On the Line: Tough Love in High Stakes

Week 4: Pulled from the Edge

I. Matthew 28:19 is the great commission of the Big "C" Church which is comprised of Christ followers around the globe. The great commission is to "Go, make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." We express the great commission distinctly through Tab as:

[Slide]: Pushing through boundaries to share God's story from Norfolk to the nations!

A. There's lots of work to do and we'd love to empower you to be a part of what God is doing from Norfolk to the nations! If you'd like to know what Tab is all about, that sums it up!

II. Today, we're concluding a series of messages through the short but action-packed letter of Jude. It's a tiny book of the Bible that's so small it doesn't have any chapters, but for the past 3 weeks we've been studying this letter we call the book of Jude and it's a lot to cover. Jude was writing to a church of mostly Jewish believers somewhere in the Roman Empire in response to Jude receiving word that false teachers have infiltrated the community of believers. Teachers are the spiritual leaders of the community of faith and these teachers that Jude addressed were diluting the faith, delivered once and for all to the saints. These teachers were manipulating the faith to their own advantage and leading people astray. Rather than shepherding the flock, they were like waterless clouds or fruitless trees who may have looked and played the part, but in the end were in it for themselves.

A. Jude has had some tough words to say to this early church comprised of true believers and these false teachers, who Jude makes clear are physically a part of the community, but not spiritually. The previous two weeks of this series we've been looking at the body of Jude's letter verses 5-16 which has focused on the characteristics of false teachers. In order to contend for the faith, we need to be fruit inspectors of those we submit to for spiritual leadership. Leaders can say things that seem right but does the character of their life support what they teach?

B. In verse 17 of Jude, he takes a turn in the letter and focuses the attention from the false teachers back to the believers. What is the responsibility of the community of faith in response to those in their midst who would dilute the purity of the faith? Jude is coming back after a substantial break in verse 5 to answer the implied question in verse 3.

[Slide]: How do we go about contending for the faith?

1. Let's dive into Jude 17. Jude directs his attention to these Christ following believers with one final warning in Jude 17-19 then he'll instruct them (and us!) on how to contend for the faith.

Jude 17-19 (CSB) [Slide]: 17 But you, dear friends, remember what was predicted by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. 18 They told you, "In the end time there will be scoffers living according to their own ungodly desires." 19 these people create divisions and are worldly, not having the Spirit.

a. Jude is encouraging the community of faith to remember the warning first expressed through the apostles. Jude is recollecting this prophetic word of the apostles, but he doesn't include himself in that same category. Isn't that interesting? The Bible makes distinctions regarding gifts and offices and sometimes we get that confused. The apostolic gift is alive and well today. That's someone who has the gift to blaze new territory for the gospel. The office of apostle is limited to those eyewitnesses to Jesus's earthly ministry. If someone claims to be an apostle (as in holding that office), run!

b. The prophetic word of the apostles that Jude challenges these believers to remember is:

[Slide]: In the end time there will be scoffers living according to their own ungodly desires.

There are a few very important points here.

(1) One, the end time refers to the age, covenant, or dispensation of grace. That covers the time between Pentecost and the yet to come Rapture. In biblical language, we're living in the end time just like the first generation after Jesus's death and resurrection.

(2) Secondly, the end time will be marked by scoffers. What does it mean to be a scoffer? That's someone who lives according to their own ungodly desires.

c. What is going on here?

(1) The apostles knew after walking 3+ years with Jesus that there would be those who think they understand the grace of God as ushered in through Jesus but in the end totally miss the boat. God is no dummy! He knew there would be those who distort the grace of God into a free pass for sin. That is another way to state the definition of a scoffer as mentioned above. Let's let grace abound by sinning away, and both Jude and Paul would stand in direct opposition to that thinking by saying one hasn't truly accepted God's grace if they are equating it with a "get out of jail free" card. A scoffer isn't a Richard Dawkins type; one who identifies as atheist. A scoffer is one who manipulates the grace of God to carry-out their own ungodly desires.

(2) Do we earn or work for God's grace? No, we don't. It's a gift. But when we receive a priceless gift, our response shouldn't be to run it through the mud, but a deep sense of appreciation and respect. Scoffers aren't living a surrendered life to Jesus but are attempting to manipulate Jesus for their own ungodly desires. These are people who create divisions and they're not born-again believers. Why? They don't have the Spirit. The Christian life begins and is carried out through the Holy Spirit!

Jude 20-23 (CSB) [Slide]: 20 But you, dear friends, as you build yourselves up in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting expectantly for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life. 22 Have mercy on those who waver; 23 save others by snatching them from the fire; have mercy on others but with fear, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.

2. Do we contend for the faith by going on a false teacher witch hunt? No, that isn't Jude's instruction. The whole paragraph is built off one imperative (command) which is:

[Slide]: keep yourselves in the love of God,

a. The rest of verses 20 and 21 are participle clauses (verbs used as nouns or adjectives) that support the imperative to keep yourselves in the love of God. And just a quick nod to the beauty of Scripture, verse 21 is a bookend, if you will, to verse 1 that said:

Jude 1 (CSB) [Slide]: To those who are the called, loved by God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ.

b. Verse 1 is an indicative statement or a point of fact! Verse 21 is imperative or a command. It's a great reminder that our obedience is in response to what God has already declared to be true over our lives! We can't separate verse 21 from verse 1. Context!

c. We contend for the faith by adhering to Jude's call to keep ourselves in the love of God. That sounds great!

d. How? We build ourselves up in the most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, and waiting expectantly for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life.

[Slide]: We do life together!

(1) Because in Jude's way of thinking, none of these are an exclusively individual endeavor. It's a both/and for Jude as he's giving instruction to the community of believers. We build ourselves up in the most holy faith by studying God's Word together. Sunday morning is a vital part of that but it's just one component. Throughout the week we gather in smaller groups of community we call LifeGroups (and there're other Groups that meet as well) but the driving force is building up one another in the faith. It's the same idea Paul writes about in Ephesians 2:19-21:

Ephesians 2:19-21 (CSB) [Slide]: 19 So then you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God's household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building , being put together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

The word for buildup and built in Ephesians and in Jude (ἐποικοδομέω) is the same word for edify that comes from edifice (literally "build up to the roof"). Build the house up to the roof but make sure it's on the proper foundation. The prophets and apostles are another way to express the Word of God. * There's likely a connection to Jesus's parable of building the house on the rock.

(2) Praying in the Holy Spirit means our prayers are controlled or guided by the Holy Spirit. They come from a place of brokenness and humility before God. A prayer life focusing to keep ourselves in the love of God comes from a dependence on the Holy Spirit and here's a litmus test on Holy Spirit derived prayers:

[Slide]: Is our prayer life more about bending God's will to our heart or bending our heart to God's will?

(a) It is the Holy Spirit that guides us to a place to say, "Your will oh God be done." Jesus demonstrated that in the Garden of Gethsemane when He prayed for the Father to let the cup pass. Nevertheless, Your will be done.

(3) The last way Jude says we keep ourselves in the love of God is by waiting expectantly for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life. Jude is reminding the community of believers that we need to talk often about Jesus's return. Even though we already have eternal life as an inheritance, Jude speaks of the future realization when we experience what's been declared to us. It's the biblical definition of hope.
What does remaining in God's love have to do with placing our hope in the mercy of Jesus Christ?

2 Corinthians 5:10 gives us some insight:

2 Corinthians 5:10 (CSB) [Slide]: 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may be repaid for what he has done in the body whether good or evil.

(a) Believers will be judged on the righteousness of Christ. All of us have sinned and deserve to be judged based off our good and evil deeds but believers wait expectantly for the mercy of Jesus because we won't be judged fairly. A fair judgment would be based off our works.
If you're here today and you're preparing to stand before Jesus one day and give the response:

[Slide]: I'm a good person

please think that one through. Good isn't even a part of the equation when holiness is the standard. A fair judgement would consider our sin. Thank God Jesus isn't fair! He's merciful! In Christ we're judged off His work not our own.

e. As we keep ourselves in the love of God by building up ourselves in the faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, and waiting expectantly on the mercy of Jesus we go after those who are being led in error. But we do so cautiously, loving the person but detesting the sin. We snatch those away from the fire by exercising:

[Slide]: Mercy

(1) In a lot of experiences within the community of faith we tend to jump into judgement which is reserved for the Lord. What we're charged to extend is mercy. Mercy is still upholding truth and challenging people in a loving way, but it's reaching out to someone headed down a bad path and loving them enough to call them back. God alone brings someone to repentance, but He can use the merciful plea of a brother or sister to do it. I would like to challenge each of us this week to prayerfully consider someone God places on our heart to extend mercy to.
The conversation could go something like this: "It grieves me to see the path that you are going down, but I want you to know that I care about you. Even though your actions are wrong I love you and want God's best for your life. If you ever want to talk, I'm here for you."
Some people might perceive that as judgement, but that's not judgement, that's mercy.

3. We'll finish up with the last two verses of Jude's letter and here they are:

Jude 24-25 (CSB) [Slide]: 24 Now to him who is able to protect you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of his glory, without blemish and with great joy, 25 to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority before all time, now and forever. Amen.

a. Jude has been a warning against false teachers and a challenge to believers to contend for the faith. There's a mystery that exists between the indicative statement of verse one and the imperative statement of verse 21 that highlights the tension between the Sovereignty of God and the freewill of human beings. Somehow both are true simultaneously! A letter like Jude that has a lot to say about the

holiness of God might leave us in a place of doubt, but Jude 24-25 doesn't let believers entertain that option. Jude is another great example that the imperatives of God which equates to our obedience are surrounded on every side with the indicative of God which equates to what God has already declared to be true!

b. A relationship with God isn't contingent on walking an aisle or saying specific words. It's not even about the physical act of water baptism. That's important but it's not a work that saves us. A relationship with God begins when we humble ourselves before the Almighty Creator God and acknowledge our sins and need for a Savior. Jesus Christ has paid our debt so that we might be reconciled to God. In response to what He's done for us we declare He alone is our Savior and Lord. Our obedience comes out of our surrender. Is it a linear process, emphatically no. We fail forward but we're no longer under sin's rule. We receive a new heart that increasingly longs for the things of God, but sin nips at us until the inheritance of eternal life becomes our reality.

C. In our battle with sin and imperfection we don't discount obedience. We contend for the faith. We make it our aim to go beyond an intellectual awareness and bend our lives to the book, but we do so knowing that on every side we're surrounded by a good and faithful God who will see us through.

1. Jude ends his letter depicting the scene to come in which we're standing in the glory of God radiating the perfection and joy that comes to us through Christ. The only proper response is to declare with everything in us to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord:

Jude 25 (CSB) [Slide]: Be glory, majesty, power, and authority before all time, now and forever. Amen.