

“THE FAITH ONCE DELIVERED”

If you're enlisted in the army of the Lord, He has given you a solemn charge, a sacred trust. It's recorded in the little epistle of Jude, toward the end of your New Testament. This little book of Jude is one of the shortest books of the New Testament, yet one of the most powerful. Jude is giving a warning to the disciples of that day concerning dangers confronting the church. Dangers brought about by false teachers who would assail the faith and use the grace of God to cloak their lasciviousness and sinful lives, touting, "Grace, grace!" when, in fact, they were living in sin and evil. Jude exhorts every Christian to stand in the face of error and defend the truth.

Jude 1-4 "Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called: Mercy unto you, and peace, and love, be multiplied. Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ."

This was a serious threat that Jude was addressing, and he calls upon every Christian soldier to stand in the face of it and to "*earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*" There is a lot of debate today about what "*the faith*" actually means. Does it simply mean that you need to stand up for what you believe in? Or is there more to it than that?

The word "faith" is one of those words in the Bible that is used in more than one way. In fact, in the New Testament, we see the word appear in two different senses, the most common of which is when we talk of a person's faith in God. In this case, we're talking about faith in the *subjective* sense, in other words, the *act* of believing. Our relationship with God exists within the realm of faith, by necessity. We believe in, trust and serve an invisible God *by faith*.

Hebrews 11:6 "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

Obviously, Paul here is talking about the *act* of believing in God. I have to place my faith in God and trust Him if I am to come to Him, be saved and accepted of Him. But that faith that we have in God has to come from something. It has to have a basis. I didn't just imagine God in my mind. I don't serve a god that I've just arbitrarily created in my mind; my faith in God has a source. Something spawned that faith within my heart. That's where the second usage of the word "faith" comes into play. Many times the Bible refers to faith in this second sense, and that is in the *objective* sense. In this case, we're not talking about the act of believing, rather *what* is believed. I'll give you a Bible study hint: when you see the definite article "the" in front of the word "faith," you can generally assume that the Bible is speaking of faith in the *objective* sense. Here are some examples:

Galatians 3:23 “But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto THE FAITH which should afterwards be revealed.”

Here, Paul is contrasting the law of Moses (that system that man had lived under before Christ) to the system of salvation by faith in Christ (the gospel). He’s talking about a body of truth that has been revealed, by which we can come to understand and know Jesus Christ, serve and obey Him and thus be saved.

Ephesians 4:4-6 “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling: One Lord, ONE FAITH, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”

Here, Paul outlines seven things, of which there are ONE. He calls that “*the unity of the spirit*” that we are to “*endeavor to keep*” in the “*bond of peace*” (Ephesians 4:3). In this passage, Paul is not talking about the *act* of believing, but about what is believed. He tells us that there is “*one faith.*”

Remember, Jude told us to “*earnestly contend for the faith*” (Jude 3). He doesn’t mean that we just arbitrarily decide what we want to believe and then stand up and contend for our opinions and our own ideas and philosophies. He’s saying that we contend for the things that we believe and practice that have been revealed by God. Of course, that brings us back to the primary question: what do we believe? What is it that we practice? Isn’t that the problem that we see in the religious world today, that there are so many conflicting religious bodies that are each contending for what they believe? So many different groups who are contending for many different beliefs, is that what Jude had in mind? No, not at all. He said to “*earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*” So, what do we believe? What are we to contend for?

Romans 10:17 “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

This is a very fundamental passage of scripture in which Paul is talking about the necessity of a preacher to be sent to the unsaved in order for them to hear the gospel, obey it and be saved. One comes to have faith in Jesus Christ, in the *subjective* sense, how? By hearing the word of God. That helps us to understand what Jude said about contending for the faith which had been “*once delivered.*” In other words, that which has been preached and entrusted to us in the form of God’s Holy Word.

Let’s take the phrase “*the faith once delivered*” apart, word by word, and see what we can learn about this faith for which we are to contend. We’ll begin at the end of the phrase and work our way back, first pointing out that “*the faith once **delivered***” is **an authentic faith**. It was delivered. This truth, this faith did NOT originate with the church. In other words, the church is NOT the author of the faith, rather it is the steward of the faith. The church is the guardian of the faith. The faith did not begin in the church, rather it was revealed to and given to the church to keep, practice and observe. That is significant because we hear a lot of people today talking about what the church believes. They’ll talk about some moral or political or doctrinal issue and they’ll say, “The church holds this position. This is what the church espouses concerning this issue.” They say this implying that there is authority in the fact that the church preaches and practices it. Friends, that is not where the authority exists. It doesn’t matter

whether the church practices it or not; that doesn't change the fact of whether it's the truth or not. The church is merely charged to "*keep the faith*" that has been delivered to it, but the faith did NOT originate within the church. It is not up to a board, council or hierarchy of men within some religious body to arbitrarily decide what the church will believe and contend for, because that's already been decided in Heaven. The truth, the faith has been delivered unto the saints, and it has been entrusted unto us to practice and keep and contend for it. This word "*delivered*" implies a revelation of God's mind unto men. It implies that God has revealed and expressed His will, and given the faith (through the process of inspiration) unto the church to believe. This came through the apostles of the first century. Those men were filled with the Holy Spirit, set apart by Jesus Christ to be His apostles. They were clothed and vested with authority and power, so that, as they spoke, they were speaking the will and the commandments of God.

John 14:26 "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."

John 16:13 "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come."

That's how the faith was delivered. That's why we find statements like this from the apostle Paul:

I Corinthians 14:37 "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord."

I Corinthians 11:2 "Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you."

You see, Paul was an apostle, filled with the Holy Spirit, and by revelation, the Lord gave to him the faith. By inspiration, He empowered him to write it down to preserve it for the church of all ages to have, read and study, to know, practice and contend for. So when Jude talks about "*the faith once delivered*," he's talking about this body of truth that's been delivered to the church in this age of time: the New Testament. The New Testament is "the faith once delivered."

The next part of the phrase we'll learn about is the word once. Jude says that the faith was "once delivered unto the saints." That means that it is a **historical faith**. In fact, I understand that the phrase we're studying would be more accurately rendered "once and for all delivered to the saints." It's a strange thing to me that some of the simplest words in God's word are the ones that cause supposedly learned men the most trouble! Isn't it strange that we have dictionaries and Bible lexicons that allow us to define and understand what to us are seemingly obscure words, difficult words that sometimes pose a challenge to us to put them in the proper context and time period and to really understand their importance, and there are men that devote their entire lives and careers to studying those words and the Greek language to help us define those words as used by the Bible writers; yet, so many people in religion can stumble over the most simple words! I don't know of any other word in God's word that is more of a stumbling block to more people than the word or concept of 'one.' Jude tells us that the faith

was once and for all delivered unto the saints. One time and for all time. That makes it a **historical faith**. That goes against the grain of thought of many today, who believe in a progressive or modern revelation, believing that they are always receiving new revelation from God and that they're always being led by the Holy Spirit into some new truth. We see preachers on television who will tell you that God told them to tell you this, or God laid that on their hearts, or God led them into this or that truth. Probably the majority of the times that they say those types of things, it involves you reaching into your wallet or pulling out your checkbook. There are a number of religions today that exist on the basis of progressive revelation. If they didn't have the claim that God had supposedly spoken to somebody in relatively modern times, they would have no reason to exist as a distinct religious body. I am thinking of one group that was founded by a woman named Ellen G. White, who claimed that God in a vision took her to Heaven, where He showed her the Ten Commandments, and He showed her a halo around the commandment to His people back yonder to "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy." She claimed that God told her to come back to earth and tell what she saw. To make a long story short, she established a religion that believes in worshipping God and observing the sabbath day, as opposed to the first day of the week as we're taught by example in Acts 20:7. Even though the Bible tells us that the sabbath day and the old law was taken away at the cross, and that we're no longer to be judged by the keeping of sabbath days and so forth (Colossians 2:14-16), the fact is that this religious body still believes that we must observe the sabbath day as they did under the old law. They believe that based upon a claim of progressive revelation. The charismatic movement is full of such claims. There are men today who claim to have the power of the Holy Spirit as the apostles did, and they claim to be led into truth as the apostles were. They claim to have the same type of authority that the apostles had, therefore, they believe that the faith is still in the process of being delivered. You know, the word 'once' is not difficult to understand in any other context. For example:

Hebrews 9:27 "And as it is appointed unto men **once** to die, but after this the judgment:"

If we could ask Paul what he meant by that, he'd say, "You're going to die one time. Once." Oh, you mean I'm never going to die? "No, you're going to die **once**." Oh, you mean I'm going to die twice? "No, you're going **once**." Paul, do you mean I'm going to die and come back, and die and come back over and over again? No! Of course not! He said, "*It is appointed unto men **once** to die, but after this the judgment.*"

So Jude, when you say that the faith was once delivered, do you mean that we've not yet received the faith? That we're still just sort of groping our way along in spiritual darkness while we wait for a revelation from Heaven? "No, the faith was **once** delivered unto the saints." Oh, you mean it was delivered twice: once through Jesus and His apostles and later through Joseph Smith in the giving of 'another testament' of Jesus Christ? "No, the faith was **once** delivered." Oh, you mean it comes over and over and over again, every time some Holy Ghost-receiving preacher claims that God has given him a new revelation or some new nugget of truth to pass along to the world? "No! The faith was **ONCE** delivered unto the saints." The Bible expresses its own sufficiency time and time again (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The third thing Jude tells us in the phrase “**the faith** once delivered” is that it is a **dogmatic faith**. In today’s world, being dogmatic about something is about the most unpopular thing you can do. We are living in the post-modern age, where we’re told that we shouldn’t be dogmatic about anything, and whatever anybody wants to believe, that’s all right if that’s what they believe. We’re told there really is no such thing as absolute truth. That’s not what Jude tells us. He refers to “*the faith*.” Has anyone ever asked you, “What faith are you?” Or, “What faith do you belong to?” Did you know that people didn’t talk like that in Bible days, because there were not a thousand different faiths. There weren’t even hundreds of faiths. There was only **the faith** that was revealed to the church of the first century through the revelation and preaching of the apostles and that they wrote down in this blessed book, the Bible. And it is yet **the faith** today, that we are to base our faith and our practice upon, and that we are to earnestly contend for.

In summary, Jude tells us the following:

- A) The faith is **an authentic faith**. It was delivered from Heaven through the apostles unto the church to keep and to practice.
- B) The faith is **a historic faith**. It was once delivered, through the apostles in the first century and not since, and we are still governed by that body of truth that came through the apostles two thousand years ago.
- C) The faith is **a dogmatic faith**. It is the definite body of absolute truth that has been given to the church to guard, keep, preach and contend for. That body of truth is revealed in the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

Jude 3 “...that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”