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Jude 3-4, 20-21

What We Believe Matters

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“What matters is not what you believe, but that you believe. It’s great that you believe. We should all believe in something. Belief is what is really important.” Have you ever heard those words? I’ve had strangers and friends tell me words just like that several times. I’ve heard them when I’ve shared that I go to church or that I’m a pastor. And honestly, I struggle because I do not believe them.

Today we’re starting a new sermon series that will take us through the summer, entitled *What We Believe*. In this series there’s a **starting presupposition** that it’s not just that we believe that matters, but what we believe matters too. So if you’re someone who thinks what really matters is just belief, then I want to challenge you to lower your defenses, and for the duration of this sermon series, open yourself to the idea that what you believe might be just as important as belief itself.

Week by week we’re going to work through what we believe as a church. The beliefs we hold to are contained in our Articles of Faith (aka. Statement of Faith). Section by section it defines what we want every person in this church to believe. As we go through topics like God, the Bible, Sin, Salvation, and Mankind, I think you’ll find that these beliefs matter. *What counts is not just that I have faith, but that I believe the faith.*

What’s the difference between *my faith* and *the faith*? (Jude 3)

Jesus had several brothers, a man named James and a man named Judas, or Jude (Mark 6:3). Jude wrote one of the shortest books in the New Testament. It's only 25 verses long, the book of Jude. In it he writes to a group of Christians, but not all is well. People have come into the church who want to tear them and their beliefs apart. So Jude writes them a letter instructing them to guard their beliefs, to keep the faith.

Jude 3 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. (NIV®)

Do you notice what Jude says? He says contend for “the faith.” The faith is different than “my faith.”

My Faith - Your act of belief.

We find a personal faith in **Ephesians 2:8** “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—” (NIV®). The first type of faith is what you and I think of when we say, “Do you have faith?” Yes. I believe in Jesus, I trust him. I believe and trust the Bible too. This type of faith is good. God uses “our faith, my faith” in Jesus to save us. But this isn’t the type of faith Jude means.

The Faith - Our body of belief.

This is the system of beliefs (doctrine) we hold as Christians that Jesus entrusted to his disciples. The NIV Zondervan Study Bible defines “the faith” as “The content of Christian belief as handed down from Christ and his apostles.” Those things Jesus and the authors of the New Testament taught us. For example:

1. We believe the Bible is true and it’s God’s word.
2. We believe in one God eternally existing in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Trinity.

All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV®) unless otherwise noted.

3. We believe Jesus died for our sins but rose again in victory over sin and death. (1 Cor 15:3-8)
4. We believe in the Holy Spirit's work in us to convict us of sin and comfort us.
5. We believe Satan is real, that sin is real, and that humans are in trouble because of it.
6. We believe salvation is available to any who repent and put their faith in Jesus Christ.
7. We believe Christians should gather together to worship and serve God as the church.
8. We believe there are certain things, like baptism and the Lord's supper, that distinguish the church.
9. And we believe that one day Jesus will come again to vanquish sin and restore all of creation.

That's nine statements, and I didn't cover everything. Notice how these beliefs make Christianity what it is. If you take any of them away, Christianity starts to look like other faiths. If you lose Satan, then there's no reason to turn to Jesus. If you lose the church, then what are we doing here? If you take away heaven, what's the point? *We place "my faith" or "a faith" in "the faith." We believe in a body of belief.*

Would you say the pledge of **allegiance** to the U.S. flag if we didn't have a U.S. constitution? No, because you would be pledging yourself to nothing. I can believe a **pool** is full of water and jump off a diving board blindfolded, but what matters in the air is whether or not there's water in the pool. What you believe about God is the most important things you can ever decide. When we jump out of this life, we want a God who **catches us** with open arms. We need to place our faith in the right things. But how can we identify what to believe and what not to believe? What is right and what is wrong?

How to identify the true faith (Jude 4)

Let's see how to identify what's true (and what's false) as we continue in Jude.

Jude 4 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. (NIV®)

Jude is telling us, "Yes, there are false teachers who are trying to convince you of their false beliefs, who want their personal faith to change the faith of the church, but there's good news. Although they've slipped in and are hard to identify, you can identify them and their false beliefs."

Have you ever seen a **police lineup** in a movie or tv show? A group of people line up against a wall holding numbers, and someone behind a one-way mirror identifies which one is the suspect. Apparently in the UK this is called an "identity parade." So what is Jude telling his audience to look for among the false-teachers? He gives them **three identifications of the true faith**:

Identification #1 - Godly living (vs. Ungodly living)

The first way to identify if what someone believes is true or not is how they live and speak (Jude 15). A false faith produces "ungodly living." That means living as if there is no God, God-less living. This word is used elsewhere in the New Testament to refer to the time of **Noah** (2 Peter 2:5). In **Genesis 6:5** it says, "every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time." Ungodly living is driven by a heart that does not know God or want to know him.

So then, what's the identification of true faith? The opposite of **God-less** living is **God-filled** living. Godly living is a life lived trusting Jesus and seeking to obey him. This kind of life seeks to love and honor God every day knowing that none of us are perfect. *When we see a Godly-life, it helps us identify the true faith.*

At the preaching breakfast this week, Bernie said the point of this passage is this. “Right theology creates right living.” The opposite is also true. “Bad theology creates bad living.” **Theology** can be an intimidating word, but all it means is “the study of God.” We do theology whether we believe there is a God or there isn’t one. *What we believe, the theology we hold, actually shapes our daily lives, for good or bad.*

I learned this week that the South African apartheid was actually a result of bad theology. In the 1930-40s, Stellenbosch University in South Africa, combined white nationalism with Christian beliefs to promote the idea that white Africans were God’s special race. Dark skin was bad and evil. White skin was ideal, so the God-honoring solution was to divide the two races. The lead to homelessness for over 3.5 million non-white people, the loss of “political representation,” denials of citizenship and being forced to live in squalor, segregated healthcare and medical care and beaches, and more. *Bad theology creates bad living while good theology creates good living. The first identification of the true faith is “godly living.”*

Identification #2 - Love of grace (vs. Abuse of grace)

Next Jude says these false believers “pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality...” This word means “debauchery, lewdness, sensuality.” **Fake-Christians** take God’s generous grace, which is undeserved forgiveness and goodness poured out on us, and say, “Because God has forgiven me, I can do whatever I want. I can sleep around. I can look lustfully at that guy or that girl. I can look at those pictures late at night because God has forgiven me. I can read that dirty novel at the beach because Jesus covers my sins.”

But those that hold to the true faith have encountered the life-changing **grace of God**. When we encounter mercy we don’t deserve, it transforms us. We no longer desire to add wounds to the one who was wounded for us. We no longer want to sin against the one who saved us from our sins. When you can’t earn grace but God gives it to you as a gift, it changes your heart to want to do good.

The Bible tells the story of a **civilian contractor** who likely cheated both the government and his neighbors out of money. But when he met Jesus, Jesus told him he was going to come to his house for dinner, showing him kindness, love, and grace he’d never known before. This grace so changed him that he promised to give half of everything he owned to the poor and if he’d ever cheated anyone out of something, he’d pay it back four times. That’s the story of Zacchaeus the tax collector. He loved God’s grace and it changed him. *The second identification of the true faith is a love of grace.*

Identification #3 - Holding to Christ (vs. Denying Jesus)

Jude’s last way to identify a true versus counterfeit faith, is by looking at how their teachers treat Jesus. Do they “deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord”? According to one dictionary, the Greek word “Sovereign” actually “emphasizes the right and power to command.”¹ Our word “despot” sounds just like the Greek, but has a negative meaning while the original did not. The Old Testament words “Adoni” and “Yahweh” were translated into our word “Lord.” Yahweh is God’s name and Adoni is often used as a substitute for Yahweh. What is Jude doing here? He is affirming that Jesus is master of everything and God himself, Yahweh. But the false teachers deny Jesus completely.

Denying Jesus's lordship is at the heart of ungodly living and abusing God’s grace while holding to Christ leads to godly living and loving God’s grace. We can confuse a lot of things about the faith, but the one each of us must get right is Jesus. Is he your Lord? Your master? Your Sovereign? Do you let him rule your life? It takes humility to let Jesus rule every part of your life, your finances, your living situation, your relationships, your job, your free time, your family. *When we do, we hold to Christ.*

¹ MED, s.v. “LORD,” 423. accord://read/Mounce_Expository#6821

The message of Christianity is that we are all born “ungodly.” We’re all sinners who need God’s grace to change us through Jesus. This is the gospel and it’s the core of good theology. **Romans 5:6** says, “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.” Jesus died so ungodly people can become Godly people, so God-less people can become God-filled people, so bad theologians can become good theologians, so fake-Christians who abuse God’s grace become changed-Christians who cherish God’s grace. *The third identification of the true faith is holding to Christ.*

Three identifications of the true faith are 1) Godly living, 2) love of grace, and 3) holding to Christ. We want to keep the true faith, but in the face of false beliefs and even false teachers, how can we do this?

How to keep the faith (Jude 20-21)

How can we hold to what we’re supposed to hold to? In the middle of the book of Jude, he continues to condemn the false teachers who hold false beliefs, but at the end, he explains how to keep the faith.

Jude 20-21 But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. (NIV®)

Here Jude gives Christians **four ways to keep the faith**:

Way #1 - Know what you believe

Jude encourages us to build “yourselves up in the your most holy faith.” We’re called to grow in our understanding, knowledge, and love of the faith—the Christian body of belief. This is what I hope we do in this sermon series as we go week by week through each section of our statement of faith. We need to learn the faith, and this is a great way to do it. I hope you’ll come back next week and **commit** to coming for the duration of this series. And if you don’t believe yet, come learn what followers of Jesus really believe.

If you want to get more out of this sermon series, I encourage you to pick up and read the book *Know What You Believe* by Paul E. Little. This book comes highly recommended to me and I’m really appreciating the way Paul is unpacking “the faith” in easy to understand words. I’m in the midst of reading it for the first time and hope you’ll join me. Talk to me after the service and I may be able to get you a free copy. *The first way you keep the faith is to know what you believe.*

Way #2 - Pray in the Holy Spirit

Jude’s second way to keep the faith is “praying in the Holy Spirit.” If Jesus and the apostles gave us “the faith,” when we pray that God would keep it true in our hearts and in the church, we’re praying in the Holy Spirit. When we pray that the message of Jesus and all the pieces of Christianity would impact our church and town, we’re praying in the Holy Spirit. When we pray, recognizing that we’re entirely dependent on God’s grace to persevere in “the faith,” we’re praying in the Holy Spirit.

To pray in the Holy Spirit does not mean you feel light-headed, emotional, or a rush of adrenaline. It can mean those things, but often praying in the Holy Spirit just means to pray for the will of God. This means when we pray about things God cares about, like his mission to the lost, or preserving and teaching Biblical truths, we are praying in the Holy Spirit. When we pray that we would deny ourselves and fight sin, we’re praying in the Holy Spirit. When we invite Christ to have Lordship over some untouched area of our life, we’re praying in the Holy Spirit. *The second way we keep the faith is to pray in the Holy Spirit.*

Way #3 - Cultivate love for God

Jude's third way is to "keep yourselves in God's love." The word "keep" can also mean "guard." Jude is commanding the Christians like he would soldiers. "Love God! That's an order!" We're to always cultivate our heart for God. *We're to work at loving God and receiving God's love.* When we have tasted the love of God, and seen just how good he is, we won't want false teachings. As you savor the depths of God's love for you in Jesus, how he gave his one and only son to pay the penalty for your sin, it gives you a heart that desires God and the true faith (1 John 4:9-10). *The third way we keep the faith is to cultivate love for God.*

Way #4 - Hope in Jesus

Look how Jude begins the letter by emphasizing Jesus and circles back around to him again. He writes, "wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life." At the end of the day, "my faith" needs to rest on "the faith," which all points to a "faith in" Christ Jesus. Jude recognizes there are real difficulties in this life, but that we should never lose hope because of Jesus. Jesus is bringing us to eternal life. He's using our trust in him and what we believe to make us more like himself.

We should never give up on those people who say things like, "What matters is not what you believe, but that you believe." God can work a miracle in their heart. Nor should we give up on ourselves. If you get frustrated that you don't know enough or theology is confusing, be patient with yourself. Jesus isn't giving up on you. Why should you? *The fourth way we keep the faith is by hoping in Jesus.*

We keep the faith by 1) knowing what we believe, by 2) praying in the Holy Spirit, by 3) cultivating love for God, and 4) hoping in Jesus. My big idea is this.

Keep the faith.

Last fall our church studied a book together, *Fruitfulness on the Frontline*. The London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC) helped produce this book. John Stott founded the LICC. He was the Pastor of a All Souls Church in central London for 25 years, a church of about 2,500 people. PreachingToday describes him as "a peerless preacher, Bible teacher, evangelist, author, global leader and friend to many." He wrote over 50 books, one of which I read on preaching in seminary.

One of his close friends, Os Guinness, also a famous author and speaker, describes his last visit to John Stott when he was sick and dying, just three weeks before his death. He writes, "After an unforgettable hour and more of sharing many memories over many years, I asked him how he would like me to pray for him. Lying weakly on his back and barely able to speak, he answered in a hoarse whisper, 'Pray that I will be faithful to Jesus until my last breath.'"

"Pray that I will be faithful to Jesus until my last breath." Let this be our prayer too. "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (2 Timothy 4:7 NIV®). May we believe in Christ and guard the faith till the very end. *Keep the faith.*

Pastor Jonathan Romig wrote and preached this message for the people of Cornerstone Congregational Church. [Click here to listen to more sermons](#) or [click here to read our story](#).