

# Jude 1:3-4

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/jude/jude-1/jude-13-4/>

*Jude felt this letter was necessary to write to encourage his readers to fight for the faith. There are certain unnamed false teachers who have come into their assembly who are using God's forgiveness as an excuse to sin and to reject Jesus as Lord.*

Jude transitions from his initial greetings to a more urgent tone, shedding light on the matters at hand concerning the preservation and defense of the faith.

He states, *Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith* (v 3).

It seems from this statement that Jude was originally working on a letter to explain and teach concerning *our common salvation*, and then something transpired that caused him to make a shift. Rather than writing about their *common salvation*, Jude *felt the necessity to write* and exhort his fellow believers to *contend earnestly for the faith*.

When we see the word *salvation* it is important to ask “what is being delivered from what?” The Greek word “soteria” is translated here as *salvation*. Its verb form “sozo” is usually translated “save.” However, “sozo” is also translated “get well” when someone is delivered from a disease (Mark 8:35). In that instance, a person is being delivered from a sickness.

This can also be illustrated by a passage from Romans:

“Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now **salvation** is **nearer** to us than when we believed.”  
(Romans 13:11)

From this verse in Romans, the salvation being spoken of cannot be the justification salvation we receive when we first believe. As time goes by, we are getting **further** away from the day and time we first believed. In this verse, we are getting **nearer** to a salvation.

The salvation that believers are getting closer to every day in Romans 13:11 is the salvation from living in our sin-filled earthly bodies. In the future, we look forward to living in a resurrected body that has no sin.

In this passage, our *salvation* (“soteria”) is getting “nearer” in time than when we first believed. When we first believe, we are saved from the penalty of sin, as we receive the free gift of eternal life in Christ, being born again as a child in God's forever family. Then on a daily basis, we can be saved from the power of sin by walking in faith, following the Spirit. Then, ultimately, we will be delivered from this sinful body and given a resurrected one. It is this last salvation we are getting nearer to in Romans 13:11.

The *common salvation* Jude shares with the recipients of this letter likely includes all three applications of the salvation we receive as believers.

Salvation of our lives or souls has three tenses—past, present, and future:

- In the past we were saved from the penalty of sin when we first believed. That is a salvation that is a gift of God received by faith (John 3:14-15). It is a gift that can neither be earned or lost.
- In the future, we will be saved from the presence of sin, when we are resurrected and receive a new body (Romans 13:11). This is the future tense.
- In the present, we are always being saved from the adverse consequences of the power of sin when we walk by faith in the power of the Spirit (Galatians 6:8).

Jude might have intended to write about *our common salvation*, to express a common fellowship of the shared redemption all believers have through Christ. It seems more likely that Jude is referencing their *common salvation* from the power of sin in their daily lives, seeing that he is writing to believers.

To learn more about the Gift of Eternal Life, see: [“What is Eternal Life? How to Gain the Gift of Eternal Life.”](#)

To learn more about the rewards a believer may win or lose, see: [“Eternal Life: Receiving the Gift vs. Inheriting the Prize.”](#)

However, an apparent urgency compelled him to shift his message from writing about *our common salvation*, instead urging the recipients to *contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints* (v 3).

The phrase *once for all* translates a single Greek word “apax” which is usually translated “once.” This emphasizes that the object of our faith is Jesus Christ. Jesus was the perfect Passover Lamb sacrificed one time for all the sins of the world (Romans 6:10; Hebrews 9:12, 10:10; 1 Peter 3:18). It is through His death that we gain forgiveness of sins (Colossians 2:14). It is through the resurrection power of His life that we can walk in freedom from the power of sin (Romans 6:9-14). And it is through Jesus’s conquering of death that believers can look forward to being delivered from the presence of sin, when we receive a new body (1 Corinthians 15:53-54).

This gift of grace through faith was handed to *the saints*. The Greek word “agios” translated here as *saints* means “set apart for special service.” Context determines what is being set apart, for what reason. For example, “agios” is used in Matthew 4:5 to refer to Jerusalem (the “holy [agios] city”). Here in Jude, “agios” simply refers to those who are set apart as children of God through faith in Christ, and simply refers to those who have believed in Jesus. It is Jesus Christ that has been *handed down*. He is the Living Word (John 1:14) and each believer is brought forth by the word of truth (James 1:18).

The appeal to *contend earnestly* underscores a proactive stance in safeguarding the gospel message that relates to the reality of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, as well as our

participation in His death, burial, and resurrection. The phrase *that you contend earnestly* translates one Greek word “epagonizomai.” This word has two root words, “epi” and “agonizomai.”

The word “agonizomai” appears seven times in scripture and is variously translated as “strive,” “fight,” “compete,” and “labor.” It is a word that was used to apply to Greek athletic endeavors, such as wrestling, which were stringent and difficult. The English word “agony” is derived from “agonizomai.” The root “epi” adds the idea of *earnestly*—with all they have to give.

Jude exhorts the believers receiving his letter to fight for the faith. To contend for the truth. He urges them not to give up one bit of ground. There are conflicts to be had, confrontations to be made, and Jude desires to stir up his friends to engage in what would likely be a difficult and distasteful disagreement. The goal is to not to be contentious for self-seeking reasons. The object of the striving is to defend *the faith*.

This might evoke the image raised by the Apostle Paul of believers dawning each day their spiritual centurion uniform (Ephesians 6:11-17). The offensive weapon in this spiritual arsenal is the “sword of the Spirit” which is the truth of God (Ephesians 6:17). Jude desires that his recipients wield the sword of truth to defend the faith, and resist those who would twist or pervert the truth of the faith for their own gain.

The primary interest of the ungodly people in their midst is in feeding their own lust (Jude 1:16). Jude does not name the perpetrators of this falsehood, only referring to them as *certain persons*:

*For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those where were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ (v 4).*

That Jude uses *certain persons* might allow future readers to apply his warning to their own circumstances. These people are *marked out for this condemnation*. Jude cannot be more clear that these people are to be confronted.

The subject persons were previously *unnoticed*—*certain persons have crept in unnoticed*. The term *crept in* indicates that these people were deliberate in their undercover infiltration.

The secretive infiltration by *ungodly persons* points to the fact that there have arisen from among their number people who can now be identified as *ungodly persons* who were previously not identifiable as such. They were previously *unnoticed*. But now that they have been identified, Jude makes clear that they must be confronted and defeated. To defend the faith requires defeating these agents of ungodliness.

These infiltrators are accused of two grievous errors:

1. they *turn the grace of our God into licentiousness* and
2. they *deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ*.

These accusations are severe, and rise to the need for the saints to “*epiagonizomai*”—vigorously contend against this false teaching.

The first accusation is that these false teachers *turn the grace of our God into licentiousness*. Paul’s epistle to the Romans addresses the accusation that Paul’s teaching of God’s grace was false because it led to *licentiousness*. In Paul’s case, his accusers taught that the antidote against *licentiousness* was to follow Jewish religious laws. Paul adamantly resisted this thought, asserting that following religious laws was not a path that leads to righteousness (Romans 9:31-32).

Paul’s opponents argued that Paul’s teaching of grace would lead people to conclude that since more sinning makes God’s grace abound, therefore they had the excuse to say “once you are forgiven you should go sin as much as you like.” Paul called this allegation slanderous (Romans 3:8). Jude sides with Paul here, making clear that those who *turn the grace of our God into licentiousness* are in fact out of step with the gospel of *grace*.

Paul did in fact teach that God’s grace covers all sin—past, present, and future (Romans 5:20; Colossians 2:14). That does mean that if we sin, Jesus’s blood covers that sin and preserves our relationship with God as His child. God will never reject His people from being His children (2 Timothy 2:13).

However, Paul vigorously argues that every believer should strive to avoid sin because of its negative consequences. God’s world has moral laws with consequences that are just as certain as physical laws. And all sin leads to death/separation from living in God’s (good) design (Romans 6:23). All sin leads to God’s wrath, which in Romans is presented as natural consequences stemming from sinful decisions (Romans 1:18, 24, 26, 28). And God will judge the deeds of all believers and hold us accountable for our stewardship of the gifts He entrusted to us (Romans 14:12; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

When we choose to sin, we incur the adverse consequences of our actions. Believers have been given the power of the Spirit to walk apart from sin, and avoid such negative consequences. That is why Paul argues that the goal of each believer should be to walk in the Spirit and avoid the deeds (and adverse consequences) of the flesh (Galatians 5:16-17). That is why these bad examples need to be confronted, because they are leading people into death, loss, and slavery (Romans 6:15-16).

The phrase *long beforehand marked out for this condemnation* conveys a divine foreknowledge and judgment upon the ungodly interlopers. This reveals a providential aspect, suggesting that such adversaries, despite their ill intentions, fall within the purview of divine justice and cannot thwart God’s ultimate purpose. The Greek word translated *beforehand marked out* is elsewhere rendered as “was written.” There is a sovereignty that evil will come into the midst of believers. These people were identified for *this condemnation*. But it behooves each person to avoid being that person:

“Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!”  
(Matthew 18:7)

The word *condemnation* in the phrase *long beforehand marked out for this condemnation* translates the Greek word “krima” which can also be rendered “judgement” as in John 9:39 where Jesus says He came into the world “For judgment.” “Krima” also occurs in an interesting verse in the Sermon on the Mount that creates a prospective dilemma:

“Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way [“krima”] you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.”  
(Matthew 7:1-2)

If “krima” was rendered “judgement” in Matthew 7:2, it would read “For in the judgment [“krima”] you judge, you will be judged.”

The general rule proposed here in the Sermon on the Mount—to avoid judging others, and only judge in a manner you apply to yourself—appears not to apply in the case of false teachers. When there are those who are leading others astray, they must be identified and confronted. Jesus told His followers to recognize false teachers by examining their “fruit” (Matthew 7:15-20). So while we are to give grace to one another, there is a higher standard for those who are teachers (James 3:1).

Jude’s application to the people *marked out for this condemnation* could apply to those who are leading the flock astray. This would fit the passage since these interlopers are compared to “Korah” and “Balaam” (Jude 1:11). Korah was a religious leader in Israel, being a Levite (Numbers 16:1-2) and Balaam was a prophet (Numbers 22:5).

There also appears to be an exception for judging the behavior of others when their example can pollute other believers and lead them astray (1 Corinthians 5:9-13). In such an instance, the overt adverse example of the sinful person is apt to lead people astray, which has the same basic affect as the false teacher. In each case the “leaven” is to be removed (1 Corinthians 5:7), and the godly people in the midst bear the responsibility to *contend earnestly for the faith*.

These verses demonstrate that the early believing community struggled against false teachings and influences, as has been the case throughout church history. Their struggles are our struggles. But we have the great benefit of learning from God’s direction to them in those struggles, as all scripture is inspired by God and profitable to train us to walk according to God’s (good) ways (2 Timothy 3:16).

Jude’s fervent plea for these believers to defend the truth and his concern for the spiritual wellbeing of his brethren is an example for each of us. Jude exhorts the recipients of this letter to engage and confront these ills, and to strive, contest, and fight for the truth of God’s word. This earnest contention for the faith forms a timeless call for believers in all eras to uphold the integrity of the Gospel amidst contrary winds of shifting beliefs.

## **Biblical Text**

**3 Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. 4 For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.**