

Introduction

I'd like to show you three things. The first is a *New York Times* newspaper. The second is the Koran. And finally the third is the Bible. I show these to you because of what they represent. They represent the three dominant worldviews that are competing for supremacy in our world and in our nation as well.

The critical question of course is which one will prevail? The answer to that, in my view, will be determined by one thing more than any other. That one thing is where professing Christians like you and I stand and that's what I'm going to preach about today from Jude 1-4.

The Passage

Verses 1 and 2 contain the typical greeting that characterized first century letters. First, it identifies its author - "Jude, "a bond-servant of Jesus." He was also the brother of Jesus. Second, it names the recipients - "those who are the called, beloved in God." That designation indicates that those to whom Jude wrote were Christians.

Verse 3 reveals what prompted him to write the letter. It says he intended to write them about their "common salvation." He planned, in other words, to write a pastoral letter that recalled and rejoiced in the spiritual experiences they and he had together. But he didn't because of a problem of theirs he heard about. He wrote a sort of broadside instead, a letter to set them straight.

Verse 4 discloses what the problem he heard about was. False teachers had come subtly into their church and were trying to lead them astray. For several reasons, a variety of heresies assailed first century churches. This one, which was pre-gnostic, taught "licentiousness, to quote verse 4. God's grace is wide enough to cover any sin, it asserted. So, one can freely sin. It also denied "our only Master and Lord, Jesus." It taught that he was a mere man in other words.

That heresy assailed the community of Christians to whom Jude

wrote and he told them what to do about it in verse 3. This is one of my favorite lines in the Bible. He declared, **“Contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.”** The phrase “the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” referred to a body of belief and practice. That body of belief and practice was the preaching, teaching, and writing of the apostles. The first century church widely accepted that preaching, teaching, and writing as God’s authoritative word to them, which it was. And that, Jude said, was their best response to the false teachers among them. Contend earnestly for that faith.

That’s the gist of verses 1-4 and I can’t think of a more instructive text for an Independence Day sermon than it. That’s because three parts of it have critical parallels in our own world today, ones that speak urgently to you and me as both Christians and Americans. Let’s identify and discuss each of the three.

Parallel #1 – the Heresy that Jude Addressed

The first part of the text that has a parallel is the heresy of verse 4. Its parallel in our world today is two of the three dominant worldviews I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon.

The first is the one that the *New York Times* newspaper represents, naturalism. Naturalism is a belief system, the central tenet of which is this. Nature, the material world, is all that exists. There are no divine or supernatural realities. That tenet leads logically to others including moral relativism, multiculturalism, pragmatism, and utopianism to name only a few – all of which contradict the tenets of Christianity.

Naturalism is now an entrenched worldview in continental Europe, England, and the United States. It has penetrated profoundly and practically into the thinking and lives of the masses. Take its moral relativism for instance. In a Gallup poll, 69% of the Americans surveyed said there are no moral absolutes. In a Barna poll, 71% of the Americans surveyed said there is no such thing as absolute truth.

The heresy of verse 4 has another parallel. It's the worldview that the Koran represents, Islam. Islam has six basic doctrines to be believed and five pillars or duties to be performed. But for our purposes today, all we need to know is that many of its tenets contradict essential tenets of Christianity. It claims, for instance, that Jesus isn't God, that He never died on the cross, and that people earn salvation by following the five pillars or duties. Islam is the world's second largest religion after Christianity, with over a billion adherents.

That then is the first part of the text that has a parallel - the heresy of verse 4. Its parallel today is two dominant worldviews, naturalism and Islam.

Parallel #2 – The Heresy Assailing the Church

The second part of the text that has a parallel is the heresy of verse 4 assailing the church. Its parallel is naturalism and Islam assailing the third dominant worldview that the Bible represents. I'm talking of course about Christianity. We mustn't be naïve about this. Naturalism and Islam are threatening the very existence of Christianity.

Naturalism is. Naturalism is by its nature atheistic. But it morphed during the last part of the 20th century and also became "anti-theistic." That means its hostile to theistic belief systems, especially Christianity, and seeks to eradicate it. Its attacks on Christianity are increasing in their frequency and vigor. Examples abound.

In 2006, for instance, evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins published a book titled *The God Delusion*, which had an unusually long run on the *New York Times* bestseller list. He contends in it that religious instruction is a form of child abuse. He also suggests that the government should put a stop to it. Tufts professor Daniel Dennett agrees, arguing that religion is a dangerous toxin that poisons people.

Please grasp that Dawkins and Dennett aren't fringe phenomena. Attacks on Christianity are now mainstreamed. Critics, for instance, regularly liken politically active Christians to the Taliban. Newscasters

like Tom Brokaw, Chris Matthews, and Bryan Williams, may not say that but we can infer from what they say they think it. Then there's the name-calling we hear. Respected leaders and writers have called Christians everything from "lug nuts" and "clowns" to "poor, uneducated, and weak." That wouldn't be tolerated referring to Muslims or Jews but it is to Christians. There's no doubt. Naturalism is assailing Christianity.

And so is Islam - in both its moderate and radical forms.

Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world. If current trends continue, it will surpass Christianity as the largest by 2050. The fertility rate in the West only exacerbates the problem. Europe, for example, has a 1.4 fertility rate, far below the 2.1 necessary to maintain its population. But the large Muslim populations in it are over the 2.1 rate. One cultural observer concludes about that, **"If the West doesn't fall, it will simply be absorbed by an expanding Islamic population."**

The biggest threat, however, is from radical Islam. I mentioned the five pillars or duties. For a minority of Muslims, there's a sixth called Jihad. Those who subscribe to Jihad as holy war don't comprise a peace loving movement seeking to evangelize. They comprise a radicalized movement instead called "Islamofascism." They have a maniacal hatred of the West in general and the United States and Christianity in particular. They're devoted to their destruction by any means possible - hence 9-11 and who knows what else ahead.

Anyway, my point is this. A second part of the text has a parallel, the heresy of verse 4 assailing the church. Its parallel is naturalism and Islam assailing Christianity.

Parallel #3 – Contending for the Faith Handed Down

There's a third part of the text that has a parallel. It that's favorite line of mine, **"Contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints."** For us, "the faith once for all handed down" is what I'd call the Gospel of God. That Gospel is nothing more than the whole Bible. For us, "contending earnestly" is

what I'd call "standing on." Putting those two things together we have the parallel of contending earnestly for the faith handed down. That parallel is standing on the Gospel of God, the Bible – and that's our call today. That's our best and most effective response to naturalism and Islam. Stand firmly, unwaveringly, on the Gospel of God. Doing that requires four things of us, each of which I want to briefly explain to you.

First, we must believe the true Gospel of God.

The American church on the whole has a problem in that regard and it's this. Its faith isn't the one which was once for all handed down to the saints – the faith of Paul, Augustine, Martin Luther, George Fox, and Oswald Chambers. It's a new faith instead, one that was tailored to fit the consumer and therapy mentality of our culture. I saw a church ad that said: **"You don't have to fit the gospel. We make the gospel fit you."** That's precisely it. Most Christians and churches aren't self-aware or honest enough to admit that, but it really is what they do.

But we shouldn't. We should believe in and demand the true Gospel of God instead. Examine the Bible thoughtfully, objectively, and thoroughly. Understand what the original writers intended to say. Then believe that, not some watered down Americanized version of it. That's where standing on the Gospel of God begins.

Standing on the Gospel of God requires a second thing. We must live it out and I mean in the most important matters of our lives. I heard a pastor say, **"I'd have a rebellion on my hands if I preached what the Bible really says about money, sports, dress, mutilation of the body, and burn out."** He was implying two things. Most of the people in his church weren't living out what the Bible says about those things and they didn't want to hear they weren't. What about us? Do we know and live out what the Bible says about the issues that matter the most to us? I hope so because standing on the Gospel of God requires it of us.

It requires a third thing. We must promote it. Many of us struggle with that don't we? Our problem is the cultural pressures we feel. Let's face it. The Gospel of God can be quite upsetting to people, especially in

this politically correct society of ours. It might offend them and make them think we're radicals, bigots, or even incompetents. So, we keep it to ourselves, hoping our lives will be witness enough.

But they never are. No one is ever won by the witness of our lives alone. They need the content of the Gospel of God and so we give it to them. We use it to address the issues that matter the most to them. We actually look for opportunities to do that and when they're there, we take them – even if we risk alienating them from us.

There's a fourth thing that standing on the Gospel of God requires of us. We must defend it. Hostile non-Christians and ignorant Christians assault it all the time. In either case, we need to turn back the assault. The Bible is true, absolutely, and thus worthy of standing up for.

An attorney once told two others and me that the Bible is hopelessly out of date. I couldn't let that go. So I kindly challenged him on it. I asked him if he concluded that after actually studying the Bible. He admitted that he didn't. I then told him that the Bible addresses the most important matters in human life like anger, sex, criticism, work, manipulation, the tongue, and more. I also told him it gives us the best information we'll ever get about those matters and gave examples.

He didn't like me saying that I'm sure but it was a constructive thing to do. It gave the other two persons and he an understanding of God's Gospel they didn't have before. They may not believe it but at least they understand it. That in turn gives the Holy Spirit something to work with in evangelizing them.

So that's our best and most effective response to naturalism and Islam. Believe, live out, promote, and defend the Gospel of God.

Conclusion

I finish the way I began - with the *New York Times*, the Koran, and the Bible. And I ask you a question that all of us need to honestly answer. Where do you stand? Is it on the *New York Times*, the Koran, or the Bible? I don't know about you but here I stand – on the Bible.