



the WISDOM JOURNEY
LESSON 761

JUDE

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH

JUDE 1-16

We are called to fight for and preserve the faith—the truth taught in God’s Word. But victory requires that we know our enemies—their teaching, character, and motivations. Jude informs us of these matters and also warns us that enemies will arise within the church itself.

One of the greatest threats to the church’s influence in the world is the world’s influence in the church. That happens to be the perspective of a biblical author who wrote a little letter—an epistle—to warn us and remind us of spiritual dangers that surround the church today.

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This letter was written by a man named Jude. And his epistle begins with his signature, here in verse 1: “Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James.”

Jude is another form of the name Judas, which, in turn, is the Greek version of the Hebrew name Judah. No doubt our Bibles translate the name Jude here to distance the author from the memory of Judas Iscariot.

Jude tells us he’s the brother of James. According to the New Testament, James and Jude were half brothers of Jesus. Matthew 13:55 gives us their names along with two other half brothers.

Unlike James, Jude is relatively unknown. Perhaps that is why he introduces himself as the brother of James, the well-known pastor of the church in Jerusalem.

Rather than mentioning James, Jude could have just said, “I am the half brother of Jesus, the Messiah.” Instead of focusing on his physical relationship to Jesus, however, he humbly mentions his spiritual relationship to Jesus. He is a servant, a slave, of Jesus Christ.

Now here is Jude’s purpose in writing this letter:

*I found it necessary to write
appealing to you to contend for
the faith that was once for all
delivered to the saints. (verse 3)*

This word “contend” is a compound word that includes the Greek word *agōnizomai*, which gives us the verb *agonize*. Jude is not talking about picking fights with unbelievers. He is talking about making every agonizing effort to defend the faith. He explains why in verse 4:

Certain people have crept in unnoticed . . . ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Jude is not concerned about people on the outside. He is talking here about people on the inside. These people are not obviously trying to destroy the church; they are actually trying to join the church. But they will eventually twist the truth so that it supports their lifestyles, which deny the mastery and authority of Jesus.

Theologians call these people *apostates*. Apostates are those who appear to follow Christ for a time but eventually abandon the faith to pursue sensuality. They want their sinful lives instead of Jesus.

Jude highlights three kinds of temptation that led people in the past to abandon the faith. And these temptations still very much exist today.

First is temptation that comes from *special privileges*. Jude mentions the Israelites who were delivered out of Egypt but, as verse 5 says, were later “destroyed” because they “did not believe.”

Notice that Jude writes, “Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward de-

stroyed those who did not believe.” This is a powerful statement of the preexistence of Jesus as God the Son. While He became a human through Mary’s miraculous conception, Jesus is the eternally existent, second member of the Godhead. Jude says He, specifically, was the sovereign power delivering Israel from Egypt.

But Israel wasted their amazing privileges through unbelief.

Not only can temptation come from special privileges, but it can also come from *special authority*. In verse 6, Jude refers to the sin of angels “who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling.” The angels enjoyed a glorious position in the very presence of God. But for some of them, that was not enough. They rebelled against God and became what we call fallen angels, or demons.

And according to Jude 6, some of the demons are being “kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment.” I personally believe Jude is referring to that passage back in Genesis 6:1-8, where some of these fallen angels possessed sinful men, and their offspring thoroughly corrupted the human race and led to the judgment of the global flood.

Jude’s point is that positions of superior authority can lead to pride. And in this context, he is warning that people in authority in the church can become so proud they think they know better than God and the Bible, and that can lead them to defying God.

Jude’s third warning is about temptation that comes from *sexual desires*. He rehearses here the sexual immorality of Sodom and Gomorrah:

*Just as Sodom and Gomorrah
and the surrounding cities,
which likewise indulged in
sexual immorality and pursued
unnatural desire, serve as an
example. (verse 7)*

That is, they serve as an example of God's fiery judgment.

Genesis 19 records how God sent down fire and sulfur, destroying Sodom, Gomorrah, and several nearby cities in this valley region. Those cities' locations have been identified by archaeologists—the ash and burn layers still evident. The only city in this region that shows no signs of fire and sulfur is Zoar, to which Lot and his family initially fled.

I have in my study a little ball of sulfur about the size of a golf ball. It, along with many others, was uncovered in this region by an archaeologist, a faculty member at Shepherds Theological Seminary.

This little ball of sulfur is still flammable. I can hold it up to my nose and smell the sulfur even though it fell from the sky 4,000 years ago. Now, if you think it was not fair for God to judge them so severely, Jude is simply using them as a reminder that one day, all who reject God's word are going to be cast by God into an eternal fire in hell (Revelation 20:15).

Following that history lesson, Jude describes what apostates look like in any generation. He writes, "These people . . . defile the flesh [violating God's original design], reject authority [God's Word], and blaspheme the glorious ones" (verse 8).

Jude explains that last phrase by telling us in verse 9 about an event not recorded anywhere else in Scripture:

*When the archangel Michael,
contending with the devil, was
disputing about the body of Moses,
he did not presume to pronounce a
blasphemous judgment, but said,
"The Lord rebuke you."*

So even the great archangel did not attempt to insult the devil. This is a reminder that when we contend for the faith, our weapon is not delivering insults but declaring God's inspired Word.

Jude describes apostate teachers in verse 11 as having "walked in the way of Cain," as described in Genesis 4. Likewise, apostates do religious deeds their own way, and they do not care who gets hurt.

They also commit "Balaam's error," verse 11 says, "for the sake of gain." Just like Balaam back in Numbers 22, apostates want to put money into their own pockets.

Finally, Jude mentions Korah, who defied the authority of Moses (Numbers 16). Likewise, apostates rebel against God's chosen leaders in the church.

Jude then describes these apostates as "hidden reefs" (verse 12). They bring a local church to shipwreck. They are like "waterless clouds" that promise a rain shower but offer nothing more than hot air.

Furthermore, they are like "wandering stars" (verse 13). Stars were critical for navigation, but these false teachers do not follow a con-

sistent pattern. They just wander around, leading people to wander along with them.

Jude adds a unique prophecy from Enoch, the Old Testament patriarch, in verses 14-15:

“Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness.”

This prophecy speaks of Christ’s judgment when He returns to earth. He is not going to pick on one sinner or any one sin; all who rejected His Word will be judged.

Beloved, God does not give us this description of apostates so we can pat ourselves on the back, but to remind us to defend the faith. And that means making sure we are walking in obedience to the Word of God today.

How can you actively “contend for the faith” in your own life, as Jude urges?

How do you handle temptations that come from special privileges or authority in your life?

In what ways do you guard against pride, especially in areas where you have influence or leadership?

How can you maintain sexual purity and resist temptations that could lead you away from God’s will?

How can you recognize and respond to apostate teachings or false doctrines within your community?

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LESSON 762

JUDE

A SEVERE WARNING FOR EVERY GENERATION

JUDE 17-25

As we face real threats to our Christian faith, our foremost duty is to live consistent, balanced, God-honoring lives. This requires guarding our relationship with the Lord even as we point others to how they can know the Lord as well.

I remember several years ago sitting in a car with a missionary couple at an intersection in downtown Toulon, France. We were at a red light when, suddenly, a young man on a motorcycle raced through the red light without even slowing down. Moments later, another young man on a motorcycle hopped up on the sidewalk and also roared across that same intersection without even slowing down to see if other cars were coming. I said out loud how incredibly dangerous that was. My friends told me that happens all the time. They said that when a young man begins riding a motorcycle, he has a lifespan, on average, of less than five years. Even knowing that statistic, they told me, these young men ignore all the traffic signs and never even pause at stop lights.

Well, the book of Jude is a stop sign for the church today. It is a dangerous thing to ignore this little letter—for your own life and for the life of your local church.

Jude is giving us a divine warning here. There are people within the organized church who are teaching error; they want to draw people

away from the truth of Christ as they twist Scripture to allow for sinful and immoral lifestyles. Jude's description of them is a courageous and honest portrayal. We need to be on the lookout if we hope to avoid a collision in the traffic patterns of our lives.

As we set sail one more time into the book of Jude, the final portion of his letter tells us how to respond to apostate teachers.

First, Jude tells us that we need to keep a *biblical perspective on these apostates*.

Remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions." (verses 17-18)

In other words, do not be discouraged, but do not be surprised either. The Lord's apostles predicted it. Paul and Peter warned of it (1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; 2 Peter

3:3-4). Think about this: the fact that apostates show up actually affirms the accuracy of Scripture.

So, here is the biblical perspective: God knew attacks and apostasy would plague the church. God warns us of them so we can be prepared for them. This is yet another reminder that God is in control—even over the appearing of apostates.

Second, we need to maintain *a biblical priority for ourselves*. There is always a danger of becoming so focused on the darkness around us—on the content of false teaching, on the greed and immorality of false teachers—that we ignore our own spiritual development. So, Jude turns the focus back on us in verses 20-21:

But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

In this sentence there is only one primary imperative, or command: “Keep yourselves in the love of God.” The other three phrases describe how to do that: “building yourselves up,” “praying,” and “waiting.”¹

Let us think about this command first. “Keep yourselves in the love of God,” Jude says. Back in verse 1 and, as we will see, again in verse 24, the author says we are kept by God. And the apostle Paul ends that great eighth chapter of Romans by declaring that nothing can

“separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus” (verse 39).

So, what is Jude saying? If nothing can separate us from God’s love, why do we need to keep ourselves in it? What Jude is highlighting here is responsibility. It is our responsibility to keep ourselves in the sphere of God’s love—that is, in the place where we can fully enjoy the benefits of His love.² He is not going to make you go to church. God is not going to set your alarm so you can get up and read His Word. He is not going to drive you to that Bible study.

Remember the prodigal son Jesus spoke about in Luke 15? That prodigal’s father never ceased loving that boy, but his son had removed himself from the sphere of his father’s love and ended up in the pigpen.

This command matches so many other commands in the New Testament to make it a priority to stay in close fellowship with the Lord. Jude now describes three ways to do that.

First, it is done by “building yourselves up in your most holy faith” (verse 20). This pictures building yourself like you would build a house—on a solid foundation, which is “your holy faith.” “Faith” here refers to the body of truth, delivered to us in the Bible.

Second, we keep ourselves in His love “by praying in the Holy Spirit.” This refers to regular communion with God through prayer. There is nothing mystical or magical here. Praying in the Spirit is not some special practice. Genuine prayer is motivated by a real person, the indwelling Holy Spirit. Prayer is not mindlessly reciting something somebody else prayed or repeating something over and over again, as if God is suddenly impressed the thirtieth time around. Praying in the Spir-

it speaks of a personal relationship with God through honest, transparent conversation called “prayer.”

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Then Jude adds a third way to keep ourselves in the sphere of God’s love—in close fellowship with the Lord. We do it by “waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life” (verse 21). As believers we have already received God’s mercy. What Jude speaks of here is waiting for the culmination of God’s mercy at the return of Christ, our Lord.

In a larger sense, then, this is how we maintain a biblical priority for ourselves.

Finally, Jude gives us a third way to contend for the faith—to defend the gospel. We must maintain *a biblical concern for others*.

False teaching and apostasy are constant dangers. And we cannot abandon those who have been poisoned by it. We should try to reach them and help them.

In verses 22-23 Jude describes three different groups of people who are in danger and how we should reach out to them.

First, he says, “Have mercy on those who doubt.” Doubts have been created in the minds of these people by false teachers. Let us be merciful and patient with them.

Second, he writes in verse 23, “Save others by snatching them out of the fire.” This de-

scribes those who are acting on their doubts. They are giving serious thought to following some apostate deceiver into justifying some sinful action. Jude writes with urgency here. It is like their house is on fire, and we need to sound the alarm.

Third, Jude writes, “To others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.” This pictures those who are now committed to false teaching. They might even be the false teachers themselves. Do not ignore them. Show them mercy, but be very careful. Avoiding their stained garment simply means you do not want to get too close, lest they influence you as well.

Now you might get to the end of Jude and be so afraid of deception and false teachers and the battle for the truth that you might be tempted to just stay in bed.

Jude anticipates that, and he ends this letter with one of the greatest assurances of God’s sovereignty in our lives that you will find in all of Scripture.

*Now to him who is able to keep
you from stumbling and to present
you blameless before the presence
of his glory with great joy, to the
only God, our Savior, through
Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory,
majesty, dominion, and authority,
before all time and now and
forever. Amen. (verses 24-25)*

Wow! What a promise from God’s Word.

Are there any signs of spiritual dangers or apostasy in your church or community that you need to be aware of?

How often do you intentionally pray in the Holy Spirit, aligning your heart with God's will?

How does the reminder of Christ's return and His mercy shape your daily priorities and focus?

How can you show mercy to those caught in false teaching while remaining cautious to avoid being influenced by their wrong ideas?

How does the promise of God's ability to keep you from stumbling provide assurance as you contend for the faith and walk in truth?

¹Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary (Broadman & Holman, 2003), 481.

²R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude* (Augsburg Publishing House, 1966), 646.

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