

Contending for the Life of Faith

What kind of life are you living? Are you living the Christian life? Can you say that? Can you say that before the face of God? Can you say that in all honesty before your own conscience?

Do you *want* to live the Christian life? Is that really the desire of your heart? Do you pray to God daily for the grace to live the Christian life?

And *why* are you living the Christian life? Is it because you were born into and raised up in a Christian family? Is it because you want to please your parents and your grandparents? Is it because your friends are Christian friends, and if you are going to keep these Christian friends you need to live like a Christian yourself? Or is it the case that you personally are committed to live the Christian life?

We are called to contend for the faith (Jude 3). But we are also called to contend for the *life* of faith. Contending for the life of faith is not something that we are called to do in addition to contending for the faith. These are not two separate callings that every Christian has, two different activities that stand alongside each other, but quite distinct the one from the other. On the contrary, there is the closest possible connection between contending for the faith and contending for the life of faith. In the end, to contend for the faith *is also* to contend for the life of faith. That is due to the close relationship between the faith and the life of faith. On the one hand, the faith is the basis, the ground, the source for the life of faith. On the other hand, the life of faith arises out of the faith, adorns the faith, and is the evidence of faith. In the final analysis, the proof that one is contending for the faith is that he or she is living the life of faith.

The Life of Faith for Which We Are to Contend

The life of faith for which we are to contend is a life of *holiness*. Jude makes that plain. In the first verse of his epistle, he addresses himself “to them that are sanctified by God the Father,” (Jude 1). The faith itself for which he calls believers to contend is the faith “which was once delivered unto the *saints*” (Jude 3). He refers to this same faith in verse 20 as the “most *holy* faith.”

The Christian life is a life of holiness. But a life of holiness is a life lived *according to the law and Word of God*. That is simply what holiness is. What is holiness? Who decides what is holy and what is unholy? God does, and God does so in his Word. Crucial both to the faith and the life of faith is the Word of God. What we must believe, but also how we ought to live is regulated by God’s Word.

God *alone* decides how we are to live. This was the sin of the unbelieving Israelites (vs. 5), the wicked angels (vs. 6), and Sodom and Gomorrah (vs. 7). They had no regard for the Word and will of God. They would not submit to the regulation of their lives and behavior by God through his revealed will. They were self-willed and determined to live as they pleased, fulfilling their own lusts. One lives the life of faith by living according to God's commandments. He submits himself to God. Living in this way, he hates "even the garment spotted by the flesh" (vs. 23). Are you living such a life of holiness?

The life of faith is also a life lived to God and to the glory of God. In the end, that is what holiness is: devotion to God. Holiness is not merely living by a set of rules, a list of dos and don'ts. That is not the essence of the Christian life. But the essence of the Christian life is that it is a life that is consecrated to God.

There is a very significant description of the kind of life that is the opposite of the life of faith in Jude's epistle. That description is "ungodly." In verse four, Jude speaks of "ungodly men" who turn the grace of God into lasciviousness. In verse 18, he speaks of people who "walk after their own ungodly lusts." But especially is this his description of the wicked as far as their life in this world is concerned in verse 15: "To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are *ungodly* among them of all their *ungodly* deeds with they have *ungodly* committed, and of all their hard speeches which *ungodly* sinners have spoken against him." Ungodly—that more than anything else describes the nature of the life of the unbeliever. He is ungodly, thoroughly ungodly. God is not in all his thoughts. He has no interest in God or in pleasing God. God's name and God's glory simply are not a concern of his.

But for the believer, it is different. He lives his life consciously before the face of God. He lives his life for the glory of God. He lives to be approved by God. He lives the closing doxology of Jude's epistle: "To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen" (vs. 25).

Third, the life of faith is also a life lived out of love for God and gratitude to God. Love and gratitude—they fuel the Christian life, the life of faith. Love and gratitude to God for his gracious salvation of us. Love and gratitude for electing grace. (Verses 4 and 6 describe what we sinners deserve!) Love and gratitude for the cross and death of our Savior, Jesus Christ (vs. 4b). Love and gratitude for the indwelling Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit. That was the problem with the false teachers whose error Jude was especially concerned to combat, as verse 4 makes plain. They did not live out of gratitude for gracious salvation. Instead they turned God's grace into lasciviousness—an excuse to live wickedly and worldly. Their sin, at bottom, was not their lasciviousness. It was their contempt for grace; it was their ingratitude.

That love and gratitude are at the heart of the Christian life, Jude makes plain in his brief epistle. He makes that plain when he calls us in verse 21 to “keep ourselves in the *love of God*.” That is also indicated by the fact that not once, not twice, but three times, Jude addresses the saints to whom he is writing as “beloved,” (vss. 3, 17, and 20). We are the beloved of God. As God’s beloved, we are called to and by his grace to love him. That love is the fountain out of which flows the Christian life.

“Are you living the Christian life?” is really the question, “Are you living your life consciously out of love for God?” Is love for God the motive for your life? It is, if the life you are living is the Christian life.

The Christian life is a life of holiness. It is a life lived to the glory of God. It is a life lived out of love and gratitude to God. But, fourth, the Christian life is also an antithetical life. It is not only a life of holiness, but the rejection of that which is unholy and vile. It is not only consecration to God, but repudiation of all that is not devoted to God. It is not only living to the glory of God, but opposing all that robs God of his glory and tramples upon the glory of God. It is not only living out of love and gratitude to God, but standing over against that which hates God, God’s Word, God’s truth, and God’s commandments.

The Christian life is not just “Yes;” but it is also “No!” A resounding “No!” An unequivocal “No!” This is why many reject the Christian life today. This is what many find offensive about the Christian life. But let there be no mistake—this is the nature of the Christian life. Jude makes this plain. He does not only set forth positively the Christian life in this epistle. But he identifies, repudiates, and condemns those who are promoting unholy living. They and their lifestyle must be rejected. “Are you living the Christian life?” is really the question, then, “Are you living an antithetical life?” Not only a life for God, but a life over against sin and evildoers. That is the question.

The Possibility That We Contend for the Life of Faith

Having considered the nature of the Christian life for which we are to contend, the question arises, “What is the possibility of our contending for it? What is the possibility of our contending, not only for the faith, but for the life of faith?”

The possibility is, first of all, the Word of God. Included in the Word of God is our own reading and study of the Word of God. Included is our study and discussion of the Word of God with fellow Christians. Included especially is the official and public preaching and teaching of God’s Word by the church. Apart from the Word of God, and God’s grace through his Word, there is not possibility of our contending either for the faith or the life of faith.

Jude makes that plain. In verse 3 he speaks of our contending earnestly for the faith “once delivered unto the saints.” The faith has been once delivered unto the saints in the Word of God, the Bible. In verse 5, Jude speaks of the unbelieving Israelites who perished in the wilderness because they believed not the Word of God. The example of Sodom and Gomorrah of which we are to be mindful and take to heart is an example that is attested in Holy Scripture. And in verse 17, Jude exhorts, “But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ,”

This is absolutely critical to the Christian life, the life of faith—the Word of God. This is why membership in the church, living church membership is of such great importance. This is why it is altogether fatal to cut yourself off from the church. This is why it is so important to be a member not just of any church, but of a true church of Jesus Christ, such as our Protestant Reformed Churches are.

Are you concerned to live the life of faith? Give yourself to the Word of God. Put yourself under the faithful preaching of that Word. Your Christian life depends on it. Your Christian life will flourish under it.

The possibility of the life of faith and our contending for the life of faith is, secondly, prayer. Prayer is critical. Think once of where prayer is treated in the Heidelberg Catechism. Prayer is treated in the last section of the Heidelberg Catechism. It is treated in the section on thankfulness because of the distinct viewpoint of the Catechism, the viewpoint that prayer is the chief part of thankfulness. But beyond this, in the last section the Catechism treats the Christian life. Prayer is treated in this last section because prayer is vital to the Christian life. Prayer is the power of the Christian life. That prayer is vital to the Christian life every child of God knows from his own experience. Invariably the result of the neglect of prayer is that our Christian life suffers. Practically that is always the fruit of our neglect of prayer. That is so because of the vital connection between prayer and the Christian life.

Why is prayer so vital to the Christian life? Why cannot we live the Christian life apart from prayer? There are a number of answers that can be given to those questions. But certainly one answer is that we cannot live the Christian life apart from prayer because God would always have us conscious that the possibility, the only possibility, of our living the Christian life is *in him*. The Christian on his knees before the throne of grace is deeply aware that for the strength to live the Christian life, he is dependent on God. And of that important truth we need constantly to be reminded.

Jude makes very plain the importance of prayer for the Christian life. He exhorts in verse 20, “But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost.” From a certain point of view, the question is not, “How is your

Christian life?” But the question is, “How is your prayer life?” The answer to that question is determinative for everything else.

Third, the possibility of living the life of faith is the fellowship of the people of God, the communion of the saints. There is a fundamental truth about the Christian faith that comes out here. We are not alone in living the Christian life. We are in this together. God’s will is that we be a help and an encouragement to one another in living the Christian life. Jude points this out in his epistle. He puts it negatively in verse 19 when he speaks of those “who separate themselves.” He is talking about those who separate themselves from God’s people, separate themselves from the gatherings of the congregation; people who go their own way. He puts it positively in verse 20: “But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith.”

This includes many things. It includes the church and membership in the church. It includes good, Christian friends. Are these the kinds of friends that you have? It includes Conventions and Young Adults Retreats. It includes, very significantly, marriage. Are you seeking a spouse? Are you seeking a godly spouse? Are you seeking a spouse who is one with you in the faith and the life of faith? Are you seeking a spouse with whom you can live the Christian life? Marry in the Lord!

The Motivation for Contending for the Life of Faith

But, finally, why ought we to contend, not only for the faith, but for the life of faith?

We ought, first of all, for our own joy. In the end, there is only joy, real joy, satisfying joy for those who live the Christian life. It is a lie of the Devil that there is joy, real joy in a life of unholiness. That is always how the Devil presents temptation and a life of sin. But that is a lie, a damnable lie. There is no joy in a life of sin, as every impenitent sinner finds out already in this life. There is only joy in the life of faith.

That does not mean that there are no sorrows attached to the life of faith and contending for the life of faith. The Christian life is not only joy, unmitigated joy. That is not Scripture, and that is not the Christian experience. There are sorrows aplenty attached to the Christian life. That is why Scripture describes this life as walking through a valley of tears.

Still, that does not take away from the fact that the Christian life is a life of joy. That is Jude 24: “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory *with exceeding joy.*”

Second, we ought to be motivated to contend for and live the life of faith out of the hope of heaven. That is the hope of the saints—the life of heaven, eternal life, life

with God in Christ Jesus. But the way to that hope, the God-ordained way, is holiness of life. Without holiness, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, no man shall see the Lord (Heb. 12:14). Only those who live the life of faith shall enter into glory (Jude 24).

The opposite is also true. Reject the Christian life, live wickedly and worldly, and the end of that life is hell. The end of that life is God's judgment visited on you now already. And finally the end is the anguish of everlasting hell. That Jude points out also. He speaks in verse 6 of the wicked angels who are "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." In verse 7 he speaks of those who like Sodom and Gomorrah will "suffer the vengeance of eternal fire." In verse 13 he speaks of those "to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever." And in verses 14 and 15 he speaks of the coming of God with his holy angels in order to execute judgment upon all the ungodly.

Do you want to go to heaven? Do you have that fervent desire in your heart? That is a good desire. With a view to going to heaven, now, contend earnestly for the life of faith. For in the way of holiness, genuine holiness, we *shall* see the Lord.

But, third, we ought to be motivated to live the Christian life out of a desire for God's glory. We have already noted that the very nature of the Christian life is that it is a life lived to the glory of God. At the same time, this ought to be the motivation for every child of God to live the Christian life. For the child of God, God's glory is everything. But God is not glorified merely by a people who know the faith, confess the faith, or even defend the faith. God is glorified by a people who live out their faith. That pleases him! That honors his name and the name of his Son, Jesus Christ. And that is the last verse of Jude's epistle: "To the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen" (Jude 25).

I end as I began. What kind of life are you living?