BUILD UP IN THE MOST HOLY FAITH

Jude 1:17-25

Key Verse: 1:20

“But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.”

So far in our study of Jude, we learned the significance of contending for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. Jude pointed out false teachers and apostates whose condemnation was certain and who were godless men, changing the grace of God into a license to sin and denying Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord. In the last lesson, Jude vividly described the lives of those godless men, who set themselves up against the word of God, being immoral, insubordinate and irreverent. He also described Enoch’s prophecy of the Lord’s coming to judge everyone and all the ungodly. We prayed that we might really believe the prophecy and promise of the Lord’s coming, “See, the Lord is coming” and keep watch as contenders for the faith, the once-for-all-delivered-to-the-saints faith. Today’s passage is directly given to the recipients of the letter with the expression, “But you, dear friends.” In this study, we can learn what we should do for ourselves and for others in order to contend for the faith.

**First, the apostles foretold (17-19).** Now in verse 17 Jude says, “But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold.” Until now, Jude spoke with his clear message of condemnation on the apostates in his day, bringing the story of God’s judgement in the Old Testament (on the unbelieving Israelites, the immoral people in Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns, Cain, Balaam and Korah). He also mentioned the angels who did not keep their positions of authority, the archangel Michael’s dispute with the devil about the body of Moses and even Enoch’s prophecy, which are recorded only in this epistle of Jude.

Now, Jude gives the beloved recipients, who are to be contenders for the faith, several instructions. In verse 17, he enjoins them to remember what the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ foretold. In our Christian faith, the teaching of Christ Jesus’ apostles is very significant. According to Ephesians 2:20, God’s household is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

Also, how important it is to remember or be reminded of in our Christian life! Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:1, “I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you”. Before his departure from this world, apostle Peter made every effort to help God’s people to always remember and be reminded of what they learned, refreshing their memory, even though they were firmly established in the truth (2 Peter 2:12-15). Apostle Peter said that he wrote both his epistles, 1 and 2 Peter, as reminders to stimulate them to wholesome thinking. He wanted them to recall the words spoken by the holy prophets in the Old Testament and the words of Jesus given through the apostles.

Then Jude says in verse 18, “They said to you, ‘In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires.’” Apostle Peter had said in 2 Peter 3:3-4, “First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, ‘Where is this “coming” he promised?’” So we see that what Jude wrote here using the word “scoffers” is referred to what Peter had written in 2 Peter concerning the scoffers’ scoffing about the promise of Jesus’ second coming.

Peter continued in 2 Peter 3:4, “Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.’” What scoffers said is not true. Since the creation of the world, there was the Flood, which changed the whole structure of the earth, and judgment by fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, etc. Then what Peter said continually is that there would be the final judgment by fire according to God’s word of promise. One clear characteristic of scoffers is to ignore the word of God and so particularly deny the promise of the Lord’s coming. Here the words of the apostles Jude wrote are, “In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires.” The appearing of scoffers is not something strange. In our time, there are many mockers of God and scoffers especially of Jesus’ second coming and many so-called Christians who do not truly believe Jesus’ coming again. This kind of spiritual phenomenon was already foretold by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Then Jude commented on the scoffers this way with his own understanding in verse 19: “These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.” What an insight to see them! They divide God’s community by spreading false teaching. They follow mere natural instincts. Jude used the word “instinct” two times here and in verse 10, “…what things they understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals.” When they understand by instinct and follow mere natural instincts, they are like unreasoning animals that have no sense of history and no hope for the future. They just live at the present. They live life according to their ungodly desires. They do not have the Spirit. They are worldly-minded and sensual, devoid of the Spirit. They are physically alive, but spiritually dead. They do not believe and scoff at Jesus’ coming again, because they do not have the Spirit. Romans 8:9 says, “…if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.” And 8:14 says, “…those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” May we have a discerning heart to see scoffers in our time.

**Second, build yourselves up in your most holy faith (20-21).** Now verse 20 says, “But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.” The word “faith” is meaningfully written two times in Jude, in verse 3, “…contend for the faith…” and here in verse 20, “…build yourselves up in your most holy faith.” The word “faith” can be one of the most important words in the Bible. As we studied, faith is a gift from God who is holy, holy, holy. James 1:17 says, “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father.” The expression “the most holy faith” shows how precious the faith is, separated from the things of the world. The faith should not be contaminated by anything of the world, the faith in Jesus Christ our Lord, the most holy faith.

Jude says, “…build yourselves up in your most holy faith.” Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 11:2-3, “I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.” Building ourselves up in the most holy faith includes living as a pure virgin to Christ with sincere and pure devotion to him. This is a fierce spiritual battle because Satan is jealous of our sincere and pure devotion to Christ. The evil and crafty one tries to divide our hearts and poison our minds. In this battle, we need to constantly crave pure spiritual milk like newborn babies (1 Pe 2:2. We are also to take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ (2 Cor 10:5).

And building up ourselves in our most holy faith is in accordance with what Paul said in Colossians 2:6-7, “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”

Life is compared to building a house. According to Jesus, putting his word into practice is building one’s house on the rock, not practicing his word, on the sand (Mt 7:24-25). There are many precious people of God who built themselves and their lives in the faith. Hebrews 11:7, “By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family.” While all people of the world followed the trend of the world without the fear of the imminent judgment, Noah took the warning of God’s judgment with holy fear and built an ark in obedience to God’s word. In this way, Noah built himself up in the faith and saved his family, condemning the world. Certainly, Abraham built up his life in the faith, particularly faith in God’s promise. Paul said in Romans 4:18-21, “Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations…Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead…Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.” In Luke’s gospel at the Last Supper, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” This Peter must have built up his life in the faith. So he could encourage the greatly suffering early Christians, saying, “These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.” (1 Peter 1:7). How precious and great it is to build our lives in our most holy faith, especially going through difficult times!

And “pray in the Holy Spirit.” Obviously, without prayer we cannot contend for the faith. Prayer is the expression of one’s faith. And Christian life is to live by the Spirit (Gal 5:16). Paul rebuked Galatians for their foolishness when they began their Christian life by the Spirit but seemed to be trying to attain their goal by human efforts (Gal 3:3). In ‘Ephesians chapter 6, when Apostle Paul told the saints in Ephesus to put on the full armor of God, he definitely included prayer, saying in 6:17, “Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.”

Then in verse 21, it says, “Keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.” In this world, everything is uncertain and unsure. But God’s love is certain and sure. Jude said in verse 2, “To those who have been called, who are loved by God and kept by Jesus Christ.” It is true that we are loved by God and kept by Jesus Christ. Now Jude says, “Keep yourselves in God’s love.” How can we keep ourselves in God’s love? It is positively and actively remember God’s love, especially when everything seems to go against me. 1 John 3:10 says, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” This is the evidence of God’s love. We should always remember it. His love is redeeming and saving through sacrificing his own Son for the atonement for our sins. In that love our redemption and salvation is sure, more than sure. His love is not to make us feel good, but to make us strong for the completion of our salvation. Also, his love is to make us useful to fulfill his purpose upon us. His love accomplishes his purpose, never failing. His love makes us victors in life in any circumstances. So Apostle Paul said in Romans 8:37-39, “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Particularly Jude said, “Keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.” According to Titus 3:5, God saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. At present we need mercy. In Jude, his greeting is “Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.” As the day of the Lord’s coming approaches, we need mercy. According to Enoch’s prophecy, the Lord is coming to judge everyone and convict all the ungodly. His coming means to bring his wrath to all the ungodly sinners. While all people of the world wait for the Lord’s wrath, those who are in God’s love through Christ Jesus wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring us to eternal life. This is the ultimate mercy. 1 Thessalonians 1:10 says, “to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.” We were the objects of God’s wrath (Eph 2:3; Ro 9:22), deserving his wrath because of our sins, but in Christ Jesus we became the object of God’s mercy in his love (Ro 9:23; Eph 2:4). We need God’s mercy from first to last. God’s love assures us his mercy, protecting us from the coming wrath. So what a meaningful and encouraging exhortation it is to keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

We may enough reasons to build ourselves in our most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit. All these go together for us to be contenders for the faith.

**Third, snatch others from the fire (22-23).** Verse 22 says, “Be merciful to those who doubt.” Those who doubt” is in other translations “to those whose faith is wavering.” The word “doubting” is basically “confused.” We remember how merciful the Lord Jesus was to the doubter Thomas. In John’s gospel, Thomas seems to be a man of determination. When the disciples noticed that Jesus was going to Judea, despite the danger of being stoned by the Jews, Thomas said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (Jn 11:16). However, in Jesus’ dialogue in an upper room, when Jesus told his disciples that he was going to his Father’s house to prepare a place for them and then come back to take them, he could not be sure of it. When Jesus rose again from the dead and appeared to his disciples and showed himself to them, Thomas was not there. So the disciples told Thomas this amazing resurrection of Christ Jesus, Thomas showed his willful doubt and unbelief, saying that unless he sees the nail marks in his hands and his wounded side he would not believe it. However, Jesus was merciful to this Thomas. A week later, he visited the disciples again while Thomas was among them and showed what Thomas requested. In Jesus’ patience and mercy, the doubter Thomas became a great man of God who apparently went to India and was martyred there for Christ. Interestingly, after Jesus’ resurrection, he went to Galilee as he promised and his eleven disciples came there. Matthew’s description is that “when they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.” Yet, the risen Jesus embraced them all and gave them the great commission to go and make disciples of all nations. “Be merciful to those who doubt.” What a beautiful exhortation!

Verse 23 says, “snatch others from the fire and save them.” What an expression! Here the fire is eternal fire as Jude wrote in verse 7, “They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.” Jesus described hell as the place “where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched” in Mark 9:48, quoting the words of Isaiah 66:24. Can you imagine the eternal fire in the unquenchable fire? In the Bible, the hottest heat humans could make was described this way: when Daniel’s three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were about to be thrown into a furnace, the king Nebuchadnezzar ordered the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than usual and commanded the strongest soldiers in his army to tie them up and throw them into the blazing furnace. The king’s command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (Da 3:19-23). The final judgment will be by fire. It is written 3 times in 2 Peter 3: in verse 7, “…the present heavens and earth are reserved by fire…” in verse 10, “…the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare/be burned up” and in verse 12, “…That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.” So when Jude said, “Snatch others from the fire and save them,” he must have had in mind the eternal fire after the final judgment. No parents will just watch their children be burned to death. They would instantly snatch them from any danger of fire. When God was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, he wanted to save Lot and his family members, hearing Abraham’s intercessory prayer. The angel urged Lot saying, “Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished.” Yet Lot hesitated. The angels who appeared in the form of men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD was merciful to them (Ge 19:15-16). We believe that it is an expression of God’s earnest heart to save eternally perishing souls. We remember what Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:16, “…Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” We also remember that there will be rejoicing in heaven when one soul repents (Lk 15:10). We also know that saving one soul includes wrestling in prayer. May we participate in his heart of snatching others from the fire, the eternal fire!

Jude continues in verse 23, “…to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.” What does this mean? We can understand this better when we refer to Galatians 6:1, “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.” Even showing our empathy to others should not be just from our human feelings but also out of the fear of God with an uncompromising attitude toward sin. We should watch out the devil’s work to tempt and make both stumble and fall

Jude concludes his epistle with the words in verses 24 and 25, “To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.” What a doxology, a word of praise! In this conclusion, two works of God are very clear: He is able to keep us from falling, and he is able to present us before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy.” Our eternal security is in him, not in us. This is our confidence. Jude wrote this at the beginning of his letter, saying, “To those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ” and here at the last part. Truly glory, majesty, power and authority be to him forever. May we be every moment and forever thankful and praising to the only God our Saviour through Jesus Christ our Lord for his love and mercy!

Thank God for our study of Jude. May we contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saint as we build ourselves up in our most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit and keep ourselves in God’s love as we wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring us to eternal life.