

The Perverters of Truth

Jude 5-16

A man responded to an ad for a job at a zoo. He was troubled to find that they wanted someone to play the part of an ape. A lot of children were coming the next day, and the zoo, having no apes, needed someone to impersonate one. Money was tight, so he took the gig. He arrived early, got into his outfit, and slipped into his cage. When the children came, all he had to do was pace the floor, look adept at swinging between trees, and eat the peanuts and bananas whenever they were fed to him.

After several hours, he was thoroughly exhausted, and the bananas were getting the better of him. As he swung from one tree to another, he slipped and fell into the lion's den next door.

He shouted, "Help! Help!"

The lion leaned over and said, "If you don't shut up, we'll both get fired."

Appearances can be deceiving, sometimes dangerously so. This is why Jude wrote the brief letter that bears his name. Certain men were posing as Christian brothers, but they were teaching a deadly lie that twisted God's grace into a license to sin. The more a man sinned, they argued, the more grace is operative and the better God looks. They relished in their sins and were persuading others to do the same. But, God hates sin and He judges it. His grace is not intended to make anyone feel safe about sinning with abandon, so Jude wrote to remind his readers of this.

⁵Though you already know all this, I want to remind you ...

"In a sense it is true to say that all preaching within the Christian church is not so much bringing to men new truth as confronting them with truth they already know, but have forgotten or have disregarded." - William Barclay

Jude conceded that he had nothing novel to share. "The faith" had been entrusted to the saints once for all, and in spite of what the false teachers of the moment were saying, his readers knew that God did not want anyone to feel safe in sinning. Still, as Jude surveyed the religious landscape of his day, he questioned if God's people remembered all that they had been taught. And, it is not far-fetched today for us to question whether many professed Christians remember (or ever really believed) what the Bible has already said about the sins with which they struggle.

Researchers say that incidents of adultery, criminal behavior, substance abuse, pornographic addiction and other things once considered sin are virtually indistinguishable between Christians and unbelievers. Something has caused the church to become tolerant not only of the sinner, but also of his sins. We live in an era characterized by twisted interpretations of grace and idiotic distortions of "judge not!" that have effectively rendered many churches a haven for sin.

Now, conservative evangelicals are shocked at the inroads that homosexual activists have made into some liberal denominations, but have we always exercised due diligence to speak to the sins of our own communities that we consider less objectionable such as materialism, selfishness, indifference to the poor and the lost or the stubborn insistence on our own way. Ultimately, our own expressions of self-centeredness are rejections of "the faith" entrusted to us. If we don't resist self-will in our selves, how effectively can we police it in the lives of others?

Jude calls us "to contend for the faith." Before we turn our attention too aggressively to the lies perpetrated by those who only claim to represent Christ, may we understand clearly that our first responsibility in defending the faith is to be very sure that we believe it ourselves ... and live it.

I. The Lessons of History (5-7)

⁵Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. ⁶And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home – these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. ⁷In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

A. God Judges Sin

Jude's readers already knew this, but they seemed to have forgotten it. God had dealt severely with sin and rebellion in the past and He had not changed any of His positions on those matters.

God delivered the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt with a great deliverance. He provided them food from heaven. Nevertheless, when it came time to claim the promise for a land of their own, they did not trust Him. Spies were sent into Canaan. Only Joshua and Caleb believed that God would give them victory. The others were terrified at the inhabitants that were already there, and the nation sided with them. Every Israelite over the age of twenty perished on the desert floor except the two men who trusted God. God despises the sin of unbelief.

Jude's second example of God's judgment is strange to us, because he cites *Enoch*, a book of Jewish legend. Jude describes certain angels awaiting judgment for rebelling against their assigned roles and leaving their appointed realm of abode. There is a strange passage in Genesis 6 that tells of "the sons of God" intermarrying with the "daughters of men" igniting a slide into human decadence that eventually prompted the great flood in Noah's day. Based on other biblical teachings about angels, most scholars do not believe these "sons of God" were angels, but descendants from the godly line of Seth. Whether or not Jude believed these were angels, he cites a legend that says they were. This becomes clear with the next example of judgment.

"In a similar way" meaning, a very similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah were judged because of "sexual immorality and perversion" which means, "lusting after different flesh." In other words, just as legend claims that angels lusted after human women, the people of Sodom lusted after the flesh of the heavenly visitors that came to Sodom to warn Lot, Abraham's nephew, to get out of town.

Essentially Jude is saying, "I don't have to remind you that God hates unbelief, rebellion and sexual deviancy. You know that He judges such things severely. Now, remember to believe it!" No matter how the false teachers sanitized, justified or otherwise spun their sins, they remained sin. In some Christian circles today, there are some who try to explain away the sinfulness of sin. That's not what "the faith" entrusted to us teaches. Don't be swayed by sophisticated new arguments for ancient issues. Don't be shamed into questioning what you already know is true.

B. Remember Why God Judged Sin in Christ

The heretics argued that grace gave a man *carte blanche* to sin. "The more you sin, the more magnanimous God looks when He forgives you," they claimed. The truth about grace is that God provided a way to break sin's hold on you. All human sin was heaped upon one innocent Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus bore the judgment due us all:

... ²¹God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. – 2 Corinthians 5:21

If we surrender our sin to Jesus, His grace is operative. By the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, we are empowered to pull away from the old man of sin and from old habits. But, if we treat this whole transaction as some sort of insurance that only buffers us from the consequences of the sins in which we gleefully continue to indulge, we have missed the point of why Christ died. Such grace is not operative, because it's not grace at all, but a fantasy. Grace, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, secured our freedom from sin and the power to say "No!"

²⁶If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, ²⁷but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. – Hebrews 10:26, 27

The spirit of the age tells us to judge no behavior. Mind your own business. Live and let live. The Word of God and the lessons of history tell us that God judges wickedness. Jude is not calling God's people to rail against the culture. It calls us to keep the culture out of the household of God. It calls us to recognize and to confront professed brothers who would pollute the church.

II. The Lewdness of Heresy (8-16)

In his introductory comments, Jude said that he had desired to write something about salvation, but the Holy Spirit did not need Jude's take on that theme. He needed this "sanctified diatribe" against those who pollute Christian fellowship. We struggle to grasp the place of anger in the Christian life. We are too often angry at the wrong things and indifferent when we ought to be mad. Jude cites legends and strange sources. His is a hard and unpleasant letter. But, one thing is abundantly clear. Jude reflects the passionate anger of a shepherd of God's people against those who would do his loved ones harm, and it doesn't hurt us a bit to be exposed to that.

A. Jude's Blistering Invective against these False Teachers

- against their malevolent behaviors verses 8-10

⁸In the very same way, these dreamers pollute their own bodies, reject authority and slander celestial beings. ⁹But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" ¹⁰Yet these men speak abusively against whatever they do not understand; and what things they do understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals – these are the very things that destroy them.

Jude calls them "dreamers." Their wishful take on a grace that winks at sin just doesn't work. They "pollute their bodies" just like the Sodomites of old. They "reject authority." So arrogant were they in their twisted understanding of grace that no appeal to Scripture or to the lessons of the past and no mandate by church or civil authorities could restrain them.

Jude does not specify how these men slandered celestial beings. Perhaps, in their arrogance, they simply denied any angelic or demonic influence over human affairs. Again, Jude draws from tradition to make his case. The Bible tells us that when Moses died, no one ever knew where the LORD buried him. Legend added that Michael was placed in charge of tending to the body. Satan imagined that he had some claim over the remains and challenged Michael. Still, Michael, who was clearly on God's side, surrendered any judgment of the devil to God. Jude's argument is that if Michael would not overstep in regard to a fellow-spiritual being, how reckless is it for men to pop off about matters of which they know nothing? In spite of their pseudo-spiritual eloquence, like beasts, the false teachers were simply driven by carnal lusts that would eventually destroy them.

- against their motivations verse 11

¹¹Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion.

False teachers don't wear T-shirts identifying themselves as such. They typically claim that they come to help their less-enlightened brothers. Jude insisted that their motives are not so pristine.

Cain, son of Adam, who murdered his brother when Abel pleased God with a better offering than he brought, became a prototype in Jewish thought for the irreverent and self-willed enemy of the truly righteous. In spite of all claims to the contrary, deceivers hate truth and authentic goodness.

Balaam was a prototype for a greedy religionist. He was the prophet who, for a price, consented to put a curse on Israel. By miraculous means, God kept that from happening, but later, he was a ringleader in leading Israel into idolatry. False teachers are motivated by what they can gain.

Korah led a group of 250 other malcontents to challenge the authority of Moses and Aaron. The earth opened and swallowed Korah and his followers. False teachers covet the honor due the true apostles and prophets of the early church. They resent God-ordained authority over their lives.

- against their misleading presence verses 12-15

¹²These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm – shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted – twice dead. ¹³They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.

¹⁴Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones ¹⁵to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him."

Hang in there a wee bit longer, listener. Jude is worked up, but he is winding down. He throws everything he can think of at the deceivers. Had there been modern kitchens in his day, he would have thrown the proverbial "kitchen sink" as well. "They are the slimy residue in the strainer ..."

Translators disagree as to whether one word should be translated "blemishes" or "hidden rocks" but one of those is what they were at the church's "love feasts." These were typically "carry-in" dinners, in the midst of which, the fellowship observed the Lord's Supper. Whether Jude intended to describe the deceivers as "perils to" or "stains on" the church, neither image is flattering. They were just there to benefit themselves. They lacked authentic shepherd hearts.

Two metaphors, "clouds without rain" and "autumn trees" both alluded to the empty promise of following these men. There was nothing there – no fruit, no refreshment, no nuthin' – just death.

The "shame" foamed up by the sea refers to the debris that is left after a storm. A "wandering star" was how the ancients described anything in the skies that did not have a fixed position - planets, comets, meteors. How can anyone navigate by a star that is all over the place?

The Old Testament Enoch walked with God and was taken up to heaven. Hebrews adds that this was because of his faith. Now, Jude cites the book of *Enoch* that identifies him as a preacher of righteousness who announced the judgment of God on men such as these.

Jude was heated, but only with a passion that the Holy Spirit wants us to understand if we are to seriously expose error and protect God's people. Now, he takes a breath and summarizes.

B. Jude's Bottom-line Observation of these False Teachers verse 16

... ¹⁶These men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.

This is what it's really boiled down to: To embrace "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" is to find the promises in Jesus worthy of dying to self. Those who are not content with their place in life or repentant over their sins will inevitably find some religious system, even if it is just secularism, that will feed their egos and accommodate the sin they cherish. That's all there really was to these false teachers. Their egos craved a following. Their sinful appetites craved indulgence. Their petty ambitions rendered them utter phonies.

What Are We to Make of All This Today?

Jude is neither the sweetest nor the most fun book in the Bible, but in a culture that attacks anyone who stands up for truth, it has its place. The use of extra-biblical sources is confusing. Do we regard them as literal, or was Jude just using pictures his readers understood? The heresy Jude took on is not identical to any heresy we face today, so how can we utilize Jude? Without calling us to be obnoxious watchdogs, there are things to which Jude heightens our sensitivities.

My ears perk up when I overhear "expertise" about unseen spiritual realms that goes beyond what can be known from the Bible. People don't curse angels today. They love angels. But, have you noticed why people love angels? The spiritual realm is usually skewed to human advantage. Very little emphasis is given to the purposes or the glory of Him Who created the angels. I hear much more said about angels and what they can do for men than *CAN* be said with any certainty.

My ears perk up whenever "advanced thinkers" present new takes on ancient truths that have never been advanced by men of the past who were, frankly, more formidable scholars. This is how deviancy, sexual and otherwise, works its way into the church. "Scholars" so-called find unprecedented ways to interpret what always seemed to be rather to-the-point Bible passages.

My ears perk up when I hear one-theme preachers who talk only about the material advantages of faith and seldom of the paths of surrender, self-denial, suffering or of heaven's rewards.

My ears perk up when Christianity becomes too much about what every man is looking for in life and not enough about what every man needs, which is a remedy from God for his sins.

Jude was passionate about contending for the faith. The errors he confronted were sinister and overt. We are called to contend for the faith. At the very least, we can start by being discerning, at least processing and questioning things that are said allegedly in Jesus' Name, but that we have never read in the Bible or have ever heard advanced by the historical Christian faith.