

Defending the Faith

THEOLOGICAL THEME: God's people are called to beware of false teachers.

According to the Federal Aviation Administration, roughly forty-three thousand flights carry over two-and-a-half million people over the United States each day. At any given time, there can be up to five thousand aircraft in the sky.¹ As passengers, we board these planes assuming we will arrive at our intended destination without giving any thought to the course the flight will take or any other detail. However, moving passengers from one location to another requires absolute precision and meticulous planning. One small navigational error can cause a huge problem. If a pilot charts a course a single degree off, instead of arriving in Miami Beach for some time in the sun, passengers could find themselves in the water of the Atlantic Ocean awaiting rescue.



What are some other small decisions or changes that can have a significant impact?

In this session, we will see that God calls on us to defend the faith against those who deny Christian morality. Our doctrine and our practice are fused together; both must be guarded from threats outside *and inside* the church. We will also see our need to recognize that false teachers fuel division within the church and how we are to build up ourselves in the faith as we also strengthen others to stand firm in the gospel together.



Voices from Church History

"The chief danger of the Church today is that it is trying to get on the same side as the world, instead of turning the world upside down...God give to us an intense cry for the old-time power of the Gospel and the Holy Ghost!"²

—A. B. Simpson (1844-1919)

1. Defend the faith against those who deny Christian morality (Jude 3-4).

³ 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. ⁴ For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Jude’s intention had been to write about the salvation his recipients shared, a salvation held by all who trust in Jesus Christ. While he only touches on the gospel briefly here before moving on to the matter he felt compelled to address, the idea of shared salvation is critical to what will follow. There is only one gospel—one way to be saved through the free gift of God through Jesus. And it is this gospel that serves as the foundation of the church and as the mortar that holds every brick—every believer, whether Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female, rich or poor, Native American, African, American, European, Hispanic, Italian, Asian, or any other ethnicity—together as one.

This is the gospel that was delivered to all the saints, including the recipients of Jude’s letter, and which was now being threatened by false teachers in the church. Instead of writing more about this gospel, Jude reminds the readers that this gospel, this priceless treasure, was entrusted to them and needed their protection. It was time to contend for the faith.

What threats opposing the gospel do we face today?	How can we contend for the faith against these threats?

Jude describes these false teachers as being designated for judgment and offers three reasons why.

First, they were “ungodly.” While these false teachers may have looked like believers, enabling them to come into the church, they were not. They were irreverent toward God and not true believers, which is why they deserved judgment. This ungodliness allowed them to remain in the sin they taught and practiced.

Second, they were “pervert[ing] the grace of our God into sensuality.” The Greek word translated “sensuality” means licentiousness and sexual immorality. These teachers were intentionally living in a shameful way and defending their actions by claiming to be under God’s grace. While God’s grace covers all sin, it is not a license to sin (Rom. 6:15-16). In Christ, we have the ability and strength to resist evil and turn from sin (Jas. 4:4-10).

Third, they were “deny[ing] our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.” Coupled with their sinful living, the false teachers denied Jesus as sovereign Master and Lord.

These false teachers were a threat to the church by what they taught and how they lived. Jude was calling on the church to respond proportionally. To contend for the faith, the church had to defend and affirm Jesus Christ as Master and Lord, but they had to do more than that. They also had to defend and affirm Christian morality, not only by what they said but by how they lived. It wasn’t sufficient to rebuke the false teachers’ sensuality, although that needed to happen. They also had to live the truth of the gospel themselves. What we believe informs how we live. The world will fail to see the beauty of the gospel we believe if they are unable to see the beauty of the gospel in our lives.

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

45. *The World Opposed to God*

There are times in Scripture where the term “world” refers to more than the physical planet Earth or the collective human population. In many instances, the term refers to an active and evil spiritual force that is in direct conflict with God and His kingdom. This evil world force operates under Satan’s control (Eph. 2:2; John 14:30), displaying the same self-centeredness and deceit that is found within his character. Christians are called to overcome this world of spiritual evil by faith in the Son of God (1 John 5:4-5).



What are the dangers of proclaiming the gospel but not living according to it, or living according to it but not proclaiming it?

2. Don't be surprised by divisions caused by false teachers (Jude 17-19).

¹⁷ But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ They said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions."

¹⁹ It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.

Jude reminded the church of what they knew—that false teachers would infiltrate the church. Jude called on the believers to “remember...the predictions of the apostles.” While we cannot be sure of what precisely he had in mind, we see several passages in the New Testament that warn against false teachers (Acts 20:28-30; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Pet. 2:1; 3:16; 1 John 4:1-6).

Jude's reminding the church of what they knew about false teachers coming into the church may have been a gentle rebuke. They knew times were coming when false teachers would follow what was right in their own eyes and would teach others to do the same. However, they simply missed the signs. That couldn't happen again. “You know this!” he seems to be telling them. “You can't let this take you by surprise again. These false teachers snuck into your church this one time, but don't let that happen again. Be vigilant!”



Voices from Church History

“Where there is no ‘moral gravity’—that is, no force that draws us to the center—there is spiritual weightlessness. We float on feelings that will carry us where we never meant to go; we bubble with emotional experiences that we often take for spiritual ones; and we are puffed up with pride. Instead of seriousness, there is foolishness. Instead of gravity, flippancy. Sentimentality takes the place of theology. Our reference point will never serve to keep our feet on solid rock, for our reference point, until we answer God's call, is merely ourselves. We cannot possibly tell which end is up.”³

—Elisabeth Elliot
(1926-2015)



What are some biblical truths we can forget or fail to act on?

Along with leading some to abandon the faith and live licentiously, Jude warned that these false teachers would also “create divisions” within the church. Whenever the gospel is attacked, the church’s unity, based on that gospel, is placed in peril. A fractured gospel splinters the church.

The body of Christ is to be full of people who look different, come from different cultures, and have different experiences. The result is a people who might share very little in common from the world’s perspective but who are truly one in Christ. The gospel takes people who are in many ways polar opposites and joins them together as members of the same family. This unified diversity glorifies God by reflecting the scope of His power to redeem all people to Himself and to one another.

But remove the gospel or compromise its purity and this unity collapses. Unity of such a diverse people cannot be supported by anything else apart from the gospel. And when the church’s unity breaks, its witness to the world erodes. The church becomes ordinary again—a group of people who argue and bicker about what others should believe.

Jude reminded the church that they should have known false teachers would come, and because of that, they should have prepared for their arrival. They should have recognized the attack on the gospel and the church’s unity, and they should have addressed it immediately. That was a mistake they made that they could not repeat. And it is a mistake we cannot repeat either.



Voices from Church History

“We have no right to expect anything but the pure Gospel of Christ, unmixed and unadulterated—the same Gospel that was taught by the Apostles—to do good to the souls of men. I believe that to maintain this pure truth in the Church men should be ready to make any sacrifice, to hazard peace, to risk dissension, and run the chance of division. *They should no more tolerate false doctrine than they would tolerate sin.*”⁴

—J. C. Ryle (1816–1900)



What efforts at preserving the church's unity might actually compromise the gospel?



What are some ways we can celebrate and advance our church's ethnic and cultural diversity?

3. Build yourselves up and strengthen others in the faith (Jude 20-25).

²⁰ But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. ²² And have mercy on those who doubt; ²³ save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

²⁴ Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

Jude's final instructions to the church focus on their need to build themselves up in the faith. If the church is going to discern false teachers in their midst and contend for the faith, then the church must know the faith. You cannot defend what you do not know. The church, then, was not to stay on the defensive but also to be on the offensive, growing in their faith.

In verse 21a, Jude calls on the church to keep ourselves in the love of God. Here we find a coupling of our work and God's work acting together in this imperative. While we know God's love is fixed on us as His children, we also know that He commands us and expects us to obey Him. Our salvation is not dependent on our obedience, but it is validated by it. While this is a rather abstract thought for many of us, we can see how practical it was for the recipients of Jude's letter.

Next, in verse 21b, Jude instructs believers to wait expectantly for Christ’s mercy, which will be realized upon His return. This instruction offers a twofold encouragement to the church. First, it gives them hope of what will come. While they may struggle now with fighting against false teachers, working out their faith, praying earnestly, and obeying God, they can remember Christ is returning, and when He does, they will enter His rest. At the same time, anticipating Christ’s mercy—withholding judgment deserved—motivates the church to humble ourselves before God and others. When we remember the mercy we have been given, we are compelled to express similar mercy to others (see Matt. 18:21-35).

Jumping ahead to verse 24, we find another imperative implicit in Jude’s benediction. The church is to remember that Christ is the One who is able to protect them from stumbling and to make them stand in the presence of God’s glory, without blemish and with great joy. Jude has called on the church to contend for the faith—to fight a battle over the gospel. Like all battles, this one comes with danger. It may be easier to run and hide and stay out of harm’s way, but the fight is worth it and Christ will protect His own.



Which of Jude’s imperatives to the church have you found most helpful? Which is most difficult for you?

As Jude shares his closing instructions to the church, he seamlessly shifts his attention from how believers are supposed to build themselves up to how they are to build others up. He makes this transition in verses 22-23 and offers three final imperatives.

First, the church is to “have mercy on those who doubt.” Jude calls on the church to extend mercy—patience—with this group and to gently answer their questions.

Second, the church is to “save others by snatching them out of the fire.” Jude has in mind here those who are being enticed by the false teachers. The church is to contend for the faith and to call on these believers to stay true to the gospel, reaching into the fire to pull them back to safety.

Third, the church is to show “to others...mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.” Here Jude refers to those who have given in to the false teachers and who have joined them in sin. The church is to treat this group soberly, recognizing the seriousness of their transgression. Out of love, the church should confront these believers and implore them to repent, hoping and praying they do so.



What are some ways churches handle the wrong beliefs of church members today?



Voices from Church History

“As I have already observed, the Church, having received this preaching and this faith, although scattered throughout the whole world, yet, as if occupying but one house, carefully preserves it.”⁵

—Irenaeus (circa 125–202)

Conclusion

The church today is not very different from the church in Jude’s day. Our mission to advance the gospel to the world around us and the threat by false teachers in the church to that mission are the same. Jude’s words to the church have reverberated through the ages and continue to ring true today. The church is called to contend for the faith against these threats to preserve the gospel we proclaim and live. This mission of fighting against false teachings is heavy, but the cross we are called to bear is heavier. Yet we do not face this challenge alone. Jesus is the One who protects us from stumbling and who will enable us to stand in the presence of His glory, blameless and with great joy.

CHRIST CONNECTION: Jude warned the early Christians about people who would create division by teaching false doctrine and engaging in sinful behavior. Jesus is the One who protects His people from stumbling and who will enable us to stand in the presence of His glory, blameless and with great joy.

HIS MISSION, YOUR MISSION

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: God calls us to defend the faith so we can deliver the faith to those who do not know Christ.

1. How does faithful Christian morality support a faithful witness of the gospel to the world?

2. How should we address false teachers and teachings that distract unbelievers from the truth of Jesus Christ?

3. What are some ways we can protect ourselves from false teachings today?

SESSION 1

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964, reprint), 79.
2. Robert Smith Jr., quoted in "Know Your Southern Baptists: Robert Smith, Jr." by Trevin Wax, *The Gospel Coalition*, May 1, 2015, <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/trevinwax/2015/05/01/know-your-southern-baptists-robert-smith-jr>.

SESSION 2

1. Thomas Helwys, quoted in "Introduction," by Richard Groves, in *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity*, by Thomas Helwys (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), xxiv.
2. Matt Chandler, Eric Geiger, and Josh Patterson, *Creature of the Word: The Jesus-Centered Church* (Nashville: B&H, 2012), 176.
3. Andrew Fuller, "The Work and Encouragements of the Christian Minister," in *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, vol. II (Boston: Lincoln, Edmands & Co., 1833), 407.

SESSION 3

1. William Cowper, "God Moves in a Mysterious Way," *Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: LifeWay Worship, 2008), 664.
2. John Wesley, Letter XXV, in *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, vol. XVI (London: Thomas Cordeux, 1813), 183.

SESSION 4

1. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1973), 81.
2. Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, in *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, vol. XI, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1869), 139.
3. A. W. Tozer, *The Root of the Righteous* (Chicago: Moody, 2015), 79.
4. "Words of Mr. Moody" in *Northwestern Christian Advocate*, vol. 47, no. 52, December 27, 1899: 19.

SESSION 5

1. C. S. Lewis, quoted in *Is Your Lord Large Enough? How C. S. Lewis Expands Our View of God*, by Peter J. Schakel (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 112.
2. Handley Moule, quoted in *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed., by Robert L. Raymond (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 397.
3. Andreas J. Köstenberger, in *CSB Study Bible* (Nashville: B&H, 2017), 1895, n. 1:18.
4. E. Y. Mullins, *Studies in Colossians* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1957), 78.

SESSION 6

1. Frederick Douglass, quoted in *The Complete Works of C. H. Spurgeon, Volume 69: Autobiography—Diary, Letters, and Records, Vol. 4*, by Charles H. Spurgeon (Delmarva, 2013) [eBook].
2. Gerald Bray, *God Is Love: A Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 671.
3. John the Dwarf, quoted in *Desert Banquet: A Year of Wisdom from the Desert Mothers and Fathers*, by David G. R. Keller (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 245.

SESSION 7

1. Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 83–85.
2. Henry Alford, "The State of the Blessed Dead," in *Advent Sermons*, 2nd ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1872), 50.
3. John Wycliffe, quoted in *Civilization's Quotations: Life's Ideal*, ed. Richard Alan Krieger (Algora Publishing, 2002), 82.
4. John Knox, quoted in *The Christian Treasury*, vol. 15 (Edinburgh: Johnstone, Hunter, and Co., 1859), 180.

SESSION 8

1. "Aircraft in the Sky at Any Given Time," Federal Aviation Administration, July 31, 2017, https://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/by_the_numbers.
2. A. B. Simpson, quoted in *Simple Gospel: The Modern Offense of the Cross*, by Joshua West (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2017) [eBook].
3. Elisabeth Elliot, quoted in *Wisdom from Myles Munroe* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2010) [eBook].
4. John Charles Ryle, *Knots Untied* (London: National Protestant Church Union and Charles Murray, 1898), 449.
5. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 10.2, in *Readings in Church History*, ed. Jonathan Marshall (Hiram, ME: Hubbard Hill Press, 2009) [eBook].

SESSION 9

1. Burk Parsons, "In God We Trust," Ligonier Ministries, September 1, 2004, <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/god-we-trust>.
2. Joni Eareckson Tada, *Heaven: Your Real Home* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 131.
3. Saint John Chrysostom, Homily IV, *On the Acts of the Apostles* (London: Aeterna Press, 2015) [eBook].

SESSION 10

1. Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 2004) [eBook].
2. Dennis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 60.
3. Richard Sibbes, *Bruised Reed and a Description of Christ* (Post Tenebras Lux Books, 2010), 20.
4. John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 35.

SESSION 11

1. Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), 8.
2. Jim Elliff, "The Change of Mind," *Christian Communicators Worldwide*, 2002, <http://www.ccwtoday.org/article/the-change-of-mind>.
3. Ambrose, *Concerning Repentance*, 21.5, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series*, vol. 10, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wallace (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 345.
4. Vance Havner, quoted in *The Westminster Collection of Christian Quotations*, ed. Martin H. Manser (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 75.
5. Paul L. Steinke, *A Door Set Open: Grounding Change in Mission and Hope* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2010) [eBook].

SESSION 12

1. Jared C. Wilson, *Gospel Wakefulness* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 84.
2. Martin Luther, in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 3rd ed., eds. Timothy F. Lull and William R. Russell (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012) [eBook].
3. C. S. Lewis, in *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, Volume III: Namia, Cambridge, and Joy 1950-1963*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 1377–78.

SESSION 13

1. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 30.
2. C. H. Spurgeon, "Paul's Desire to Depart," in *Spurgeon: New Park Street Pulpit: 347 Sermons from the Prince of Preachers* (BookBaby, 2012) [eBook].
3. J. A. Medders and Brandon D. Smith, *Rooted: Theology for Growing Christians* (Spring Hill, TN: Rainer Publishing, 2016), 140–41.
4. Jerome, Letters XXII, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series*, vol. VI, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wallace (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 41.

The Gospel Project®

Adult Personal Study Guide ESV
Volume 6, Number 4 Summer 2018

Eric Geiger

Senior Vice President, LifeWay Resources

Ed Stetzer and Trevin Wax

General Editors

Brian Dembowczyk

Managing Editor

Daniel Davis

Content Editor

Josh Hayes

Content and Production Editor

Ken Braddy

Manager, Adult Ongoing Bible Studies

Michael Kelley

Director, Groups Ministry

Send questions/comments to:

Content Editor by email to
daniel.davis@lifeway.com or mail to
Content Editor, *The Gospel Project*:
Adult Personal Study Guide, One LifeWay Plaza,
Nashville, TN 37234-0102; or make comments
on the Web at lifeway.com.

Printed in the United States of America

The Gospel Project®: *Adult Personal Study Guide* ESV
(ISSN 2330-9393; Item 005573553) is published
quarterly by LifeWay Christian Resources,
One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234,
Thom S. Rainer, President. © 2018 LifeWay
Christian Resources.

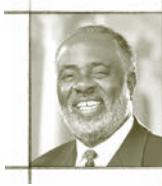
For ordering or inquiries, visit lifeway.com, or
write LifeWay Resources Customer Service, One
LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234-0113. For bulk
shipments mailed quarterly to one address, email
orderentry@lifeway.com, fax 615.251.5933, or write
to the above address.

We believe that the Bible has God for its author;
salvation for its end; and truth, without any
mixture of error, for its matter and that all
Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To
review LifeWay's doctrinal guideline, please visit
www.lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are
taken from the English Standard Version® (The Holy
Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright 2001
by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News
Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

About the Writers

Unit 2:



Robert Smith Jr. (sessions 7-9) is a professor of Christian preaching and holds the Charles T. Carter Baptist Chair of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama. He is the author of *Doctrine That Dances* and *The Oasis of God*. He is married to Dr. Wanda Taylor-Smith, and they have four adult children with one in heaven.



Brandon D. Smith (sessions 10-13) works with the Christian Standard Bible and co-hosts the Word Matters podcast. He is the author of *Rooted: Theology for Growing Christians* and *They Spoke of Me: How Jesus Unlocks the Old Testament*. He and his wife live near Nashville, Tennessee, with their two daughters.