

Effective Bible Study: Lesson 8

Understanding Authority

Written by John Poole

(Contemplating Your "Red Letter" Edition)

Spoiler Warning: I'm not sure how far you've come in your studies on the book of Jude, but I want to pause and share with this a couple my own observations from the book of Jude in order to set up this next part of our study.

Jude 3 says, "I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people." (NIV). That word contend has an intense meaning. The Greek word "epagónizomai" is used only here in the Bible. That word was used in conjunction with gladiatorial contests and indicated an intense struggle. As you know, gladiators didn't compete in tickling contests.

Now Jude urges the reader to "contend for the faith." Where does the Bible tells us that faith comes from? Romans 10:17 tells us, "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ." Let's frame that idea around a series of questions? Should people know about God and believe in him? Of course. Is it important for people to know who Jesus is? Again, most of you are saying, of course. And where exactly do we learn about God and Jesus? Or to phrase it differently, from where did you learn about Jesus and the Gospel? Did you not learn it from the Bible? Sure, you've heard people talk about Jesus and talk about His Gospel. But from where did those people get their information? Where do we get our knowledge about God and Jesus the gospel what God really expects of people? Is it not found in the Bible?

Alexander Campbell once observed, "Where the Scriptures speak we speak and where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent." And we come out of a tradition of people who were known as "people of the Book." But we certainly weren't the first. Predating Alexander Campbell was the principle known as "sola scriptura," or "by scripture alone" in English. This principle arose out of the Reformation Movement which arose in the early 1500s around the time Martin Luther published his Ninety-five Theses. They were done with Catholic Christianity and done with the false religion the Catholics had foisted upon the people. Unscriptural leadership, unscriptural practices, unscriptural doctrines. One of the novel ideas that came out of that, and has been the hallmark of every single major church reformation in history (some of which predated the 1500s Reformation Movement), is the principle of "by scripture alone." They wanted no more human creeds, and practices, and traditions of men that are treated as if they are equal to or

greater than the actual commands of God. They wanted to just get back to what the Bible says. Perhaps events such as Covid-19 should give Christians pause to reconsider where we're going in our walk and what principles we're holding onto it.

Having gotten through questions and learning to take the scripture seriously and learning to evaluate what it is that we're reading and ponder and pray about these things, now we really want to get into application, or how this text applies to people living nearly 2000 years after the texts were completed. Is it still relevant? Does it still pertain?

The authority of the New Testament should be without question for the life of a Christian. And the New Testament is explicitly clear that Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth. Hebrews 1:1-2 reads, "In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe." God spoke through the prophets but also through the Son. Remember the parable of the wise and foolish builders in Matthew 7:24-27. Both of the builders heard the message, but the difference was in what they did with the message. The wise builder followed Christ's instructions.

By faith, we should believe that Jesus' authority is in His word and what He has said to us. John 12:48-50 says, "There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day. For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So, whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say." What did Jesus say will judge people at the last day? (Hint: Read the text). By faith, we believe that Jesus' words were given to the apostles and the prophets. John 17:8 says, "For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me." and verse 14 says "I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world." Think about Jesus' concern with giving the apostles His "words" coupled with His observation of the world hating His people. Just think for minute about how powerful Jesus is words are. His words create disciples that will have everlasting life and his words cause a lot of conflict (hence the need to "contend") for others who don't agree with him. That's why these studies are so important.

Think about it like this: If all we had were "red letter" editions of the gospels, how would we know what qualifications of elders looked like, or to love our wives as Christ loved the church? For crying out loud, how is that we understand anything at all about the specificity of church structure and function if not for the 23 books that follow the Gospel of John? The New Testament in a nutshell, shows this progression of divine revelation. God the Father, Son and

Holy Spirit have always been and always will be. But in terms of the Scriptural revelation of the action of God in imparting the specifics of His plan and message, there is this perceived progression. First, God gives the Son. Then, the Father and Son give the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives divine speaking and revelation of Christ's words to the apostles and prophets. The apostles and prophets both preached to crowds and put pen to paper, writing texts, until here we are today, nearly 2,000 years after these amazing events, and we have access to the words of God. That is, if you have faith enough to believe in such things.

God -> Son -> Holy Spirit -> Apostles and Prophets -> Preached/Wrote -> Application to Us
God's word applies to all of us, regardless of nationality or race or gender or financial status because God wants all people saved. But all of this goes back to the authority that the Son has in His words. Now the real fact of the matter is, all red-letter editions of the Bible need to have all the words in red letters, because they were all, from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21, spoken by Christ.

To be clear: Jesus gave His words to His apostles by means of the Holy Spirit. John 14:25-26; 15:26; 16:7-14; (Counselor = Spirit). The Apostles and prophets, via the Holy Spirit, spoke and wrote the words of Jesus. They commented on this numerous times.

- 1 Corinthians 14:37 – The words Paul was writing are the Lord's commands.
- Ephesians 3:2-6 – Paul writes by inspiration
- 2 Thessalonians 2:14-15 – They are to hold to the teachings passed on by Christ.
- 2 Peter 1:20-21 – The Scripture came from God.

Here is your assignment. I have written my own synopsis of some of the passages above, but I would like you to look at each passage and write your own synopsis within the context. If you are familiar with the books in which they are contained, understanding who the writer and the audience are, and if you have an understanding of the occasion, that will certainly allow you to draw some conclusions about the intent of the passage and what we are to understand about it. But you also want to make sure that you look at the several verses written before and after the specific passage in order to help you better determine a specific context and application. With all that in mind, take some of those questions we asked in Lesson 2, apply those questions to the following texts. Clearly, not all of those questions will apply, and it's good to challenge the text with questions which you may come up with.