

A FAITH WORTH FIGHTING FOR

The Fight

TEXT: Jude 3-4

INTRODUCTION: Our text today is about fighting. I have never liked fighting, even as a kid or teen. For one thing, I was always one of the smallest in my class, so fighting was not a really smart thing to do. To be honest, I did get into two fights growing up – one in fourth grade and the other in seventh, both times defending a girl, neither of which appreciated it nearly as much as she should have!

In 1979, a fight broke out in the Southern Baptist Convention, a fight against the growing liberalism in our Baptist colleges and seminaries that were teaching our students that the Bible was full of myths, legends, and mistakes. Unlike many preachers and laymen in those days, I knew it was a fight that needed to be fought. I had been to a Baptist college and a Baptist seminary.

- I had been taught in both that evolution was true and supernatural creation was the lie.
- I had been taught that angels did not exist, but were added to the Bible because of Persian influence.
- I had been taught that Jesus' blood, shed upon the cross, paid no role in my salvation. Jesus was just giving me an example of selfless sacrifice by which I could be saved if I lived the way He did.

A couple of years before the fight actually broke out, God delivered me from the barren desert of liberalism; and I embraced the Bible as the perfect, inerrant Word of God. So when men like Paige Patterson, Paul Pressler, Adrian Rogers, Jerry Vines, and Charles Stanley launched a battle against men who actively and ardently sought to continue to teach our young men and women in our Baptist institutions that the Bible was not true, I joined the battle.

I was no more than a foot soldier. I did not even know the Preacher – Generals like Drs. Patterson, Rogers, Vines, and Stanley, much less Judge Pressler. But I fought that insipid, creeping liberalism that had infiltrated our schools and corrupted the minds and hearts of countless Baptist young men and women for many, many years. I and tens of thousands of other Baptists fought to try to prevent more God called men and women

from having their faith destroyed and their calling stolen. Morris Denman fought that battle as I did. Karen fought the battle right by my side. Rick and Christy Mitchell were in Slidell with us in those days and joined us along with dozens of other faithful church members.

It took 15 years to fully win the war in the national convention and turn our seminaries back to the doctrinal position with which each of them had been founded: the perfection and inerrancy of the Bible, the flawless, perfect Word of God. Today, glory to God, Southern Baptists own six of the most faithful, effective, doctrinally sound, God honoring seminaries in the entire world.

But although the battle was won over the seminaries, it had scarcely begun to be fought in the Baptist colleges. The Baptist colleges were run by the state Baptist conventions, and almost all of them remained liberal to the core in spite of the reversal of course in the seminaries. One of those state conventions was Louisiana where I lived and served as pastor. One of those still very liberal colleges was our own Louisiana College.

A small group of Louisiana Bible believing pastors asked me to lead the fight in our state against liberalism for a season. I did not want to do it. Karen did not want me to do it. But when the call came, and Karen and I talked about it, she said to me, “Mike, we both know this is something God has called you to do.”

In obedience to the command of God that today is our text in Jude, verse 3, I told my fellow pastors, “Yes, I will do it.” A few months later I was elected President of the Louisiana Baptist Convention. Usually when men are elected to positions such as this it is to honor them for long, faithful, distinguished service. That is not why I was elected. I was elected to fight – to fight to return the Louisiana Baptist Convention to the principle that the Bible is the Word of God and truth without mixture of error and to lead that convention to pledge itself to work in accordance with that principle, including the work of its college.

This verse of Scripture which so clearly gave me God’s marching orders reads like this

Jude 3 Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

Jude says, “I exhort you to contend ...”

To defend

To fight

The Greek is *epagonizesthai*.

Notice that the word contains the root of the English word “agony.”

Contending for the faith, fighting for the faith is often agonizing. This period of time for us was agonizing. The first meeting I held as president of the convention was with the Executive Directors of each of the Louisiana Baptist institutions and the chairmen of the Board of Directors for each one. I asked them to go on record as supporting the statement:

This convention shall do all of its work in accordance with the principle that the Bible is the Word of God and is truth without mixture of error in every area of which it speaks.

Only two of the twelve men present with me that day would join me in that statement. From that moment on, I was the enemy at every meeting. A year and a half into my two year presidency, at the age of 47, I had a quadruple bypass. But God was more than sufficient. Two days after my surgery, I was sitting up in my hospital room writing a letter to the Executive Board of the convention. The fight continued to be filled with agony. But seven years after my presidency ended, Louisiana College elected a President committed to restoring the college to the principle of inerrancy.

Now I tell you this for two reasons:

1. It would nearly be dishonest for me to preach a verse that has played such a critical role in my life and not tell you about it, as if that what I share with you today is merely academic.
2. But most importantly I need to emphasize that the command here to contend, to fight, is not allegorical or even metaphorical. It is literal.
 - **There is a time for the Christian to fight!**
 - **There are some things for which Christians ought to fight!**

Therefore, to help us understand this text and this command, let me ask three questions:

I. WHAT ARE WE TO FIGHT FOR?

The text offers an explicit answer: “**contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.**”

A. “The faith” signifies explicit content.

1. This is not saying that we are to fight for everything we believe just because we believe it.
2. We need to humble ourselves and realize that none of us is always right.
3. God's Word does not urge us to fight for everything about which we are "right."
 - a. I may be "right" about which methodology is best in developing small group Bible studies.
 - b. That does not mean I should fight about it.
 - c. Many a church has been destroyed or rendered ineffective because people fought among themselves over
 - "That's just what I believe, and I'm not going to change it."
 - "That's what I've always been taught."
 - "That's my right as a member of this church!"

Folks, let me just interject here – God bless you that you do not do this here at St. Andrew Baptist Church. We have the sweetest fellowship I have ever known in a church where people are not insistent on getting their own way or defending their own rights. I am trying to be clear, because when I tell you the Scripture says we are to contend, I do not want any of us to think it is OK to become contentious!

- d. On the contrary, Scripture urges us to yield our "rights" to others, choosing even to suffer harm rather than defending ourselves.
 - e. Jesus did not assert His rights at His trial before Caiaphas, Herod, or Pilate. He did not defend Himself. Instead He went to the cross.
 4. There were only two occasions in which Jesus fought during His earthly ministry.
 - a. Both of those were in the temple.
 - b. Both times it was about something that was a part of "the faith."
- B. "The faith delivered" means**
1. The content of "the faith" did not originate with us.
 2. It was given to us. It came from someone else.
 3. "The faith" does not consist of our analysis, our opinion, or even our interpretation.
- C. "The faith which was delivered once for all"**
1. The content of "the faith" is complete, finished.
- D. "the faith which was delivered once for all to the saints"**

We should be getting pretty close here, folks, to figuring out what Jude is talking about. What specific content has been once and for all delivered to the born

again people of God that does not consist of their thoughts, analyses, and opinions but of the thoughts, analysis, and declarations of Someone Else?

Jude is talking about the Bible.

The Holy Spirit, Who is speaking through Jude, is talking about the Word of God.

God is saying - While I want you as much as possible to live peaceably with all men, I have told you some things that are non-negotiable. There are some things you should contend for, you should fight for.

Let me mention a few laid out clearly in Scripture:

God is the creator. He spoke everything into existence in six days.

He alone is God, and He alone is to be worshipped and served.

Man is a sinner. Without forgiveness and redemption he will be separated eternally from God.

Jesus Christ is the Son of God, God Himself in the flesh.

Jesus died in our place upon the cross, paying the penalty for our sin.

Man can only be saved by trusting Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Savior.

Now, why did Jesus fight in the temple? For number two. The merchants and money changers were disrupting the worship of the One True and Living God, and Jesus would not tolerate it.

II. WHEN DO WE HAVE TO FIGHT?

The answer to this question is in verse 4.

Jude 4 For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

More detail about when we have to fight is given in verses 5 to 19, encompassing most of this short book. We will look at some of this detail in the weeks to come, but for now, notice what is said in this verse.

A. We are to fight when ungodly men infiltrate the church and seek to cause the church to deny the faith.

- 1. These ungodly people pervert the gospel – turning grace into lewdness.**
- 2. These ungodly people deny the Lordship of Christ – they refuse to obey His words!**

Notice that our fight is not with the lost!

Our fight is not with government, which by and large is run by lost men. This does not mean we do not seek to influence government and law, but we do not fight against it. We do not rebel. Jude is not talking about fighting ungodly Rome or Romans. Yes, they deny the faith; they pervert the gospel; they refuse to obey Christ. But that is to be expected. They are lost. **We do not fight against them. We seek to win them. We seek their salvation. We share with them the gospel and pray for them.**

We are to fight against the perversion or denial of the faith when people, lost or saved, creep into the church and try to get the church to accommodate their perversion and their denial!

We should be disturbed when the government says that marriage is not between one man and one woman, but we do not fight the government because of it. We are not to revolt or rebel.

But if one among us says, “We should acknowledge marriages in the church or we should perform marriages in the church other than those between one man and one woman, God says “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”

III. HOW CAN WE FIGHT FOR THE FAITH?

The answer to this question is not in the text. We find this answer elsewhere in Scripture.

A. Mt. 18:15-20

- 1. Go to the individual**

2. Take one or two others

3. Take it to the church (through whatever processes the church has set up)

B. Some of you are wondering, “Did you do that regarding liberalism in the convention?”

1. The answer is yes.

2. I went to see the president of the Baptist college where I was first introduced to liberalism.

3. I went to see the president of the seminary where I was taught liberalism as a matter of course.

4. I met with the president of Louisiana College.

5. I met with the Executive Director of the Louisiana Baptist Convention.

- All privately
- All way before I became a leader in the fight against liberalism
- In every case I was rebuffed or dismissed, and there was not even a hint of a promise to change.

There is never an excuse for circumventing the plan of Christ in dealing with sin or a problem with a brother or sister in Christ or in the church.

Two things serve as wrecking balls for any church:

- **Contentiousness over personal opinions and desires rather than contending for the faith**
- **Talking about a problem with a brother or sister or in the church with someone other than the offender**

Go privately, take one or two, take it to the church through the systems the church has established. By the way, that is what the leaders who began the fight in the Southern Baptist Convention did as well. It is one of the reasons God blessed it and made the Southern Baptist Convention the only denomination in

the history of Christendom that began the slide into liberalism and reversed its course!

Here is the essence of Jude 3 & 4:

When people in the church seek to contradict God's Word by perverting the gospel or denying the Lordship of Christ, fight against them. Use what our Lord Himself gave us as the way to deal with the problems.

INVITATION - Almost every sermon I preach pretty naturally flows into an invitation. This one doesn't. But that does not mean there are not decisions to be made.

There are some here who need to respond to the one and only gospel that will save you and trust the Lord Jesus Christ today.

There are some that need to obey the Lord in baptism, church membership, an area of service, or turning away from some sin.

There are some who have gossiped against a brother or sister instead of going to them as Jesus says.

There are other things not spoken in the sermon, but spoken by the Spirit from the Word of God to your heart because there are decisions to be made.

So we are going to have an invitation, because God always invites a response to His Word.