



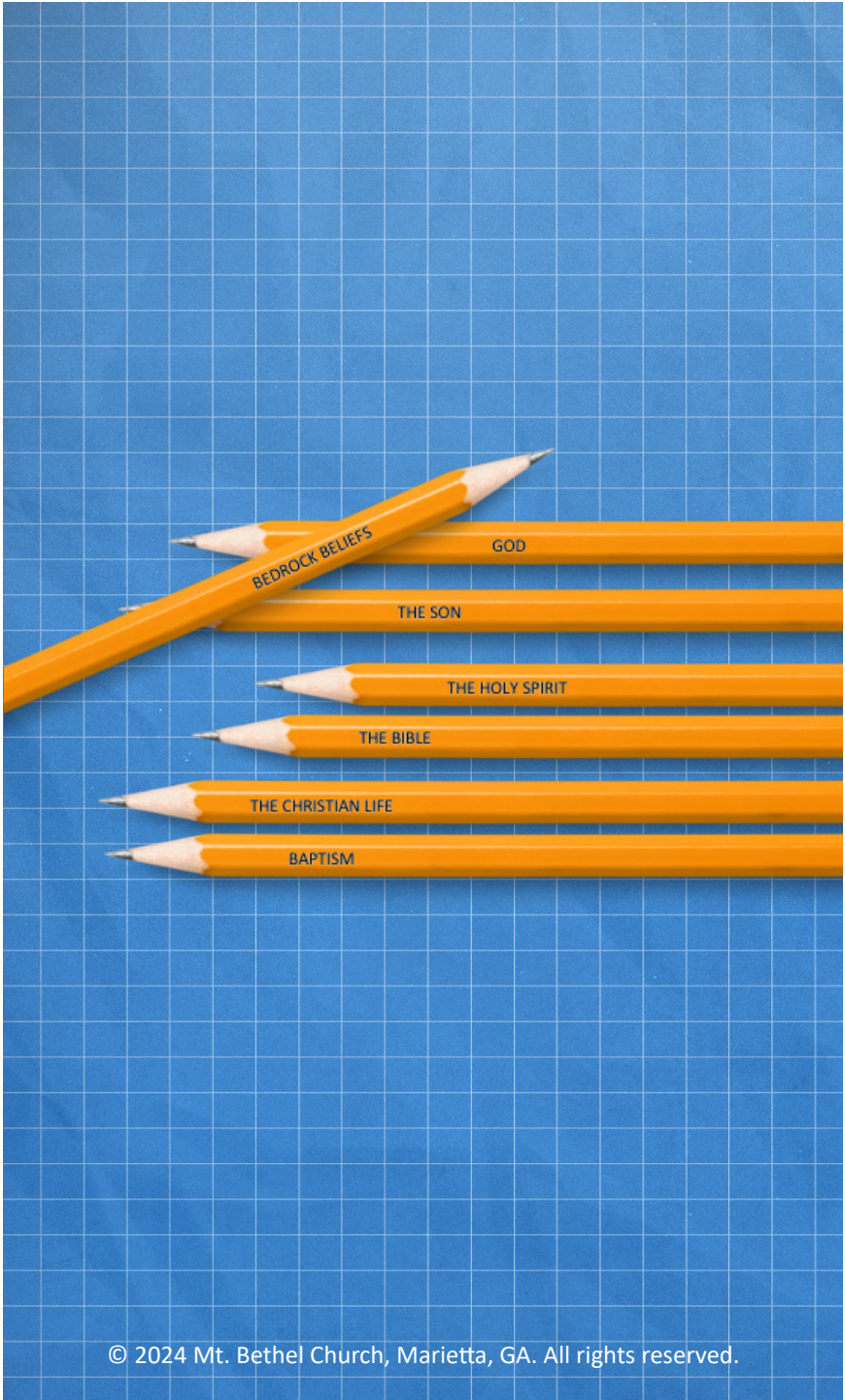
# — A Firm — Foundation

THE MARKS OF DISCIPLESHIP



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Week 4

## Contend for the Faith

By Dr. Jody Ray



*"Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those who have been called, who are loved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ: Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance. Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once and for all entrusted to God's holy people. For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord."*

*(Jude 1:1-4, NIV)*

## Introduction

The book of Jude is a brief, yet powerful letter found in the New Testament. Written by Jude, the brother of James and the half-brother of Jesus, the letter is addressed to “those who have been called, who are loved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ.” In the opening verses, Jude sets the stage for his urgent call to contend for the faith in the face of false teachings and ungodly practices that were infiltrating the early Christian community.

Verse 1 begins with Jude identifying himself as a “servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James: and addressing his letter to “those who have been called, who are loved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ.” This salutation sets the tone for the letter, emphasizing the divine calling and the believers’ secure position in God’s love and preservation through Jesus Christ. Jude’s use of the term “kept” highlights the protective care of God over His people, a theme that will be echoed throughout the letter.

In verse 2, Jude expresses his desire for his audience to experience an abundance of mercy, peace, and love. This threefold blessing reflects Jude’s pastoral concern for the spiritual

well-being of the recipients. His use of these terms also underscores the foundational elements of Christian life: the mercy of God that brings salvation, the peace that comes from reconciliation with God through Christ, and the love that binds believers together in the body of Christ.

Moving to verse 3, Jude shifts his focus from personal greetings to the primary purpose of the letter. He writes, “Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people.” Here Jude reveals his original intention to write about the believers’ shared experience of salvation in Christ. However, he felt compelled to change course due to the pressing need to address a critical issue threatening the church.

This verse highlights Jude’s sense of urgency and the gravity of the situation that prompted him to write this impassioned appeal.

The phrase “contend for the faith” is central to understanding Jude’s purpose in writing. The Greek word translated as “contend”

(epagonizomai) carries the connotation of earnestly fighting for something, often in the context of athletic or military competition. Jude implores believers to engage in vigorous, unwavering defense of the Christian faith against any encroachment of false teachings and ungodly influences. The urgency of this call to action underscores the seriousness of the threat facing the early church and serves as a timeless exhortation for all believers to stand firm in the truth of the gospel.

Jude clarifies the nature of the faith that requires defending by describing it as “faith that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people.” This statement emphasizes the fixed and unchanging nature of the Christian faith, which was definitively revealed and entrusted to the early believers. The phrase “once for all” underscores the completeness and sufficiency of the gospel message, indicating that there is no need for additional revelation beyond what has already been given. Jude’s use of this language serves as a safeguard against any attempts to distort or add to the core tenets of the Christian faith, affirming the timeless and unchanging nature of the truth that was handed down to the early church. In verse 4, Jude begins to provide a glimpse into the specific challenges that were confronting Christians. He warns, “For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and

deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.” Here Jude introduces the adversaries that have infiltrated the church community, describing them as ungodly individuals who distort the grace of God and deny the authority of Jesus Christ. This verse sets the stage for the subsequent exhortations and warnings that Jude will expound upon in the rest of the letter.

Jude’s characterization of these infiltrators as “secretly slipped in among you” underscores the insidious and deceptive nature of their presence within the community of believers. Their arrival may have been subtle, but their impact on the faith and practice of the church was perilous. The phrase “For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago” suggests that their ungodly influence and ultimate judgment had been spoke or prophesied, further emphasizing the seriousness of their actions and the need for decisive response from the church.

The specific charges leveled against these false teachers are twofold: they pervert the grace of God into a license for immorality and they twisted the message of God’s grace into an excuse for indulging in sinful, fleshly desires. Instead of embracing the transformative power of God’s grace to lead lives of holiness and obedience, they advocated for a immoral lifestyle that dishonored God. Additionally, their denial of the authority of Jesus Christ undermined the very foundation of the Christian faith, rejecting the lordship and

sovereignty of the one true Sovereign and Lord.

Jude's portrayal of the challenges facing the early church resonates with the contemporary issues within the Christian community. The infiltration of false teachings, the distortion of God's grace, and the denial of Christ's authority continue to be pressing concerns in the life of the Church today. Jude's call to contend for the faith remains as relevant and imperative now as it was in the first century.

If we apply Jude's message in verses 1-4 to our context today, it reminds us of the need to be vigilant and discerning in the face of false teachings and ungodly influences that seek to compromise the integrity of the Christian faith. The call to contend for the faith encompasses both the internal strengthening of believers' convictions and the external defense of the gospel against opposition and distortion.

Jude's letter serves as a sobering reminder that the church must maintain doctrinal fidelity, moral integrity, and unwavering allegiance to the lordship of Jesus Christ. It challenges believers to stand firm in the truth, to resist the allure of worldly compromise, and to uphold the purity and integrity of the gospel message in the midst of a culture that is increasingly hostile to biblical values.

Furthermore, Jude's emphasis on the unchanging and once-for-all nature

of the faith underscores the need for believers to anchor themselves in the timeless truths of Scripture and the historic teachings of the Christian faith. In an age of shifting opinions and relativistic ethics, the call to contend for the faith demands a steadfast commitment to the unchanging principles of God's Word and the core doctrines of the Christian faith.

Ultimately, Jude's urgent call to contend for the faith is a call to active engagement, unwavering commitment, and courageous defense of the truth in the face of opposition. It is a call to hold fast to the faith that has been handed down through the generations and to earnestly contend for its purity and integrity in the present age.

In conclusion, Jude's opening verses set the stage for the powerful and timeless message of his letter. As contemporary readers, we are challenged to heed Jude's urgent call to contend for the faith, to stand firm in the unchanging truth of the gospel, and to resist the insidious influences of false teachings and ungodly practices. Like the early church, we must be vigilant in defending the faith, upholding the authority of Jesus Christ, and preserving the purity of the gospel for the glory of God and the advancement of His kingdom.





**Day 1 | Week 4**  
**Who is Called to Contend?**

By: Dr. Jody Ray

*“Jude a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James, to those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ: Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.”*

*(Jude 1:1-2, NIV)*

## Day 1 | Week 4

### Who is Called to Contend?

Jude addresses his letter to a broad audience. He describes his audience in three specific ways: “those who have been called, who are loved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ.”

#### Those Who have been Called

“Those who have been called” are not those who have been called in fulltime ministry or pastoral work, nor is it describing the person whom God has called into the mission field. The concept of “the called” or “the chosen” describes God’s initiative in drawing individuals to Himself, inviting them into a relationship with Him, and bestowing upon them the blessings and the benefits of salvation.

The “called” are those people who having heard the good news of the Gospel, repented of their sin, and then responded to God in faith. Paul addressed the church in Roman in the same way. In Romans 1:6-7 (NIV), Paul writes: “To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” Those who have been called are invited, by Jesus Christ, to become part of the family of God and

are set apart for his service. When we experience “new birth” it means that we are “reborn” into God’s family. As members of God’s family, we experience the fullness of God’s love and are participants in the greatest inheritance.

Paul, in his letters, frequently expounds on the idea of God’s calling and the implications for believers. For example, in Romans 8:28-30 (NIV), Paul writes about God’s work in the lives of believers, stating, “And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.” This passage illustrates the interconnected nature of God’s calling, justification, and ultimate glorification of believers.

In the broader theological context, the concept of being “called” encompasses several dimensions:

1. The General Call: This refers to the universal proclamation of the Gospel to all people, inviting them to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. It is the call to salvation extended to everyone who hears the message of the good news.

2. The Effectual Call: This refers to the specific, irresistible work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who respond to the general call, drawing them to faith and regeneration.

3. The Call to Holiness and Service: Believers are also called to live a life that is set apart for God's purposes and to serve Him in various ways in the body of Christ. This call involves living in obedience to God's Word and growing in conformity to the character of Christ.

In the context of Jude's letter, the phrase "those who have been called" serves as a reminder of the believers' identity as recipients of God's grace and as participants in the divine plan of salvation. It reflects the understanding that their faith and inclusion in the community of believers are the result of God's calling and sovereign work in their lives.

### **Who are Loved in God the Father**

The second group of people Jude describes are those people "who are loved in God the Father." What person, having come to faith in Jesus Christ, can't testify to the love of God in their lives. As Christians, we understand that "who are loved by God the Father" is a foundational aspect of our faith. For the Christian, the knowledge of God's love is central to understanding the nature of God and His relationship with humanity. God's love for us is expressed in John 3:16 (NIV): "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and

only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." God's love for us was expressed in the person of Jesus Christ on the cross. We have experienced the lavish love of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The phrase "loved by God the Father" conveys several important theological truths:

1. Unconditional Love: The love of God, described by Jude, emphasizes the unconditional and unmerited nature God's affection for believers. This love is not based on human worthiness or merit but is a reflection of God's character and His benevolence toward humanity.

2. Covenantal Love: In the Bible the concept of God's love often conveys the idea of a covenantal relationship between God and His people. This love is rooted in God's faithfulness to His promises and His commitment to those whom He has chosen.

3. Redemptive Love: The love of God is intimately connected to the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches that God's love was demonstrated through the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross, providing the means for reconciliation and forgiveness of sins for those who believe.

4. Personal and Intimate Love: The phrase “loved by God the Father” also speaks to the personal and intimate nature of God’s love for each individual believer. It conveys the idea that believers are the objects of God’s affection and care, and that His love is experienced on a deeply personal level.

Jude wants to emphasize the foundational role of God’s love in the lives of believers, highlighting the transformative and sustaining nature of God’s love for us.

### **Kept for Jesus Christ**

The third group of people whom Jude describes as those “kept for Jesus Christ.” The phrase describes important truths about our relationship as Christians with Jesus. Let’s expound on this idea. “Kept for Jesus Christ” means:

1. Protection and Preservation: it means that God, through His power and faithfulness, protects and preserves those who belong to Christ, ensuring their ultimate security and well-being in Him.

2. Believers Belong to Christ: The statement means that through faith in Jesus Christ, believers are united with Him and are entrusted to His care and authority.

3. Future Hope and Expectation: “Kept for Jesus Christ” means we have a future orientation. Believers are being kept or reserved for a future purpose or fulfillment in the context of Jesus Christ’s redemptive work. This aligns with the Christian hope of the second coming of Christ and the culmination of God’s redemptive plan.

4. Participation in Christ’s Work: This phrase also means that believers are being held in readiness to participate in the work and purposes of Jesus Christ. As Christians, we are called to live out our faith in service and sacrifice to Christ and His kingdom.

Again, Jude’s letter is addressed to a wide audience. They are “the called,” the “loved in God the Father,” and the “kept for Jesus Christ.” In reality, Jude is using three different descriptive phrases to describe one person. Who is he describing? He’s describing the Christian. Every Christian has been “called.” In order to be a Christian, you must first hear the good news of the Gospel, repent of your sin, and respond to God in faith. When we respond to God through faith in Jesus Christ, we experience the overwhelming power of God’s unconditional grace and love in our lives. Then we understand that we belong to Christ and have a future hope in Him.



**Questions for personal reflection:**

1. What does it mean for you to be “called” by God?

2. How do you experience God’s love? What does that mean for you personally?

3. Who is called to contend for the faith?



**Day 2 | Week 4**  
**Contending for the Faith?**  
By: Dr. Jody Ray

*“Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once and for all entrusted to God’s holy people.”*

*(Jude 1:3, NIV)*

## Day 2 | Week 4

# Contending for the Faith?

Jude's primary purpose for writing this letter becomes evident in verse three. He initially expresses his intention to write about the common salvation shared by all believers. However, he quickly shifts his focus, feeling compelled to address the urgent issue of false teachers who have infiltrated the Christian community. Jude's overarching purpose is to exhort the church to contend earnestly for the faith that has been entrusted to them, emphasizing the need for vigilance, doctrinal integrity, and moral uprightness in the face of opposition and deception. There is a sense of urgency in Jude's words. He is communicating the importance of contending for the faith; emphasizing the need for believers to actively defend and uphold the core doctrines and teachings of the Christian faith.

### **What does it mean to “contend for the faith?”**

The word “contend”, in Greek, means to “engage in a struggle” or “fight for a cause.” It carries the idea of vigorously defending or striving for the faith, suggesting a strong and active effort to uphold and promote the teachings and doctrines of the Christian faith in the face of opposition or challenges.

The phrases “engage in a struggle” or “fight for a cause” make us feel a little uncomfortable, don't they? They make us feel like we are doing something wrong. The reason these words make us uncomfortable is because we live in a culture that values tolerance above all else. In fact, you could make the case that the only thing that is not “tolerated” in society today is “intolerance.”

The Orthodox Christian faith contains specific theological and moral teachings that are considered foundational to the faith. As a result, there are instances where we may find it necessary to hold to our convictions and be discerning or even critical of beliefs or ideologies that are in direct conflict with the faith. One of the main reasons why Christians



have to be intolerant of certain beliefs or ideologies is to preserve its core beliefs. Mt Bethel Church holds specific theological doctrines and moral teachings that we consider essential to the faith. Because they are essential to the faith, they are also considered to be nonnegotiable. We will speak more about this in the coming days, but as an example one of these core non-negotiable beliefs is that Jesus Christ came to reconcile us with God. He accomplished this by paying the penalty for our sin on the cross. Therefore, there is no other way to be in a relationship with God except through His Son, Jesus Christ.

The late British philosopher, Karl Popper, developed the idea of the “paradox of tolerance.” The paradox of tolerance suggests that if a society is excessively tolerant and allows the unrestricted acceptance of all viewpoints, including intolerant or harmful ones, it may ultimately undermine the very tolerance it seeks to uphold. On the other hand, John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement said, “We are not to judge the beliefs of others, but to practice the religion that we feel is true and leave others to their own conscience.”

These ideas considered together suggest a nuanced approach to tolerance. John Wesley’s statement emphasizes personal conviction and the importance of allowing others to follow their own consciences, reflecting a spirit of respect and understanding. At the same time, the paradox of tolerance serves as a cautionary reminder that while

tolerance is valuable, there are limits to what should be tolerated, particularly when it comes to ideologies that seek to undermine the principles of tolerance and seeks to destroy ethos of a particular community.

It’s important to note that when we are “intolerant” of certain beliefs does not imply a lack of respect for individuals who hold those beliefs; rather it reflects a commitment to upholding core Christian convictions, doctrines, and values.

### **We are Called to Contend for the Faith not to be Contentious about the Faith**

Jude calls us to “contend for the faith,” not to be “contentious about the faith.” There’s a big difference in “contending” and being “contentious.” There are people who are contentious and like to provoke arguments. They like to argue for the sake of arguing. However, that’s not what Jude is talking about by contending for the faith. Contending for the faith refers to the act of defending, upholding, and promoting our Christian values and doctrines in a constructive manner. It involves engaging in discussions, debates, and apologetics to support and explain the faith, often with the goal of persuading others and strengthening the faith of fellow believers. “Contending for the faith” is rooted in a desire to share and uphold one’s beliefs with love, humility, and respect for others, while seeking to promote understanding and reconciliation.

On the other hand, “being contentious about the faith” involves promoting one’s religious beliefs in a manner that is argumentative, combative, and divisive. This behavior often leads to strife, discord, and conflict within religious communities and among individuals holding differing beliefs. People who are contentious about the faith may engage in debates or discussions with an aggressive, confrontational, or disrespectful attitude, often seeking to prove their point at the expense of others’ beliefs or feelings. This approach can lead to division, alienation, and a lack of genuine dialogue and understanding.

The difference in contending for the faith and being contentious about the faith lies in the manner in which the person expresses and defends their religious beliefs. While contending for the faith involves respectful and constructive engagement, being contentious about the faith involves an argumentative and divisive approach that undermines the nature of Christ and His love for the world.

#### **Questions for personal reflection:**

1. Why is it important that you “contend for the faith?”
2. What is the difference between “contending for the faith” and “being contentious about the faith?”
3. What is our motivation for “contending for the faith?”

**Day 3 | Week 4**  
**What Are We Contending For?**  
By: Dr. Jody Ray

*“Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people. For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.”*

*(Jude 1:3-4, NIV)*

## Day 3 | Week 4

# What Are We Contending For?

### What Are We Contending For?

We know that, as Christians, we are called to “contend for the faith.” However, what does that actually mean? What is the “faith” for which we are called to contend? The faith that Jude is contending for are the core tenets of the Christian faith which are those fundamental beliefs and teachings that have been passed down through the apostolic tradition and are essential to the Christian understanding of God, salvation, and faithful living. While Jude does not provide an explicit list of these core tenets, they can be inferred from the broader context of the New Testament and the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. These core tenets include belief in:

1. The Triune God: Christians believe in one God who exists eternally in three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

2. The deity of Jesus Christ: Christians affirm that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, fully divine and fully human, who came to earth, lived a sinless life, died for the sins of humanity, and was resurrected, providing the means of salvation.

3. The Virgin Birth: Jesus was born without a sin nature. He did not carry the stain of original sin, which is inherited by all humanity. His sinless nature enabled Him to serve as the perfect sacrifice for the atonement of humanity’s sins.

4. Salvation by grace through faith: Christians believe that salvation is a gift from God received by faith in Jesus Christ, not by one’s own works or efforts.

5. The authority of Scripture: Christians affirm the Bible as the inspired and authoritative Word of God, containing the teachings and guidance for faith and practice.

6. The Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. It’s through the Holy Spirit that believers receive ongoing guidance, comfort, and the continued transformational work in their hearts and lives.

7. The resurrection and the second coming of Christ: Christians believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and anticipate his future return to judge the living and the dead.



8. Faithful Living: Christians are called to live according to the moral and ethical teachings of Jesus Christ, which include love for God and neighbor, compassion, forgiveness, justice, and moral purity.

Jude emphasizes the important relationship between correct doctrine and true faith. In John 14:15, (NIV) Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commands." Loving God means obeying Jesus. Therefore, the core tenets of Scripture must not be compromised. Jude's exhortation to contend for the faith indicates the importance of defending these core tenets against false teachings and distortions that would threaten the integrity of the Christian Gospel and the faith standard it upholds.

### **What is Christian Doctrine and Why is it Important?**

Christian Doctrine refers to the core teachings, beliefs, and practices that form the foundation of the Christian faith. These doctrines are derived from the Bible and the traditions of the church, and provide the framework for understanding God, humanity, salvation, the Church, and the Christian life. Renowned Christian author and apologist, C. S. Lewis, emphasized the importance of Christian doctrine when he wrote: "If you do not listen to theology, that will not mean that you have no ideas about God. It will mean that you have a lot of wrong ones."

### **The Relationship Between Correct Doctrine and True Faith are Vitally Important**

The importance of correct doctrine and true faith are vitally important because they give us the realities of Jesus and salvation. The Bible is the inspired Word of God that has been handed down to us to steward and not for us to change based on cultural shifts in perspective. The Bible should never be twisted or manipulated; when that happens, we can become confused with right and wrong and lose sight of true path to knowing God and eternal life.

### **Here Are Several Reasons Why Correct Doctrine and Truth Faith Are Important**

1. Preservation of Truth: Correct doctrine helps preserve the essential truths of our Christian faith. It provides a framework for understanding the nature of God, the purpose of human existence, and the means of salvation. Without adherence to correct doctrine, there is a risk of distorting or losing these fundamental truths.

2. Relationship with God: Christianity is about having a relationship with God through the person of Jesus Christ. Correct doctrine provides a framework for understanding who God is and how He relates to humanity. True faith involves trusting God's character, promises, and redemptive work, which forms the basis for a deep and meaningful relationship with Him.

3. **Spiritual Growth:** Sound doctrine and true faith are foundational for spiritual growth and maturity. They provide a solid basis for understanding the teachings of the Bible, developing a deeper knowledge of God, and living out the Christian faith in our daily lives. Without a solid doctrinal foundation and genuine faith, believers will struggle to grow spiritually and discern God's will for their lives.

4. **Defense against False Teachings:** Correct doctrine and true faith help protect believers from being led astray by false teachings and heresies. The New Testament contains numerous warnings about the dangers of false prophets and teachings that deviate from the core truths of the Christian faith. By holding fast correct doctrine and exercising true faith, believers are better equipped to discern and refute false teachings.

5. **Unity within the Church:** Correct doctrine and true faith is the glue that holds the church together in unity. When believers share a common understanding of essential Christian doctrines and hold to true faith in Christ, it fosters a sense of unity and mutual support within the body of Christ. This unity is based on a shared commitment to the core beliefs of the Christian faith.

## **The Absence of Doctrine and the Implications on the Christian Faith**

The implications of the absence of doctrine on the Christian faith is profound. Take for example the absence of the virgin birth of Jesus on Christianity. The impact would be significant to say the least, as the belief in the virgin birth is intricately woven into the doctrinal and theological framework of the Christian faith. For example, the absence of the virgin birth would call into question the unique identity and nature of Jesus Christ. Without the virgin birth, the understanding of Jesus as fully God and fully man, without stain of original sin would be cancelled out. Neither would there be the incarnation – that Jesus, the Son of God, took on human flesh.

Taking this idea, a step further, the absence of the virgin birth would raise questions about the sinless nature of Jesus. Again, Christian doctrine teaches that Jesus was born without sin, which enabled Him to serve as the perfect sacrifice for the atonement of humanity's sins. Finally, the absence of the virgin birth as an actual historical event would completely call into question the reliability and authority of Scripture.

These are just a few examples of the implications for Christianity if there were no virgin birth of Jesus. The virgin birth is foundational to the Christian faith and the understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

In contemporary application, Jude 1:3-4 serves as a call to action for Christians to uphold and defend the truths of the Christian faith, to remain steadfast in the face of challenges, and to actively engage with the world in presenting and defending the gospel. It reminds us of our responsibility to protect the integrity of the faith and pass it on faithfully to future generations.

**Questions for personal reflection:**

1. Why is Christian Doctrine so important?

2. What's the relationship between correct doctrine and true faith?

3. How can you personally contend for the faith as a follower of Jesus Christ?



**Day 4 | Week 4**  
**Who are We Contending Against?**  
By: Dr. Jody Ray

*“For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.”*

*(Jude 1:4, NIV)*

## Day 4 | Week 4

# Who are We Contending Against?

In verse four, Jude addresses the presence of false teachers and their influence within the Christian community. Jude writes that these false teachers have “secretly slipped in among” the believers in order to twist the Bible’s teachings to justify their own opinions, life choices, or wrong behavior. By doing this, they may gain temporary freedom to act as they wish, but when they distort the truths of Scripture they are playing with fire.

During the time of Jude’s letter, Gnosticism was an influential movement that was starting to emerge within the early Christian community. Gnosticism was not a monolithic belief system, but rather a diverse and complex set of beliefs that drew from a variety of sources, including Greek philosophy, Jewish mysticism, and Christian teachings. The Gnostics specific teachings varied, but they generally shared common characteristics:

1. Secret Knowledge: Gnostics claimed to possess secret spiritual knowledge (gnosis) that was necessary for salvation and transcended the teachings of Christianity. This knowledge was often seen as a means

of escaping the material world, which was viewed as inherently corrupt and flawed.

2. Dualism: Gnostics often held a dualistic view of the world, believing in a radical separation between the material and spiritual realms. They typically saw the material world as inherently evil or less important, while emphasizing the importance of the spiritual realm.

3. Denial of Christ’s humanity: Gnostics denied the full humanity of Jesus Christ, asserting that he only appeared to be human, but in reality, he was purely divine. Obviously, this belief contradicted the doctrine of both the virgin birth and the incarnation.

4. Salvation through knowledge: Gnostics often taught that salvation came through acquiring the secret knowledge rather than faith in Christ’s atoning work or the grace of God. They believed that through gaining this special knowledge, individuals could achieve spiritual enlightenment and liberation from the material world.



5. Rejection of the Old Testament and Jewish Tradition: Gnostics separated the God of the Old and New Testaments claiming the God of the Old Testament was a lesser, inferior god who was responsible for creating the flawed material world.

In our modern times we are seeing the rise of a neo-Gnosticism. The term neo or modern Gnosticism refers to a variety of contemporary spiritual and philosophical movements that draw inspiration from the ancient Gnostic traditions of the early Christian era. Modern Gnosticism is a diverse and decentralized phenomenon, encompassing a wide range of beliefs and practices. Take for example the concept of Dualism. Modern Gnosticism embraces a dualistic worldview that teaches a radical separation between the material and spiritual realms. The New Age movement is an example of this perspective.

The New Age movement puts a strong emphasis on the pursuit of higher consciousness and the ability of the individual to orchestrate inner transformation. Take the pursuit of higher consciousness of the New Age movement as an example. This idea involves exploring spiritual and metaphysical concepts, as well as practices aimed at fostering personal awareness and transformation. One such practice within New Age is meditation. Meditation is a fundamental practice in the New Age movement that is believed to facilitate a deeper connection with one's inner self and the universe. By

quieting the mind and focusing on the present moment, the individual's goal is to attain heightened awareness and spiritual insight.

As followers of Jesus our spiritual awareness and insight isn't something that comes from within ourselves, but rather found through a relationship with Jesus Christ. It's only when we know Jesus as Savior and follow Him as our Lord that we gain spiritual awareness and insight. Spiritual awareness occurs for the Christian as we move from darkness into the light of Jesus Christ. In 2 Corinthians 4:6 (NIV), the Apostle Paul writes, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ."

Another example of Modern Gnosticism is the environmental and anti-consumerist movements. These movements portray the material world as endangered or corrupted by human activity, while advocating for a return to a more harmonious and sustainable relationship with nature. This can sometimes take on a spiritual or quasi-religious dimension, with an emphasis on reconnection with the natural world as a means of transcending the perceived shortcomings of modern civilization. Environmental activists often view the natural world as sacred and worthy of reverence. There's no doubt that we are called to be good stewards of the environment, however, acts and rituals aimed at healing the Earth take this idea to an extreme

and even pagan practice. A growing movement known as “spiritual ecology” seeks to integrate spiritual and environmental perspectives, drawing on religious and indigenous traditions to promote ecological awareness and conservation. This approach emphasizes the spiritual dimensions of environmentalism and the interconnectedness of all life. Genesis 2:15 says, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” We recognize that all created things belong to God, and we are accountable to Him as stewards of creation. We are to worship God the creator and not that which He created.

Another area of emphasis in modern Gnosticism is the idea of a spiritual essence or divine spark within an individual that transcends the material world. This Gnostic perspective often involved the devaluation of the physical body and an emphasis on the importance of inner, spiritual truths over external, material realities. Following this train of thought modern Gnosticism embrace the concept of transcending or transforming one’s earthly existence. An example in our modern society is transgender ideology. Much of the discussion around gender dysphoria (when an individual’s gender identity does not align with their birth sex) is interpreted as a conflict between an individual’s inner, spiritual sense of self and their external, physical embodiment. Christians hold the belief that human beings were created in the image

of God. Genesis 1:27 says, “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” As Christians, we believe that human flourishing is found in God’s created order.

#### **Questions for personal reflection:**

1. In what areas have you experienced an effort by some to reshape or redefine the orthodox tenets of Scripture?
2. Why is doctrine so important to the church?
3. Why is having our identity firmly established in Jesus Christ so important?

## Day 5 | Week 4

# How Do We Contend for the Faith?

By: Dr. Jody Ray

*“Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those who have been called, who are loved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ: Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance. Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once and for all entrusted to God’s holy people. For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.”*

*(Jude 1:1-4, NIV)*

## Day 5 | Week 4

# How Do We Contend for the Faith?

As we have learned over these last few days, all of us are called to earnestly contend for the faith. To “contend for the faith” means to defend and uphold the core beliefs and teachings of the Christian faith, particularly in the face of challenges, opposition, and cultural pressures. In our modern culture and society, contending for the faith involves several key aspects:

**1. Understanding and Articulating Core Beliefs:** Contending for the faith begins with a deep understanding of the foundational beliefs and teachings of Christianity. It involves being able to articulate these beliefs clearly and compellingly, especially in the context of contemporary issues and questions.

**2. Engaging in Thoughtful Dialogue:** In today’s pluralistic and diverse society, contending for the faith often involves engaging in thoughtful dialogue with individuals from different belief systems, worldviews, and ideologies. This includes being able to respectfully present and defend Christian beliefs while also listening to respectfully to other perspectives.

**3. Addressing Cultural Challenges:** Modern culture presents a range of challenges to the Christian faith, including secularism, moral relativism, and skepticism toward religious traditions. Contending for the faith requires engaging with these challenges thoughtfully and constructively, offering meaningful responses to cultural and intellectual critiques.

**4. Loving and Serving Others:** Contending for the faith is not solely about intellectual debate; it also involves embodying the love, compassion, and service exemplified by Jesus Christ. This means living out the principles of the faith in ways that demonstrate its transformative power and relevance in addressing human needs and societal challenges.

**5. Cultivating Discernment:** Contending for the faith involves equipping individuals to discern between truth and error, especially in an age of information overload and conflicting messages. This includes fostering critical thinking skills, a robust understanding of Scripture, and a willingness to seek wisdom and guidance from trusted sources.

6. Living as Salt and Light: Christians are called to be ambassadors of God in the world, reflecting the values of the kingdom of God. Contending for the faith thus involves living lives of integrity, justice, and compassion, serving as a positive influence in society and demonstrating the transformative power of the gospel.

7. Prayer and Dependence on God: Ultimately, contending for the faith is a spiritual endeavor that requires reliance on the guidance and strength of the Holy Spirit. This includes fervent prayer for wisdom, courage, and opportunities to share the message of the gospel effectively.

In our modern culture contending for the faith is of utmost importance due to the prevalent diversity of beliefs, worldviews, and ideologies. As societal norms and values continue to shift, the need to defend and uphold the core tenets of Christian faith becomes increasingly crucial. By actively engaging in discussions, debates, and intellectual (grace filled) discourse, we not only strengthen our own convictions but also contribute to the preservation of this Gospel message that we've been called to steward.

### Questions for personal reflection:

1. In what ways are you currently contending for the faith?
2. Which one of the seven ways for contending for the faith listed above do you identify with the most? Why?
3. Is there a particular area you need to grow and mature in?







## OUR MISSION

To lead people to trade the pursuit of more  
for a life worth pursuing in Jesus Christ.



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