

Jude 1:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

Analysis

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. Jude addresses readers as "beloved" (Greek *agapētoi*, ἀγαπητοί), establishing affectionate relationship before urgent exhortation. He had intended to write about "the common salvation" (Greek *tēs koinēs sōtērias*, τῆς κοινῆς σωτηρίας)—the salvation shared equally by all believers regardless of background, the unified gospel message.

However, circumstances compelled a change of topic. The phrase "it was needful" (Greek *anagkēn eschon*, ἀνάγκην ἔσχον) expresses urgent compulsion—Jude felt a pressing obligation. Instead of a general treatise on salvation, he must "exhort" (Greek *parakalein*, παρακαλεῖν—to urge, appeal, encourage) them to "earnestly contend" (Greek *epagōnizesthai*, ἐπαγωνίζεσθαι). This rare word combines *epi* (intensifying prefix) with *agōnizomai* (to struggle, fight)—hence "struggle intensely," "fight vigorously," like an athlete competing for victory.

They must contend "for the faith" (Greek *tē pistei*, τῇ πίστει)—the definite article indicates not personal faith but the body of Christian doctrine, the objective gospel truth. This faith was "once delivered" (Greek *hapax paradotheisē*, ἄπαξ παραδοθείσῃ)—delivered once for all time, a completed historical act. The verb

form emphasizes finality—no new revelation supplements or supersedes the apostolic gospel. "To the saints" (Greek *tois hagiois*, τοῖς ἀγίοις) identifies all believers as holy ones, set apart for God.

Historical Context

This verse captures a pivotal moment in early Christianity—the transition from apostolic teaching to defending apostolic teaching. As the first generation of eyewitnesses aged, false teachers arose claiming new revelations or different interpretations. The church faced its first major doctrinal crisis: would Christianity maintain apostolic orthodoxy or evolve into diverse, contradictory movements?

The phrase "once delivered" became crucial in debates over canon and authority. Against Gnosticism's claims of secret knowledge and ongoing revelation, the church insisted on the finality and sufficiency of apostolic testimony. The concept of *tradere* (to hand down, deliver) gave rise to the term "tradition"—not human innovations but the faithful transmission of apostolic teaching (1 Corinthians 11:23, 15:3, 2 Thessalonians 2:15).

Jude's urgent change of plans reflects the severity of the crisis. False teaching wasn't merely an academic disagreement but a spiritual emergency threatening believers' welfare and the gospel's integrity. Church history confirms this pattern—every generation must defend the faith against new errors wearing contemporary disguises. The very fact that Jude wrote this letter demonstrates the Spirit's provision of resources for each generation's battles.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. What false teachings in contemporary culture require Christians to 'earnestly contend for the faith'?
2. How can believers contend for the faith earnestly without becoming contentious, harsh, or divisive?
3. What does it mean practically to defend 'the faith once delivered' rather than evolving Christianity for contemporary culture?

Interlinear Text

Ἄγαπητοί, πᾶσαν σπουδὴν ποιούμενος γράψαι ὑμῖν
Beloved all diligence when I gave to write unto you
G27 G3956 G4710 G4160 G1125 G5213

περὶ τῆς κοινῆς σωτηρίας ἀνάγκην ἔσχον γράψαι
of the common salvation needful for me to write
G4012 G2839 G4991 G318 G2192 G1125

ὑμῖν παρακαλῶν ἐπαγωνίζεσθαι τῇ
unto you and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend G3588
G5213 G3870 G1864

ἄπαξ παραδοθείσῃ τοῖς ἀγίοις πίστει
which was once delivered unto the saints for the faith
G530 G3860 G3588 G40 G4102

Additional Cross-References

1 Timothy 6:12 (Faith): Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

Philippians 1:27 (Faith): Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;

Jude 1:20 (Faith): But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost,

Revelation 12:11 (Love): And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

Titus 1:4 (Salvation): To Titus, mine own son after the common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Revelation 2:10 (Faith): Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

2 Timothy 1:13 (Faith): Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

1 Timothy 1:18 (Parallel theme): This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare;

Galatians 2:5 (Parallel theme): To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.

Hebrews 13:22 (Parallel theme): And I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation: for I have written a letter unto you in few words.