



Called to Contend

Jonathan K. Dodson | Jude 1-16 | October 16, 2016

We're moving through the biblical letter of 2 Peter, and the next two Sundays Jude, in order to become a people of *biblical depth, spiritual growth, and public faith*. This little letter raises a lot of issues, only some of which I'll address today. I'll be down front afterwards to answer questions. These are controversial times. How should you respond? *Our passage shows us what to do—Contend for the faith, why to do it—because we're Called, and how to do it—Keep ourselves in the love of God. Called, Contend, Keep.*

Called

I frequently talk to be people about their work. And when trying to forge a career people will often say, I don't feel *called* to what I'm doing. I'm *called* to something else. Now what does this mean? It seems like "calling" refers to an aspiration to have not "just a job" but to do something purposeful, something you're made for. But where does the calling come from? Who's the caller? Because if there is no Caller, then there are no callings. They are fictions. Rhonda Byrne, author of the bestselling spiritual, *The Secret*, says our mind emits and receives frequencies from the Universe, which lead us into our callings. The universe calls. But an issue you should have with this is that a universe cannot call; it is impersonal. Calling requires a Caller, someone with a voice. Jude identifies the Caller when he says: "[To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ](#)" (2). The Caller is *personal, authoritative, and loving*. **Personal**. Called and kept for Jesus, a person. In John 10, Jesus describes himself as a shepherd who knows his sheep. He says, "[The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name...the sheep follow him, for they know his voice](#)" (3). Jesus is personal, so personal he calls not by frequencies but by name. The sheep recognize this; it's one of the reasons they follow him. Now in context, there are others who are trying to coax the sheep away from the Shepherd, to steal and kill (as we'll see later in this passage). They are trying to subvert the **authoritative** call. Jesus insists that—he alone—is the Shepherd, and that we *follow* his voice. Not that we subscribe to his podcast, or read his books but that we follow his voice. When you follow someone, at some level, you're saying I trust your authority. Jesus is saying follow me for life, wherever I lead. Now, that's a lot of trust, it's putting all your eggs (children, career, health, status) in a single basket. Why trust *him*? Because he's not any old shepherd; he's [the Good Shepherd who lays his life down for the sheep](#) (10:11). Notice how he uses his authority. Not to berate or exploit but to seek our good at his own expense. We admire leaders like this, who use their power to serve. Marco Rubio made the headlines recently, not for campaigning but for serving Floridians to help clean up after Hurricane Matthew. There he was work clothes, ball cap, looking just like one of us. King Jesus gets into our clothes, and looking like one of us, he cleans up the wreck of our lives. He gets all the dirt and the muck of our failures all over himself while he's cleaning up, forgiving sin, and restoring us to the love of the Father. And here's the third aspect of the Caller. The called are "**beloved** in God the Father." To be called is to enter into the authoritative, sacrificial love of the Father and the Son. What does it mean to be loved by God? In Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*, the central character, Myshkin, comes across a young peasant woman. She sees her six-week old baby smile *for the first time*. She crosses herself with deep devotion. He asks why, "[Well sir, just as a mother rejoices seeing her baby's first smile, so does God rejoice every time he beholds from above](#)

a sinner kneeling down before Him to say his prayers with all his heart.” God rejoices when a sinner bends his knee to his call, to be engulfed in his love. And this kind of praying is a sure sign you’re hearing his voice, accepting his authority. Myshkin goes on, “[this is the whole essence of Christianity, that is to say, the whole conception of God as our Father and of God’s rejoicing in man, like a father rejoicing in his own child.](#)” God’s rejoicing in man? Staggering! [Me at 6] Do you know who I am? Do you know what I’ve done, not done? Oh yes I do and that’s precisely why I’m calling you. When all you can do is smile, I rejoice in you. Don’t try to squeeze dignity from what you do or what you haven’t done; receive dignity from who you are—beloved of God! And if you start to forget, or struggle to believe it, just look at the cross—the Good Shepherd mucked up, skewered for you. This is love.

Contend

Now, as much as Jude wants to linger on our calling, there are more pressing matters to attend to: “[Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints](#)” (3). If we’re called by the personal, authoritative, loving God, we should contend for **the faith**. The faith is a stand in for “the gospel,” which the followers of Christ preach: “[He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy](#)” (Ga 1:23). The gospel is the grand announcement that God is Savior and King in Jesus. To contend for the faith, then, is to *express intense effort* toward the gospel. He’ll explain how at the end of the letter, but now he wants them to understand *why*. People with an agenda are stealthily moving into the church. What’s their agenda? To [pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ](#) (4). The word means to alter or change something, in this case *to change grace into sensuality*, to alter it into a license to live however we want (God forgives!). Today, we call this **freedom**. Freedom to do whatever we want. Now, freedom has accomplished a lot of good. Rights for minorities and women, democratic diffusion of power. But over time freedom moved from a good to THE good. It unseated any other absolute like truth, morality, divine authority. Freedom strikes a divine pose. And when a culture removes absolutes, there are massive consequences. Jude is onto this in the 1st century. He knows that divine authority governs morality. So he strings together 3 examples in 5-7 of how God responds to those who alter grace, those who abandon it create their own morality. In verse 5, he mentions the *Israelites* who abandoned God’s instructions and tried to take the promised land on their own terms—destroyed. The religious are not excepted. In verse 6, *angels* who “[did not stay within their own position of authority](#)”—kept in chains. This could be a reference to the fall of Satan and his angelic cronies or to an unusual passage in Genesis 6 where fallen angels appear to rape women. Either way, the point is clear—God judges those who abandon authority and innovate morally, even angels. Verse 7 cities, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, [indulge in sexual immorality and pursue unnatural desire](#) (the literal reading is “go after other flesh.” Now some people try to make the case that this is not same-sex desire by saying the men of Sodom wanted to sleep with angels. But the issue with this is that there is no indication that they knew the men Lot was hosting were angels until the angels reveal their power by striking the men blind. In fact, these males in Sodom say, “[Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them.](#)” So it is men desiring to know men. Now know doesn’t have to mean sexual intercourse but it does in the context when Lot offers his daughters “*who have not known any man.*” Both Peter and

Jude pick up on this attempt for same-sex relations as call it “sexually immoral.” Now, why is homosexual intercourse immoral? It abandons divine design; it makes sexual freedom ultimate, not God. But the key issue here is *not* homosexuality. Gay sex doesn’t keep you out of heaven any more than promiscuous straight sex does. What keeps us out of heaven is refusal to submit to Jesus as Lord and Redeemer. In fact, Sodom and Gomorrah weren’t judged for homosexual sin (which is different from same-sex attraction). Ezekiel fills out the picture when he says “*Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy*” (16:49). God judges the city, not for a single sin, but for the whole mountain of sins. He judges the city for the same reason he judges all of us—for *abandoning his authority to innovate morally.* One other example. Jude refers to Balaam’s error. Balaam was willing to prophesy *against* Israel for influence and money—**greed**. If we are unwilling to accept the restraints of generosity, sacrificial giving, and we view possessions and money as ultimately ours, then we must take in Jesus harsh words: *It’s harder for a rich man to enter heaven than a camel get through the eye of a needle.* Why? Because the greedy pervert the grace of God, denying Jesus as Master and Lord. Greed says I’m king and I call the financial shots. I have a right to do whatever I want with my money. Unseating God, we exploit economies, families, communities, churches, and serve self. And you don’t have to have a lot to be greedy. Do you give generously to the Lord and his work? Are you tithing faithfully? Balaam is judged. But not ultimately for his greed. The real issue behind the greed is that Balaam replaced God with another god, the god of influence, wealth, comfort. Jude lines up these case studies to illustrate what happens when we replace divine authority with personal authority, when we make freedom not Christ our Master. We alter the grace of God into a license to live however we want to (promiscuous straight sex, gay sex, exploitative or stingy greed, we deny Jesus as Master and Lord. We cheapen grace. But grace says, you are beloved in God the Father *and* kept for Jesus Christ. Jesus is your King; God is your Father. For Jesus to settle on being a mere Redeemer, a forgiver of sins and *not* a ruler of sinners, would be to deny himself. To say, I am a trinket among the trophies of sexual freedom and greed. But I am *not*; I am the *real* king. He cannot deny himself. If he is the King; he must act like the king, and to do so is in our best interest. Jude is saying over and over that rejecting God’s authority in favor of our own results in destruction. In the end, “*Real freedom is not the absence of constraints but the choosing of the right constraints.*” The key issue is—what constraint will you accept? Whose voice will you follow? What master will you heed? If we insist on individual freedom, we forfeit the Shepherd and pervert his grace. But if we insist on Christ, we get the Good Shepherd, personal, loving, true. Jude says, contend for the faith. Spend intense effort on the gospel of Jesus Redeemer and King.

Keep

Finally, and more on this next week, *keep* yourself. Contend for the faith by keeping yourself in the love of God: “*keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life*” (21). How? Identify with sinners, show desperation for mercy, wait on Jesus as Lord and as Christ, to complete the good work he has begun. Keep yourself in the love of God. Listen to his voice. Follow his word. And when you falter, remember Jesus keeps you. Kept for Jesus. Keep yourself and Jesus keeps you. Christ is sovereign to keep; we are responsible to keep. He is the Keeper we are the kept.



He is the Caller; we are the called. Like when I reach down to pull my five-year-old up the rocks on the Greenbelt, and she reaches out to cling to me—cling to the love of Christ as Christ clings to you. Through your prayers, in your obedience, in your repentance, keep stretching out to Christ, who already has you by the nape of your neck. Because God rejoices in man, in the woman who humbly kneels and says her prayers with all her heart. It's quite simple, hard at times, but simple. Read your Bible, say your prayers, obey your Lord, with all your heart. Why? Because you are the beloved of God.