



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermons

Jude's Counsel **Sometimes You Have to Change Course - 2** **Jude 3-4**

David Anguish

In 1 Kings 22, we read a fascinating episode that occurred during Israel's divided kingdom period. Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, makes a state visit to Ahab, King of Israel. Ahab asks Jehoshaphat if he will agree to go to battle with Syria over Ramoth-Gilead. Jehoshaphat tentatively agrees but seeks to confirm the plan with a word from the Lord to be revealed through the prophets. Four hundred of them, most prominently Zedekiah, assure the two kings that their plan will succeed.

But Jehoshaphat wisely asks if there is another prophet they can consult. Ahab says there is, but that this prophet, Micaiah, never gives positive counsel. Jehoshaphat insists, however, and they send for him. When he first enters their presence, he tells them their plan will work. But something in his manner indicates he does not really believe that and Ahab rebukes him. Micaiah then tells the kings that if they proceed with their plan, Ahab will not "return in peace" (1 Kings 22.28). They silence Micaiah and go to war. But just as he said God had told him, the plan fails, and Ahab, disguised as a common soldier, is killed (1 Kings 22.1-40).

A fascinating part of this story is the exchange between Micaiah and the messenger sent to escort him to the royal court. The messenger tells him all 400 prophets have agreed in endorsing Ahab's plan. "Let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak favorably," he said (1 Kings 22.13). But Micaiah refuses: "As the Lord lives, what the Lord says to me, that I will speak" (v. 14). This exchange shows his determination to not compromise in the succeeding events. It also points to the lesson from Jude we are studying here: sometimes, the counsel we should give includes news that is neither positive nor pleasant.

It's because Jude followed that principle that he said he could not write on the topic he had intended to address (see Jude 3). Something else, less pleasant to hear, needed to be said.

Intense Effort for Dangerous Circumstances

As we saw previously (see “[Jude’s Circumstances](#)”), Jude wrote what he did because of the influence of some deceitful false teachers. After shelving his plan to write about the believers’ common salvation, his new purpose was to appeal (παρακαλέω; *parakaleō*) to his readers “to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (v. 3).

The key word here is “contend” (ἐπαγωνίζομαι; *epagōnizomai*). The word’s meaning was “to exert intense effort on behalf of someth[ing], *contend*.” It was sometimes used in athletic imagery to emphasize the effort to be expended against an opponent, effort given in a noble cause (Bauer 2000, 356). But because those with a noble cause sometimes face opposition, the word also included the meaning, “to fight for” (Ringwald 1975, 644).

The latter idea makes some uncomfortable. But in the face of a dangerous heresy like the one Jude confronted, it is important remember that God’s spokesmen are at times called to be watchmen who warn of impending danger and confront those who would counsel a different course from the one God has revealed (cf. Acts 20.28–30; Ezek 3.17–19). Unfortunately, “this part of his duty is widely neglected in our generation, under the plea of tolerance” (Green 1968, 158). Without endorsing derisive and bitter disputes, Jude’s words remind us that sometimes conflict cannot be avoided.

Fighting for the Faith

As noted above, the verb, *epagōnizomai*, “contend,” primarily refers to the exertion of intense effort to realize a noble cause. Since such causes are at times resisted, it is sometimes necessary for the intense effort called for to take the form of a fight. But because Jude says that the contending is to be for “the faith,” a phrase best taken to refer to its content or teaching, some find the idea of “fighting” for it to be out of step with the nature of Christian teaching. This is especially so in our time when “tolerance” is touted above most other virtues.

Douglas Moo offers a corrective to such thinking.

But this faith has come under attack, and so Jude’s readers need to “contend” for it. “Contend” is a strong word. It refers to the exertions of the athlete and is similar to the word Paul used in 1 Corinthians 9:25: “Everyone who *competes* in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.” Paul later applied this same term to his and his coworkers’ energetic defense of the gospel (Col. 1:29; 1 Tim. 4:10; 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7). Thus Jude urges his readers not simply to resist the false teachers’ perversion of the faith, they are actively and energetically to fight for it. Jude himself spells out some of the detailed components of this struggle in verses 20–23 (Moo 1996, 229).

In fact, various forms of ἀγωνίζομαι (*agōnizomai*), the root word at the heart of the compound verb *epagōnizomai*, are used multiple times in the New Testament to refer to things that are worth fighting for.

- In 1 Timothy 6.12, Paul told Timothy to “*fight* the good fight of the faith.”
- In Luke 13.24, Jesus said his disciples should “*strive* to enter through the narrow door.”

- In Colossians 4.12, Paul told the Colossians that Epaphras, one of their number, was “always *struggling* on [their] behalf in his prayers.”
- In Colossians 1.29, he said that the maturity in Christ that believers should aspire to (v. 28) was something for which he *toiled*.
- In Hebrews 11.33, the writer used another form of the word (καταγωνίζομαι; *katagōnizomai*) in commendation of great people of faith who “*conquered* kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,” and so on (cf. v. 34).
- In Romans 15.30, using another form of the word (συναγωνίζομαι; *synagōnizomai*), Paul urged his brothers in the Lord “to *strive* together with [him] in [their] prayers.”
- In Hebrews 12.4, the writer used the compound word καταγωνίζομαι (*katagōnizomai*) to refer to the readers’ “*struggle* against sin.”

As we think about the intensity of the word “contend,” we notice that Jude immediately shows both the urgency and right way to engage in the fight he says is necessary. He demonstrates his own urgency in his change of plans for the writing. Furthermore, his words in verses 3–4, especially the latter, convey a passion that shows how urgent he thought the matter was, urgent enough to justify the high cost the fight may require. In the words of Michael Green:

Jude uses the word *epagōnizomai* in order to emphasize that the defence of this faith will be costly and agonizing; the cost of being unfashionable, the agony of seeking to express the faith in a way that is really comprehensible to contemporary man. For, granted the once-for-allness of the Christian faith, we must not neglect Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s passionate plea in *The Cost of Discipleship* against the cheapening of Christianity until it becomes a set of propositions assented to, of acts performed, of shibboleths observed, rather than the vibrant, vital personal relationship with Jesus which inflames, invigorates and permeates every aspect of political, social and personal life (Green 1968, 160).

Thus, as he engages the fight, Jude pulls no punches. But he also writes with the motive of love (v. 2; and the word “beloved” in v. 3), aiming for the salvation of his readers who had been kept for Jesus (see vv. 2, 21).

Jude’s Counsel for Us

Jude’s counsel reminds us, first, that there are some things worth fighting for. It’s possible for us to begin to take things for granted and not expend the effort necessary to sustain and nurture them as we once did. It’s also possible for us to begin to feel overwhelmed by the resistance we face and the gains that those pushing false ways are making. Jude’s urging to contend for the faith reminds us to stay in the fight. But above all, it reminds us not to forget the One who sustains us and ultimately has overcome.

Second, when we notice that Jude put more emphasis on behavior than doctrine in his letter, we are reminded that sin must be confronted, both for the sake of the sinner and for the sake of the body whom the sin adversely affects.

Third, we are reminded that peace at any price is not true peace. The biblical concept of peace is more concerned with having things be right with God than with the absence of conflict. Where sin dominates, things are not right. Thus, sometimes, in an effort to align things with

God, we must fight against the temptation to not make waves, to say, “‘peace, peace’ where there is no peace” (Jer 6.14; 8.11).

Conclusion

I’ll return to the case of Micaiah and his determination to speak only what the Lord would have him say (1 Kings 22.14). We should follow his example and the corresponding urging of Jude and exert ourselves to engage in contending for the faith.

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