he began to sink. Even then, the Lord held him! Later, Peter spoke of stumbling because of disobedience (1 Pet. 2:8). John 11:9-10 speaks of stumbling because men no longer walk in the light in fellowship with Jesus. Why should we stumble? We have every reason to trust God both in respect of His intentions and His methods. God is light, and He is love, and all our safety comes from Him who has covenanted to keep our going out and our coming in from this time forth and for evermore (Ps. 121). It is not a case of whistling in the dark to keep our spirits up. It is a case of considering and accepting facts. The facts are that God is greater than all, and has given us the victory (1 Cor. 15:57).

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God is able. What does that mean? He is able to deliver His people in circumstances that seem set to destroy them (Dan. 3:16-18). So persuaded were these men that they faced with calmness the possibility that there would in fact be no intervention by God. They were sure about God, but not presumptuous enough to think that they knew in detail everything He would do. God was able. They were in His hand. That was enough to be going on with. Abraham, in the face of human impossibility, was persuaded God was able to do what He had promised (Rom. 4:16-21). There were manifest difficulties, but they had to be dealt with by God. It was not Abraham's "department". In 2 Cor. 9:8 (AV) we are told of the God who is able to make all grace abound....always....in all sufficiency....for all things. There is no need to run dry, and if we stay near the fountainhead there is no reason why we should be sore with thirst. Paul speaks in Eph. 3:20 of the God who is able to do far more abundantly than we can ever ask, think or even imagine. In a sense you never know what God is up to, but you can be sure it is good. God is also able to subdue all things to Himself (Phil. 3:21). He is able to keep us in respect of the service and salvation He has entrusted to us and the soul and life we have committed to Him (2 Tim. 1:12). Wonderful God that He is, He is able to help and succour those who are tempted (Heb. 2:14-15, 18; 4:15). He is the God who is able to save to the uttermost of time and experience (Heb. 7:25), seeing that He "pleads our cause at God's right hand, omnipotent to save." (Rom. 8:34) We have a God who is willing and able, and He is right beside us.

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The final note of Jude's epistle is, "To God be the glory." The fault with us is that "Your God is too small". We have made Him in our own image and attributed to Him all our limitations and complications of which we are generally very aware. Think about God, not least in the rejoicing, the exceeding joy attending our presentation in His heavenly court. Whose joy is it? Of course it is ours, and it will exceed anything we have expected. Isaiah expresses the abounding exultation and we will all declare on that day that "the half has not been told." (1 Kings 10:7). But what about the joy and gladness of God Almighty? Does it not say in Isaiah 53:11 that He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied? Does not Paul hint at this when he speaks in Eph. 1:18 of God's inheritance in the saints? What does God get out of it all? He gets us, and He considers it a heritage of delight, fulfilling His eternal purpose with peace and joy. When all the saints are gathered in glory there will come to pass the purpose for which the whole order of creation was called into being. Think of this in respect of our own birth, life and salvation. Think of how all the costly disciplines and sore experiences will in a moment be transformed into

everlasting splendours. It does not yet appear what we shall be (1 John 3:1-3). But because these things must surely come to pass we live in the truth of them by the grace of the God who is able to bring us faultless, un-accusable and totally acceptable and satisfied into His presence. Finally in God's eternal presence, and looking back over our own personal story,

"I'll bless the hand that guided,
I'll bless the heart that planned,
When throned where glory dwelleth
In Immanuel's land." (Anne Ross Cousin)

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