

# Now, Contend For The Faith Against Apostate Teachers, part 1

I want to start by talking about the eternal decree of God. When we think of a decree, we usually think of a presidential decree or a governor's decree. They are like an Executive Order of the president. In theology, the decree of God refers to His eternal plan whereby He determined everything that is happening and is going to happen. His decree foreordained everything that has occurred and is occurring. His eternal decree is consistent with His will, His plans, or we could say His purposes.

**DECREES OF GOD THE FATHER.** There is much we could say about the decrees of God, but we do not have the time tonight. My purpose is to talk only about some of God's plans or things he decreed related to salvation.

1) *God the Father Decreed the Son of God.* The first important part of God's decree that is related to our salvation is found in Psalm 2:7, a messianic Psalm about Christ. Here is Psalm 2:7.

I will surely  
tell of the  
decree of the  
LORD:  
He said to Me,  
"You are My  
Son,  
Today I have  
begotten  
You."  
Psalm 2:7  
(NASB)

Decrees of God The Father Related To Salvation	
• Decreed the Son of God	Psalm 2:7
• Decreed Christ's Death and Resurrection	Acts 2:23-24
• Decreed the Elect Would Have Eternal Life	Acts 13:48
• Decreed Salvation Would Be By Faith	Romans 3:27
• Decreed Believers Would Be Like Christ	Romans 8:28-29
• Decreed How Sanctification Works	2 Thess. 2:13-14

In this verse the Son of God or Christ is speaking, and He tells us that God the Father made a decree that established a new relationship within the trinity. What was the decree? The answer is "You

are My Son." That is, the second person of the Trinity would be called My Son or the Son of God. This does not mean that the term, My Son, refers to the creation of the second person of the trinity. Christ was not created. Then to what is Psalm 2:7 referring?

It is referring to a change of title for the second person of the trinity. This change established Christ as the rightful heir to the Father's kingdom. This was decreed before the foundation of the world according to Matthew 24:34. It also prepared the way for the promise that someday one of David's descendants would sit on David's throne and rule forever. Now that promise required an eternal person. So, this helps us understand that "My Son" figuratively refers to David's descendant or the Messiah.

This change of title also anticipated that Christ would be virgin born in order to be the sinless Savior who would die for

our sins (Luke 1:35; Hebrews 1:5-6). It also anticipated His resurrection according to Acts 13:33-34.

So, God's eternal decree before the foundation of the world included a change of title for the second person of the Trinity. It was

necessary because Adam and Eve would sin, and the human race would need a Savior and a Messiah.

2) *God the Father Decreed Christ's Death and Resurrec-*

tion. Another part of the eternal decree related to our salvation is found in Acts 2:23-24. Here is the passage,

... this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. Acts 2:23-24 (NASB)

This verse tells us that God predetermined that Christ, that is My Son, would die and then be resurrected. It is an interesting passage. We are told that God planned Christ's death and resurrection. The result was that death was defeated. In dying, He took our sins upon Himself and the resurrection proved that He was the sinless sacrifice, because only sinners are sentenced to death (Romans 6:23), and Christ never sinned. He only took our sins upon Himself.

So God's eternal decree before the foundation of the world included 1) a change of title for the second person of the Trinity 2) and that Christ would die on a cross and be resurrected for our sins.

3) *God the Father Decreed the Elect Would Have Eternal Life.* Acts 13:48 gives us another part of the eternal plan of God that is related to our salvation. It states that God predetermined who would be saved.

When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. Acts 13:48 (NASB)

This message is repeated many times in the New Testament. We discussed this in our study of 1 Peter 1:1-2. In summary, God chose, elected, or predestined men and women for salvation.

So God's eternal decree included 1) a change of title for the second person of the Trinity, 2) that Christ would die on a cross for our sins and be resurrected, and 3) who would be predestined to eternal life.

4) *God the Father Decreed Salvation Would Be By Faith.* Our next verse reveals that God also planned how people would become believers or Christians. Listen to Romans 3:27.

Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. Romans 3:27 (NASB)

Here we are told that salvation is not by some law of works. It says that God determined that salvation would be only by faith. Now why did He do that? I believe the answer is that God knew sinners could not be perfectly obedient. If we had to perfectly obey Him, all of us would go to hell. So, He required faith in Christ. God wanted to give us a gift. It is an act of love. Further, Romans 4 reveals that if a person does try to earn salvation by works, he or she will go to hell. If you read Romans 4:4, you will discover that it says if a person tries to earn salvation, then God owes the person something. Consequently, they cannot be saved because salvation is only given as a gift.

Therefore, it is clear from Scripture that in eternity past God determined that men and women could only be saved by faith, which is also a gift from God. Otherwise, He would have required baptism or some other work in order to be saved. Ephesians 2:8-9 clearly teaches that salvation is a gift, and so is faith. Works do not save.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2:8-9 (NASB)

Titus 3:5 says the same thing,

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy . . . Titus 3:5 (NASB)

So, we can only be saved by faith and not by works. I should add that real faith is accompanied by repentance and submission to Christ (Romans 10:9-10). God causes the repentance, gives the faith and moves us to submit. (Acts 11:18)

So, God's eternal decree included 1) a change of title for the second person of the Trinity, 2) that Christ would die on a cross for our sins and be resurrected, 3) who would be predestined to eternal life and 4) that salvation would be by faith.

5) *God the Father Decreed Believers Would Be Like Christ.* Romans 8:28-29 gives us more information about God's eternal decree. This passage teaches that God the Father also predestined that believers would be conformed into the image of

Christ. This is the fifth part of God's eternal decree related to our salvation. We would become like Christ. Here is the verse,

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son . . . Romans 8:28-29 (NASB)

In these two verses we are told that God the Father decreed that believers would be conformed into the image of Christ. That is, God's plan included changing those He predestined to become more like Christ. These passages reveal that God did not plan to save us and then let us live as we desire. He wants to make us like Christ.

6) *God the Father Decreed How Sanctification Works.* The final passage that we are going to look at about salvation in God's decree is 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14. As I read this passage listen carefully for God's predetermined plan and how it is accomplished.

But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 (NASB)

What did you notice? First, did you notice that God the Father chose those who would be saved? Second, did you notice how God planned to conform believers into the image of Christ? In eternity past, He planned to use the Holy Spirit and the truth of the Scriptures to change us. That is His method. This is how we grow spiritually. This is an important biblical truth. It tells us why we need to study the Word of God and why the Holy Spirit is so very important for our spiritual growth.

As a quick side note, the word sanctification in this verse literally refers to the process of separating believers from their sins. Progressively believers are to be sinning less and less. Romans 8:13-14 says that when this occurs it is proof that a person is a believer. We need to understand that we will never

become sinless in this life. Yet God is changing us to become more like Christ. Sanctification refers to this transformation process, which is accomplished by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. It is a gradual process. It does not happen immediately.

Why does He use the Holy Spirit and the Word of God? Because that is what works! That is also part of His plan. Philippians 2:12-13 describes this gradual process.

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Philippians 2:12-13 (NASB)

This passage says that we are to work and God works in us also. Philippians 1:6 does too!

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:6. (NASB)

So, God's eternal decree included 1) a change of title for the second person of the Trinity, 2) that Christ would die on a cross for our sins and be resurrected, 3) who would be predestined to eternal life, 4) that those who believe in Christ would have eternal life, 5) believers will be conformed to be like Christ and 6) this will occur by a believer's study of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit.

**FOUR PRINCIPLES FOR CONTENDING WITH APOSTATES.** Now we are ready for our study which is Jude 20-21. Here is the passage.

But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. Jude 20-21 (NASB)

We have already been urged in Jude 3 to contend earnestly for the faith that was once handed down to the saints. Verse 4 explains that the reason we must is that apostate teachers have

crept into the church unnoticed. We may not know who they are, but they are here. We have learned that apostates are not people who lost their salvation, but are individuals who were exposed to Christianity, heard the gospel, sat in the church, but refused to believe in Christ and repent. Later, these apostates may start teaching the Bible. They teach falsehoods because the Holy Spirit is not within them to guide them to understand the truth. They teach error and heresy.

In verses 5-16, Jude then described the characteristics of these apostate teachers so that we can know how to identify them. Then beginning in verse 17 Jude started speaking directly to believers. He told us a) to remember the apostates and b) to remember they are not believers. They may look like us, but they are not part of the body of Christ. That brings us to our study.

In our study, Jude tells us how to contend for the faith with apostate teachers among us. He gives us four more principles to follow in addition to remembering that they exist in our churches.

1) *Build Yourselves Up In The Holy Faith.* The first principle that Jude gives us is,

**But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith . . . Jude 20 (NASB)**

When he says, “But you, beloved . . .” this is a signal that he is not talking about the apostates but is talking to believers. He is concerned about our spiritual growth and tells us that we are to build ourselves up on our most holy faith. Now he is not speaking about our personal faith in God—subjective faith. He is referring to the Word of God. Why did I say that? The reason is that in the Greek text there is a definite article connected to the word “faith.” Jude is referring to “the faith,” the objective content of the truths of our faith contained in the Scriptures. The word “holy” is important because it also points to the Scriptures. Romans 1:2 speaks of the holy Scriptures. Maybe the reason Jude inserts “holy” here is that it reminds us the apostate teachers were teaching error. We could say they taught “an unholy faith.”

So, Jude is urging believers to study the Word of God because that is how we grow spiritually. The Bible is part of

God’s primary plan and method for spiritual growth. This is also necessary because apostate teachers change what God wrote. As a result, they hinder your spiritual growth when they distort it. Therefore, Jude says believers need to study the Bible. This suggests that believers even in Jude’s time were not studying the Scriptures as they should have.

1 Peter 2:2 is a powerful verse that we sometimes miss. It says,

**... like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation . . . 1 Peter 2:2 (NASB)**

I want you to notice the apostle Peter says the Word is how believers grow in respect to salvation. Once again, we are reminded that we grow spiritually by the study of the Word. That is one of the two principles of spiritual growth that we learned earlier in 2 Thessalonians 2:13. This means that if believers do not study the Word of God they will limp along spiritually.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 is also another powerful verse. It tells us that the Word of God transforms us.

**For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. 1 Thessalonians 2:13 (NASB)**

I want you to notice that just reading and studying the Word of God transforms the believer. As we read and study, the Holy Spirit convicts us and gives us understanding.

Hebrews 5:11-14 is another excellent passage that teaches us to seriously study the Bible. But it reveals that believers who are constantly on a diet of milk will not grow spiritually. In fact, they will go backwards spiritually. Milk is okay for new believers; but to become a mature believer, believers must seriously dig deeply and study some mind-challenging biblical truths. Learn some theology.

Now I think every Christian has had the experience of trying to understand a difficult passage of Scripture. This

can occur for two reasons. First, they have only an elementary knowledge of Scripture. That means the only solution is to study Scripture to learn more. The second reason believers have difficulty is if they have unconfessed sin. Sin causes a believer to have difficulty understanding the Word. That is the message of 1 Corinthians 3:1-3. When we have not confessed our sins, we have trouble understanding Scripture because the Holy Spirit is grieved.

2) *Pray in the Holy Spirit.* The second principle that Jude urges believers to follow, since apostates are among us, is to be “praying in the Holy Spirit.” Now I want you to notice that we are told “to be praying.” He did not say pray once. Nor did he say to “build yourselves up your most holy faith one time” in the first principle.

The Greek tenses in both principles are present participles which refer to an ongoing activity. This means that we are to keep studying Scripture and keep praying.

Now what does Jude mean by “praying in the Holy Spirit”? First, this does not refer to

speaking in tongues as some might believe. The meaning is found in Ephesians 6:18-19.

*With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and pray on my behalf. . . Ephesians 6:18-19 (NASB)*

Here Paul urges us to pray at all times in the Spirit. If we were to remove the words “at all times,” the phrase would be identical to that in Jude. So, the meaning of the phrase is actually very simple if we understand Paul’s statement.

In order to understand Paul’s statement, it is important to

remember that in Ephesians 4:30 Paul tells us that when we sin, we grieve the Holy Spirit. Then in 1 Thessalonians 5:19 he commands us to not quench the Spirit. Therefore, we need to confess our sins in order to restore our relationship with the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 5:18 Paul also urged us to be filled with the Spirit. To do so, we should ask the Holy Spirit to control us. So, when Paul says in Ephesians 6:18-19 that we are to pray at all times in the Spirit, he has assumed that we are not grieving the Spirit, but are confessing our sins and are filled with the Holy Spirit. That is how we pray in the Spirit. When we pray this way, we are to be less focused on ourselves.

3) *Keep Yourselves in the Love of God.* The third principle is found in verse 21. Here Jude urges us to keep ourselves

in the love of God. Now this does not mean that God may stop loving a believer. Remember that Ephesians 1:4-5 says believers were predestined to salvation because God loves us. Salvation was His idea. Remember God’s decree includes being transformed into the image of

Christ and Ephesians 2:6 says we are already seated in heaven. Our reservation is in place and it is going to happen! We are not going to be rejected.

I think John 15:9-11 explains what Jude is teaching us here. Listen to John 15:9-10.

*Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. John 15:9-10 (NASB)*

In these two verses Jesus says that if we keep His commandments, then we abide or remain in His love. He is talking about



obedience, thereby avoiding God's discipline. Hebrews 12:5-11 helps us understand this when it says that God the Father will discipline us if we sin. 1 John 2:5 refers to obedience as allowing the love of God to be perfected in us.

Now before we leave this principle, we must read John 14:21. It helps us discover another benefit of obedience.

**He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him. John 14:21 (NASB)**

Notice that John urges us to be obedient so that we can enjoy the full favor of the Lord and not His discipline.

4) *Waiting Anxiously For Eternal Life*. The fourth principle is found at the end of verse 21.

**... waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. Jude 21 (NASB)**

Notice that we are to continually look forward to eternal life. The Greek word for "waiting anxiously" has the idea of eagerly wanting something to happen. Jude is talking about dying and going to heaven. Jude is not having an unhappy day. Even the apostle Paul wanted to die and go to heaven. He said this in Philippians 1:23-24.

**But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to**

**remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. Philippians 1:23-24 (NASB)**

Now that captures the right idea. What is the message? One way to contend for the faith and endure the difficulties that believers encounter is to fix our eyes on our future home and on our God.

**CONCLUSION.** Jude has given us four principles to help us contend for the faith against apostate teachers. He has told us to study the Word of God faithfully, pray in the Holy Spirit constantly, always be obedient or do not sin, and eagerly look forward to going to heaven. That is, do not keep your eyes fixed on this world and the problems of this life. We are not staying here. This is not home. The apostates are not going to heaven. This life on earth is disappearing. If we are always focused on this life and its struggles - including apostates, we will be unhappy.

Our joy is found by following these four principles and looking to Jesus. As we study Scripture, we learn more about God. As we pray, our minds are fixed on Him. As we strive to be obedient, Christ will reveal Himself to us more. As we long to go to heaven, we will anticipate seeing our God, whom we cannot see now. You see, these four principles will draw us closer to God. God the Father is urging you to follow these principles in order to contend for the faith once for all handed down to the saints. This helps us stay on the right path and not be deceived by apostate teachers.