

BIBLE
STUDIES
FOR LIFE.

SMALL GROUPS

ANSWERS TO TOUGH QUESTIONS

DEFENDING WHAT YOU BELIEVE

JEREMIAH J. JOHNSTON

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ANSWERS TO TOUGH QUESTIONS: DEFENDING WHAT YOU BELIEVE

It can be hard to live out our faith in the midst of a culture of confusion. Christians also face the challenge of many competing voices. A battle is raging for our hearts and minds, and it seems skeptics have taken the microphone. People outside the church hardly know the Bible at all, and even many believers do not know Scripture as well as they should. Consequently, Christians are ill-equipped to provide the answers our culture and communities desperately need.

In this study, “Answers to Tough Questions,” we will learn how our faith challenges us to go to God’s Word instead of Google® for answers. The questions we’ll raise are the ones skeptics often ask, and while they may appear difficult, we find answers in the Bible. In answering tough questions, we will discover how to defend our faith and point to The Answer—Jesus Christ.

JEREMIAH J. JOHNSTON

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1

Do We Need to Defend Our Faith?



QUESTION 1:

What's the closest you've come to being an expert at something?

THE POINT

God can use you to show others the truth.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Some people are passionate about their coffee. I mean, really passionate. They are quite capable of defending their choice of coffee and explaining the subtleties between, say, Arabica and Robusta coffee beans. One doesn't have to be a professional barista to be a coffee expert.

I once sat next to a man and woman on an airplane who talked for sixty-eight minutes about basketball. (Yes, I timed them.) Specifically, they debated who was the GOAT—the Greatest of All Time: Michael Jordan or LeBron James. As far as I could tell, they were neither

professional basketball players nor coaches, but they certainly were very passionate fans.

People tend to be effective communicators on subjects that hold their passion. Yet many Christians with a deep love for Jesus don't think they can effectively communicate about their faith.

The good news is you don't have to be either a "professional" or a degreed scholar to be knowledgeable about your faith. Jude has shown us that every follower of Jesus can defend the faith.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

JUDE 1-4

¹ Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James: To those who are the called, loved by God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ. ² May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. ³ Dear friends, although I was eager to write you about the salvation we share, I found it necessary to write, appealing to you to contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all. ⁴ For some people, who were designated for this judgment long ago, have come in by stealth; they are ungodly, turning the grace of our God into sensuality and denying Jesus Christ, our only Master and Lord.

Your past does not disqualify you. Jude knew this. He was the physical half-brother of Jesus (Matt. 13:55), but he saw his brother as nothing more than that: his brother. Jude joined his other brothers in ridiculing Jesus out of unbelief (John 7:3-5). Thankfully, the embarrassment of not immediately recognizing Jesus' divine identity was only a comma in Jude's life, not a period. Jude moved from skeptic to "servant of Jesus Christ"; in Acts 1:14, he, Jesus' other brothers, and Jesus' mother, Mary, were praying with the apostles in Jerusalem. Jude's life reminds us that faith is about our present, not our past. We learn from our past, but we don't live there; it doesn't define who we are in Christ.

Defending the faith doesn't appear to be Jude's original purpose in writing: "I was eager to write you about the salvation we

share" (v. 3). However, disturbing news had reached Jude that the faith was under attack from within; it had "come in by stealth" (v. 4). Jude was ready to alter his plans and call the church to "contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all" (v. 3).

QUESTION 2:

What are some ways the Christian faith is being challenged today?

Contending for the faith was not something Jude was calling a select few to do, like some "special forces unit" of the church. He was writing to all believers. Every Christian must contend for the faith.

THE POINT

We are called to contend, a word that pictures a struggle. This word could have an athletic connotation. Christians should rise up and challenge false teaching, error, and any misrepresentation of “the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all.” We don’t need to forfeit to any opponent; instead, we strive to ensure that the truth is heard.

As he contended for the faith, Jude modeled two traits for us:

▶ **Humility.** Jude was the half-brother of the Messiah, but he didn’t wave that in people’s faces. Jude had serious first-century Jewish credentials, yet he didn’t

waste words about himself. In beginning his short letter, Jude didn’t bother mentioning his family connection to Jesus, only his brother James.

▶ **Brevity.** Jude’s letter is one of the shortest books in the Bible. This was Jude’s “elevator speech” against false teaching and error! Some occasions may call for a deeply researched defense of the faith, but many times, our defense does not need to take a long time or be overly complicated.

JUDE 20-23

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.



Earlier, Jude had noted false teachers had entered the church (v. 4), and throughout the bulk of his letter (vv. 5-19), Jude outlined the character and vices of these people. He wanted his readers to know and recognize them so that they could stand against those who sought to sow doubt and confusion among the believers. Now, Jude offered four specific things we should do as we contend for the faith.

1. **Build up your faith.** “Build yourselves up in your most holy faith” (v. 20). Unfortunately, too many Christians come to faith in Christ, but they never grow in that faith. A favorite tactic of many cults and false religions is to isolate uninformed Christians and catch them off guard. Jude’s point is that our focus must be on growth.
2. **Pray.** In Jude 19, Jude described the false teachers as “worldly, not having the Spirit.” True believers, though, do have the Holy Spirit in their lives, and we must rely on the Spirit at all times. A Christian never loses the indwelling presence of the Spirit (Rom. 8:9), but we must continually rely on Him and let Him fill us (Eph. 5:18). We cannot build up our faith, let alone contend for it, without “praying in the Holy Spirit.”
3. **Love.** The most important decision I can make today, as a follower of Jesus, is to live in the atmosphere of God’s love. “Keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting expectantly” (v. 21). The word “keep” is telling. We don’t “keep” in the sense of locking ourselves away, but we keep an eye on ourselves to ensure we don’t drift away from the love of God. Christians are in the custody of God’s love, so let’s keep an eye on things to make sure we don’t wander away!
4. **Show mercy.** Defending the faith is never about being the smartest person in the room. The goal is never to win an argument and lose a soul. When we contend for the faith, we are to do so with mercy. The imagery is powerful. Jude instructed us to reach out mercifully to “those who waver” and doubt; others we may save only by “snatching them from the fire” (v. 23). What is this fire? It is the eternal death created for the devil and his demons. That moves us to show kindness and mercy, but we must never compromise.

QUESTION 3:

How can we balance showing mercy and contending for the faith?



JUDE 24-25

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.

This is one of the great doxologies in Scripture. This letter was not simply distributed and read as we commonly do today. Some scholars have estimated that only about 10 percent of the Roman Empire could read.¹ Jude's letter was likely read aloud like a sermon in the context of a house church or small gathering. So as the original hearers heard the call to contend for the faith, they also heard this doxology spoken over them.

So what was the blessing in Jude? You are not alone! Jesus is with you, protecting you as you stand and contend for the faith. In standing for Christ, one never stands alone. The blessing doesn't stop there. Jesus also empowers us to "stand in the presence of his glory." We may face adversity, but we can stand before Him "without blemish and with great joy" (v. 24).

No matter what challenge you face today, you do not confront it alone because He "is able"—that is, fully capable—to present you faultless, as if you had never sinned. In Christ, you are utterly forgiven, cleansed, purpose-filled, focused, and called. God's protection and power are with us, so that we can contend for the faith. We don't have to rely on ourselves.

QUESTION 5:

What are some practical steps you can take to gain confidence in defending the faith?

QUESTION 4:

How do these verses encourage you as you seek to defend the faith?