

DEFYING the ODDS ...Daring To Be Different In An Indifferent World



Defying the Odds by Manifesting Unity

Why “Contending” for UNITY?

The dictionary defines “**contend**” as... to *strive* in contest or rivalry, to *struggle* against difficulties or opposition, to *argue* (like in a debate).

The epistle of Jude is written to Jewish Christians living in Jerusalem. In the opening passages, the author explains that he had initially intended to write a general letter of encouragement on the topic of “the salvation we share.” Instead, Jude explains, “**I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.**” (Jude 1:3). Let’s look at this in context...

Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James, To those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ: Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance. Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to **contend for the faith** that was once for all entrusted to the saints. For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are **godless men**, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord. (Jude 1:1–4 NIV)

Jude is concerned because “**the faith,**” the Christian message of the gospel, is under attack from false teachers who are spreading dangerous heresies. Jude urges his readers to **contend for the faith** against those who seek to **undermine** and **erode** it. If Jude were writing this message in 2021, the “godless men” would be the voice of our post-Christian culture, the media machine. Underneath the surface, what is driving this assault upon “the faith” is surely a scheme of the enemy. In 2 Corinthians 2:11, Paul tells the people of Corinth that they are **not ignorant of the enemy’s devices**. The question is, “**Are we?**”

In the same way that “the faith” was considered by Jude to be the believer’s standard, the “**unity of the faith**” is what we are talking about contending for today:

- How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in **unity!** (Psa. 133:1 NIV)
- I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, **eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit** in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Eph. 4:1–6 ESV)

- I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony (that all of you agree) with each other. Let there be no divisions (gk. schism) in the church. Rather, **be of one mind, united in thought and purpose.** (1 Cor. 1:10 NLT-SE)

Why are we contending for unity. Simple. Many believers today are eager to do and say a lot of things, but many times their voice is merely an **echo of the modern culture.** Those “echos” are creating some of the most **devastating divisions** between members of the church who are Called first, to love God and then, love each other as well.

Instagram was created as a place where anyone could make their voice heard. You can post a pic of last night's stunning sunset or the latte art you were blessed with at Red Leaf Coffee yesterday, but it has also become a bastion for tearing down issues or people you don't agree with. Fifty years ago, truth was relative. Today, truth is very personal, very public and you had best learn to accept it. Everyone has an opinion and everyone's opinion is valid. Period.

One of the casualties of this new and improved version of truth for followers of Jesus is **the unity we have in Christ,** which has been severely weakened and currently seems to be on life support. **So, today we are going to contend for that unity in three ways:**

1. Contending in **TRUTH**
2. Contending in **LOVE**
3. Contending in **PRAYER**

- **CONTENDING IN TRUTH**

- Let's start with this truth... **There is NO biblical unity that doesn't begin with Jesus.**
- Here's another truth concerning unity... **There is NO manifestation of unity apart from the unity that starts with Jesus and flows to one another.**
- The best (only) source of truth, when it comes to our relationship with each other, is **the Word of God.** So, what does the Word say about unity in our relationships with each other?
 - **YOU SHOULD BE OF ONE MIND...** Finally, all of **you should be of one mind.** Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude. (1 Pet. 3:8 NLT-SE)
 - **AGREE WHOLEHEARTEDLY WITH EACH OTHER, LOVE ONE ANOTHER, AND WORK TOGETHER...** Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose. (Phil. 2:1-2 NLT-SE)
 - **WE ALL BELONG TO EACH OTHER...** Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other. (Rom. 12:4-5 NLT-SE)
 - **LIVE IN HARMONY & PEACE...** Dear brothers and sisters, I close my letter with these last words: Be joyful. Grow to maturity. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you. (2 Cor. 13:11 NLT-SE)

- **CONTENDING IN LOVE**

- First of all, you don't have to contend in love. You can contend in fear. You can contend in anger. Contending in love is resourced in a very specific kind of love. The Greek word for love. **Agape love.** Unselfish love.
 - **CLOTHE YOURSELVES WITH LOVE, WHICH BINDS US ALL TOGETHER IN PERFECT HARMONY...** Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you.

Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, **clothe yourselves with love**, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. (Col. 3:12–15 NLT-SE)

- **What does it look like** to contend for unity in **love**?
 - It looks like **humility**.
 - Often times we think contending is like standing on our soapbox and railing at the devil, reminding him that we've read the end of the book and we know how it looks for him, sometimes sounding a lot like we are mocking him. We cast down this and bind that, all the while refusing to forgive those who have offended or hurt us.
 - **WALK IN HUMILITY...** When you act with presumption, Convinced that you're right, don't be surprised if you fall flat on your face! But walking in **humility** helps you to make wise decisions. (Pro. 11:2 TPT)
 - **Humility leaves the door open** for God to do something unexpected, something beyond your abilities or control. Just when you think you have each other figured out, the Holy Spirit shifts the circumstances, empowers the weak and leaves you feeling like you really are "one." Unity manifests and love grows.
 - It looks like **understanding**.
 - Today, I want to stir up a hunger and thirst in you to really desire to want unity. **Jon Tyson** calls this, "**spiritual envy**." He says, "I understand attention to the culture, but the truth is you are the ones who are missing out on the fullness of what Jesus has to offer."
 - The **confidence** that comes from being grounded in the Word, grounded in love and grounded in Jesus. The big question for Jon Tyson is, "**Who are you becoming by what you're doing?** Are my lifestyle, choices and decisions leading me into a **closer** relationship as a disciple of Jesus or **further away** from one?"
 - **What is God offering** that the devil wants to keep from us?
 - That our **faith in God** would be formidable. Like it or not, you are in a war—a very serious one. This war is cosmic in its proportions. It involves God, humans, angels, demons, principalities, powers, nations, and antichrists. What are the satanic strongholds that spiritually imprison people, the strongholds that we seek to destroy? Arguments and opinions. Where is the battle raging? In our thoughts.
 - I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but to **keep them safe from the evil one**. (John 17:15 NLT-SE)
 - For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy **arguments** and every lofty **opinion** raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, (2 Corinthians 10:3–5 ESV)
 - That our ability to **glorify God** would be (super) natural.
 - All who are mine belong to you, and you have given them to me, so **they bring me glory**. (John 17:10 NLT-SE)
 - I brought glory to you here on earth by **completing the work** you gave me to do. (John 17:4 NLT-SE)
 - That our **reflection of Jesus** to the world would be unhindered.
 - The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become **perfectly one**, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. (John 17:22–23 ESV)
 - "Glorify me through your **pleasure** in me." Jesus Calling

- It looks like **Jesus**.
 - What do you do when one of your very close friends is attacked? You **contend for their character** on their behalf. You fight for their honor. You don't let their name be drug through the mud. You do something. Jesus did something. He gave. **Contending looks selfless**.
 - Whatever **biblical unity** we experience in this life finds its source in the person and power of Jesus. When we contend for unity in our relationships with each other, God releases to us something Paul in Romans 15 called **"a spirit of unity."**
 - **GIVE US A SPIRIT OF UNITY...** For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a **spirit of unity** among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom. 15:4–6 NIV)

- CONTENDING IN PRAYER

- **Prayer Points:**

- **PRAY** that the love Jesus has given us for each other would begin to **stir our hearts** and **motivate us to contend** for the **unity** we share.
- **PRAY** that we would not **"look down"** on those in the family of God whose **opinions differ** from ours.
- **PRAY** that we, as God's people, would **allow Jesus to be Lord** over our lives and **let him decide** what's right or wrong.
- **PRAY** that we would contend for **the unity we have in Jesus** as the people of Evangel, choosing to **honor** and **serve** one another in love.
- **PRAY** that we would **not allow the enemy to divide us...** ever... period!