

Now, Contend For The Faith Against Apostate Teachers, part 2

We will begin by reading 2 Timothy 3:1-13. In this passage the apostle warns us about what will happen in the last days upon the earth.

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these. For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected in regard to the faith. But they will not make further progress; for their folly will be obvious to all, just as Jannes' and Jambres' folly was also.

Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me! Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But

evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. 2 Timothy 3:1-13 (NASB)

In this long and sobering passage the apostle Paul warns us that the world will become more and more evil. I want you to especially notice in verse 5 that Paul says men will be lovers of pleasure rather than God and at the same time hold to a form of godliness. That is, they will look godly, but they are not. They are phony. Consequently, Paul says to avoid these men, and he describes some men who are worse when he says they enter the households of women weighed down by sins. In verse 13 he gives us the sobering truth that “. . . evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”

This is an important principle. We know it is true. Anyone who has lived long enough knows that our world is becoming worse. 1 John 5:19 says that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one! That is an obvious truth. This evil world is increasingly opposed to every biblical principle

because Satan is opposed to God and the world is controlled by Satan. The terrible truth is that apostasy is growing—the total rejection of God—inside and outside the church!

HISTORICAL CYCLES FROM BAD TO WORSE. But we should not be surprised. History is a great teacher. It tells us that Adam and Eve were created in Genesis 2 without sin; but by chapter 3, they sinned and plunged the creation into sin. By



Genesis 4 one of their sons, Cain, committed the first murder. By Genesis 6 the world was so evil that God chose to destroy all mankind, except for Noah and his family. God had to do this in order to protect the godly line to Christ, our Savior, or the genealogical line to Christ would have been corrupted.

Then after the flood, righteous Noah and his family began to repopulate the world in Genesis 9. But by Genesis 11 the new civilization established the first religion and God had to scatter them around the earth. That is, the degenerative cycle had occurred again. You see, the cycle starts with godly men and then mankind's conduct proceeds to bad and then to worse.

History tells us that the Israelites left Egypt, crossed the Red Sea on dry ground, experienced incredible miracles but within one year God refused to allow anyone who was twenty years and over to enter the Promised Land because they refused to believe Him. The miracles and wonders did not motivate them to believe. Once again, the cycle was repeated, starting with godly men and deteriorating from there.

Then after forty years the believing Israelites entered the Promised Land and eventually the book of Judges reports twice (Judges 17:6; 25:26) that the Israelites were doing whatever was right in their own eyes. The Israelites had rejected God once again. Then they pleaded for a king—the ultimate rejection (1 Samuel 8:7). So God gave them a king.

Then under King David, a man after God's own heart, and King Solomon, the wisest king, the nation of Israel hit its zenith. But four hundred years later God caused the Assyrian and Babylonians armies to conquer and deport the citizens of the nation because of their idol worship and excessive sins. So, the cycle repeated itself again. Do you see that each time the cycle starts with godly, faithful men and deteriorates from bad to worse?

Seventy years later, the southern kingdom of Judah returned to the land from the city of Babylon, and within about 150 years, once again, Israel went astray. Malachi records the sad situation. The priests had abandoned God, taught error, and only a remnant remained faithful (Malachi 3:16). Most of Malachi is addressed to apostate priests. Consequently, God promised to send the apostate priests to hell. Once again, the cycle repeated. The cycle started with godly men and deteriorated from bad to worse.

That was the condition of Israel when Jesus was virgin born and walked among us. The nation has not recovered to this day.

After Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension back to heaven, the church exploded in growth under the ministry of the apostles. Thousands of people were saved; but after the first century, some of the early church fathers turned apostate. The Roman Catholic emerged, and it turned apostate. Once again, the cycle repeated.

Then God used the Reformation in Europe to put His church back on the right path. He used men like Calvin, Luther, Wycliffe, Knox and Zwingli to salvage His church. They rejected the false gospel of the Roman Catholic Church and staunchly taught that salvation was not by baptism, holy water, indulgences, praying the rosary, praying for the dead or praying to Mary. Salvation is by God's grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone. It was an incredible resurrection of the church.

But today Europe is largely apostate and only a remnant remains. I discovered this sad truth when I was invited by the European mission board to visit the Netherlands in 2005 and preach at one of their churches for a week and then speak at one of their seminaries. It was a great time to teach the Word of God to fellow believers. While we were there, we saw some of the great churches that had been built during the Reformation. We were told that church attendance in the Netherlands was about 16%. Most of the churches were liberal, apostate and virtually empty. The churches were heretical because they have rejected "the faith once for all handed down to the saints." Today, only 3-4% of the churches are Bible believing churches and they have small congregations. I took photos of empty and abandoned churches as a reminder. In England we took more photos of churches whose doors have been closed. Today, apostasy is common throughout Europe. Once again, the cycle has repeated.

SEMINARIES AND CHURCHES ARE BECOMING APOSTATE. Today, some U.S. Christians are blind to the fact that apostasy is increasing in our country too! When we were younger, we were blind to the trend. We did not have the perspective of history. Many of the great seminaries of the past are now apostate seminaries. For example, Princeton Theological

Seminary (founded in 1812), Yale Divinity School (founded in 1701), Duke Divinity School, Harvard Divinity School (founded in 1816) and Fuller Theological Seminary are just a few of the many apostate seminaries. Today, there are only a small number of excellent seminaries left that are true to the Word of God. Once strong denominations are now governed by apostate leaders and pastors who firmly reject the deity of Christ. They are ignoring the great doctrines of “the faith once for all delivered to the saints.”

WORLD-WIDE APOSTASY IS COMING. I am saddened by the fact that this cycle keeps repeating, and that we are in another one. It may be the final one. I pray that it is the final one. Jesus warned us in Matthew 24:4-5 that apostasy was coming and would explode just before His second coming. Here is Matthew 24:4-5.

And Jesus answered and said to them, “See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will mislead many.” Matthew 24:4-5 (NASB)

Notice that Christ said, “see to it that no one misleads you.” Then He added that many will say, “I am the Christ.” And sadly, many will believe the lie. This has already occurred in our lifetime and continues to occur. That is apostasy - apostate inside and outside of the church.

In Matthew 24:22-25, Jesus said that apostasy would exist in the tribulation.

Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. Then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Christ,’ or ‘There He is,’ do not believe him. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you in advance. Matthew 24:22-25 (NASB)

The apostle Paul also warned that apostasy would explode just before the tribulation starts in 2 Thessalonians 2:3,

Let no one in any way deceive you for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the

son of destruction . . . 2 Thessalonians 2:3 (NASB)

These verses reveal that both Jesus and Paul warned that apostasy would occur inside the church and outside the church. Like a runner, the world is rushing to the end of another cycle!

JUDE’S WARNINGS ABOUT APOSTASY. Why did I start the study by talking about the cycle of apostasy? Because the book of Jude is about apostasy and understanding the cycle prepares us for our study. We have already discovered that the book of Jude warned the early church that apostates were already in the church. Individuals were teaching error at the time of the New Testament. Some were even denying Christ; we saw that in Jude 3.

In verse two Jude warned the early believers and he warns us to cling to the “faith once for all delivered to the saints.” Jude gave us guidance for identifying apostate teachers in verses 5-16. Next, in verses 17-19 Jude urged us to remember that apostates are among us and that they are not believers. Jude did this because if believers do not understand that apostate teachers are already in the churches, then Satan has won the first round of the fight. Many believers think that variations in doctrine are just honest differences of interpretations. They do not realize that some of these differences are very serious. They are the views of apostates!

Then in verses 20-21 Jude urged believers to do four things:

- 1) To always study the Bible, so to be able to hold to “the faith once for all delivered to the saints.”
- 2) To always pray in the Spirit – that is, confess your sins and submit to the Spirit so that the Holy Spirit can teach us and help us grow!
- 3) To be obedient so that we avoid the Father’s discipline.
- 4) To be eagerly looking forward to eternal life - to keep our eyes on Jesus.

URGED TO HELP OTHERS TRAPPED BY APOSTASY. This brings us to our study tonight which is Jude 22-23. These two verses are about three groups of people. See if you can identify them as I read the passage,

And have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatch-

ing them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh. Jude 22-23 (NASB)

1) *Help Those Who Have Doubts Because of Apostates.* The first group of people in verse 22 are people who are doubting because of what they heard some apostate teacher say. Notice that verse 22 says, “have mercy on some, who are doubting.” Since the context of Jude is about apostate teachers, we must understand Jude was describing individuals who were doubting as the result of listening to apostate teachers. We must also note that the word “doubting” reveals that they are struggling with doubts about something they heard from an apostate teacher. The Greek word that is translated as doubting is *diakrino*. It literally means “to judge through.” It has the sense of “trying to decide.” These individuals are struggling to understand what the truth is!

It is not difficult to understand why someone might have difficulty trying to decide if an apostate teacher is teaching truth. Maybe they heard a faithful Bible teacher and then they listened to someone on the television, internet or read a heretical article or book, and because their Bible knowledge is limited, they are confused. Someone needs to help them understand.

The only way they can know the “faith once for all delivered to the saints” is to study the Bible or have someone teach them. It can be helpful to know what the early church called heresy. The great Christian creeds such as the Nicene Creed of A.D. 325, Chalcedonian Creed of A.D. 451, and the Athanasian Creed of A.D. 570 were written in response to heresies created by some very popular apostates. It is hard to believe heresies can be popular. But remember that apostates love a following.

Additionally, given our human nature for the new and sensational, believers must be on guard against seeking some new teaching. Instead we must seek to understand “the faith once for all handed down to the saints.” There is lot of that to learn in the Bible. In 2 Timothy 4:3-4 the apostle Paul warned Timothy, a pastor, about people in his congregation when he said this,

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine;

but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. 2 Timothy 4:3-4 (NASB)

What Paul described is also true today! People want their ears tickled. They seek to be entertained by the sensational. Such a desire leads to the acceptance of false doctrine. An example of this problem was illustrated a number of years ago when a very popular and persuasive television preacher was holding a coliseum-packed crusade. During his sermon he stopped and announced that the Holy Spirit had just told him that God was not a trinity; instead there were nine of them! The crowd cheered in enthusiasm. He claimed that he was not giving them some old denominational teaching, but something new. He tickled their ears with blatant heresy. Sadly, many in the audience believed him. I am sure some in the audience were confused. Some doubted the “faith once for all delivered to the saints” that says God is a trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Another example is that some supposed Bible teachers claim that hell does not exist. The teaching is called Annihilationism and it has increased in popularity in recent years. That teaching is not a new insight in biblical truth. It is old heresy!

For many decades, we have been fighting the battle over biblical inerrancy - the Bible is without error in everything that it says. Some seminaries, Christian colleges, universities, churches and pastors that once held to a high view of Scripture now do not believe the Bible is without error. But the Bible says God wrote it.

Another error that has emerged in our lifetime is called Hyper-Grace and Post-Modernism. Hyper-Grace claims that a believer does not have to worry about sinning or confessing their sins because we are under grace. That only leads to defeated Christians since the Holy Spirit is constantly grieved with them. Post-Modernism teaches that the meaning of Scripture is what it means to you as you read it. So, every passage of the Bible can have a different meaning. To the biblically uneducated person this can seem convincing if they listen to humanistic logic and not the Bible. Jude says,

... have mercy on some, who are doubting . . . Jude 22 (NASB)

That is, we are encouraged to show these individuals mercy and try to help them understand what Scripture truly says.

2) *Help Those Who Are Convinced Because of Apostates.* The second group of people is found in verse 23. These are individuals who are convinced that the apostate teacher's beliefs about salvation is true. They are on the road to hell. Therefore, Jude says,

... save others, snatching them out of the fire . . . Jude 23 (NASB)

These are individuals who are more deceived than the first group. The first group has doubts about what they heard from an apostate teacher, but this group is convinced that the apostate's teaching about salvation is accurate. The Greek word for "snatching" has the idea of "grabbing or seizing something by force." The picture is that they are going to hell and we can grab them and quickly pull them to safety. It is like grabbing someone before they fall into a swimming pool. Only here we keep them from falling into hell.

Over the years NeverThirsty.org has often received hateful comments that say we are sending people to hell by not teaching that baptism is essential for salvation. Some have added that we are going to hell, ourselves, as a result. Baptism for salvation was one of the heresies that was fought by the early church.

Another example is recorded in Acts 15:1, 5. In this passage we are told that some individuals, called Judaizers, claimed circumcision and observance of the Mosaic Law were required for salvation. The book of Galatians also refutes the Judaizers who claimed that individuals need to keep the Jewish feasts, sacrifices, and be circumcised in order to be saved. Colossians 2:4-12 also addressed salvation by works—keeping feasts and aestheticism. These heresies surfaced in the early church and were defeated in that age by the apostles.

Today, these same heresies are still with us. Sadly, this heresy sends people to hell. It is clear that the apostles taught that salvation is by faith plus nothing else. We must remember that Ephesians 2:8-9 says that salvation is by faith and not by works. Galatians 2:6 says that no man may be justified by

works.

In modern times the church has had to battle a teaching that says all that a person has to do is believe Jesus died and was resurrected to be saved. Then they can return to their old sinful life and still go to heaven. It is called "easy-believism." Your ticket to heaven is in your pocket and you can continue living as you desire. If that is true, then the demons are going to heaven too!

"Easy-believism" emerged out of a concern to avoid teaching a works-salvation. But they missed the point that if faith is an involuntary response, then why isn't repentance and a desire to submit to Christ? That describes what happened to me when I became a believer. I realized that I was a sinner and was going to hell. I believed that Jesus is God and I felt so terrible about my sins that I repented and wanted to submit to Christ and so I did. Everything occurred in my head and in my heart. That is not a work. That is a response of the heart. That was the work of God in my heart. He gave me the faith, the repentance and the desire to submit.

Jude says,

... save others, snatching them out of the fire

So, how do we save someone who is believing the false teachings of apostates? Show them mercy by praying for them and teach them the truth. This means believers must understand the gospel and then share it.

3) *Help The Apostate Teachers Themselves.* The third group of people in verse 23 are the apostate teachers themselves. Jude says,

... and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh. Jude 23 (NASB)

This is a fearful statement. Jude urges us to be merciful even to the apostate teacher, but we must do this in fear. Now why should we show mercy and be fearful? The answer is that as we try to warn them, we might believe their lies and drift from "the faith once for all delivered to the saints."

When Jude urges us to even hate "the garment polluted by the flesh" he uses very graphic words. The phrase refers to

clothes stained by bodily functions. He refers to dirty underwear that has been stained by excrement or urine. His point is that we must be as fearful of apostate teachers as we are of handling someone's dirty underwear. If you are not, then you should be!

Many years ago, I invited some Mormon elders into my home. Friends of mine had been listening to them and wanted to know how I would respond to their claims. My purpose was to convince my friends and these Mormon elders that Mormonism was a false religion and, hopefully, motivate them to repent. I studied for weeks in preparation for their coming. I was in fear as I anticipated their visit. I thank the Lord that I was able to share many reasons why Mormonism is false. I was able to preach the gospel about Jesus from their Book of Mormon because their founder, Joseph Smith, had copied from the Old Testament. After they left, my fear turned into relief. I think that is what Jude is describing. Show mercy but do it in fear or with great caution and not with arrogance.

Revelation 2-3 describes seven churches that once were great, but they turned apostate. Some years after they are described in Revelation 2-3, God removed them. For example in Revelation 2:18-29, God warned the church of Thyatira, which existed in Asia Minor, to remove a false teacher. They did not.

I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first. But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. Revelation 2:19-20 (NASB)

This is a tragic picture of a church. It had a team of elders who ignored the warnings of Jude and the other apostles. Did you notice what they did? They tolerated the woman Jezebel. She was an apostate teacher. We are told that she “teaches and leads My bond-servants astray.” But the leadership refused to

obey and God removed the church.

Maybe some members of the church had complained about her teaching, but no one wanted to be unloving and cause a problem. Some may have even gossiped about her and criticized her teaching. But notice that God rebuked the leadership for “tolerating” the woman. The Greek word that is translated as “tolerate” is *aphiemi*. This word has the sense of releasing control. That is, the church leaders released control of her, probably to maintain peace in the congregation or avoid confrontation. An experienced leader knows that confrontations can fracture a church. But tolerating error is contrary to the teaching in Jude, 2 Peter, 1 and 2 John and the epistles of Paul. Notice that God said He urged the apostate to repent, but she did not. That is how we show mercy. Call them to repent and stop their false teaching. Jezebel should have been removed since she refused to repent. The congregation needed to be taught that false doctrine is dangerous and not to be tolerated.

The churches in Revelation 2-3 illustrate another cycle of proceeding from bad to worse.

CONCLUSION. Unfortunately, when Bible-believing, conservative churches around the world are more interested in “peace,” “unity,” and avoiding conflict in the congregation than in “contending for the faith once delivered to the saints,” the cycle of apostasy starts again. As a result, apostasy grows and increases. Jude has warned us to remember that apostates exist in our churches. They are not believers. He has urged us to study the Word, pray in the Spirit, be obedient, and eagerly look forward to eternal life.

At the same time, we need to show mercy by helping those who are doubting, those who believe the apostates' lies about how to be saved, and even attempt to rescue apostate teachers. Studying the Bible helps us to grow and be prepared to show them mercy. Prayer also helps us grow and is the means by which we ask God to save them. Obedience helps us become more like Christ and is an example of true godliness to those under the influence of apostasy. May Jesus come quickly.