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Bible Exposition: Jude 1-7

The early Christians faced opposition for their faith. Some of that opposition came from outside the church, for instance, from the Roman government. Opposition also came from other outsiders as more and more people were drawn to follow Jesus, such as from the Pharisees and teachers of the law.

But there were also threats that arose from within the church; false teachers who introduced confusion and controversy that resulted in disunity and division. The problem was not that disagreements had arisen, but that these teachers were worldly minded and devoid of the God's spirit. The reality is that in our own day we face similar threats. God's word was important then, and God's word is important now. The message of Jude adds to the chorus of Old and New Testament saints who have warned God's people of the danger of being led astray from God's word.

A FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

The opening verses tell us that Jude is writing to his "dear friends" (v3) – fellow Christians – "those who have been called, who are loved by God and kept by Jesus" (v1). Jude addresses the Christians in the early church, those who are loved by God and kept by Jesus on the basis of his abundant "mercy, peace and love" (v2). The foundational truth that Jude establishes is that only through God's grace in Jesus do we have peace with him. And it is a relationship based on God's love for us, not our love for him. After all, that is what grace is, his undeserved favour for us.

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH

Jude tells us he was eager to write about the salvation we share (v3), but something else has come up. He wanted to write about the gospel, the salvation we share in Jesus, but a more urgent matter has arisen. It is urgent not because it is more important, but because of its great impact on the gospel itself. He says, "I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints." The word

"contend" means to fight, to strive, to argue, to assert, defend, to stand up for. Jude is urging the Christian believers to fight and stand up for "the faith that was entrusted to the saints"

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"The faith" entrusted to us is the gospel message, it is the doctrinal truths the Bible teaches, and they have been entrusted to the first Christians and all Christians – "once for all." That is, to Christians then and to Christians now: them and us. To be entrusted with something means to look after it. If you entrust me with your car, you'd expect me to look after it. You'd probably be upset if I was careless with it or if I tried to service it myself only to break it. In the same way, God has revealed his truth to us in his word and has entrusted it to our care. God's word is something we must take care of; it isn't ours to change or to try to improve upon.

A THREAT FROM IMPOSTERS

The reason why Jude urges his friends to contend for the faith is because there is a threat. Verse 4 tells us what that threat is: there have been some people who have secretly slipped into the church. You might call them wolves in sheep's clothing, they may look like everyone else, say the right

things, do the right things, but underneath they are imposters. These imposters have slipped into the church in such a way that they have been able to fool people into thinking they are genuine believers. Sometimes it isn't obvious who these people are, and so they may even be able to obtain positions of responsibility or influence. Whilst they may have secretly infiltrated the church, Jude describes how their true identity can be exposed.

Firstly, they change the grace of God into a license for immorality (v4b). In other words, they change the gospel message of grace by saying that sin is okay. They might say that God is a God of unlimited love and grace, so it doesn't matter how you live, even if it is immoral (although they wouldn't call it that), God will forgive you as he accommodates and accepts everyone! But God's grace doesn't give us any permission to do what we like. We know that from Romans 6:1-2: "Shall I go on sinning so grace may increase? By no means!" and Titus 2:11-12 "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, it teaches us to say "no" to ungodliness and worldly passions." That is a threat we continue to face from within the church, from those who change God's grace into a licence for sin.

Secondly, these imposters can be exposed by the way they "deny Jesus as our only sovereign and Lord" (v4c). To deny Jesus as Lord may not necessarily be done with words. As Jesus says, there will be those who cry out to him, "Lord, Lord" (Matthew 7:21-23). These imposters may still say the right things and even give lip service to Jesus as Lord, but fail to live that out in faithful obedience to him as Lord and master of their lives.

ETERNAL CONSEQUENCES

In verses 5-7 Jude gives three examples of the consequences for those who are led astray and lead others astray too. The first example (v5) is God's great rescue of his people from Egypt. But

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once rescued there were those who didn't believe and were destroyed. The second example (v6) casts our eyes to the heavenly realm where even angels – God's chosen messengers - who had disobeyed God are punished. The details are not revealed to us, but the point is plain: if God punishes even the celestial beings, how do mere mortals expect to escape punishment if we rebel and go our own way. The third example (v7) is of Sodom and Gomorrah who had given themselves up to sexual immorality. They were destroyed by fire and it points to the punishment of eternal fire for those who follow in their footsteps.

There are consequences – eternal consequences, for those who turn away from God. It is a topic that Bible teachers might rather wish to avoid. It isn't pleasant talking about such things. Like Jude, we would much rather speak about the joy and the hope of the salvation we share. But if the early church faced this threat, then we will face similar threats. It cannot be ignored or avoided for it is an urgent matter of great importance. With the church in every age, God's word urges us to recognise the threat and to respond by contending for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.