

Study 13: Jude's Letter

Introduction

Jude's letter is one of warning and condemnation of the false teachers who had infiltrated the church, as well as encouragement to the Christians who were feeling neglected.

In Peter's letters, the problems had arisen from the outside. But in this case, the problems and the attacks were coming from the inside of the church. This rebuke of the false teachers is not particularly directed at them (they would hardly read it or take any notice of it), but rather to the Christians who were trying to be faithful in the face of error and subterfuge.

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Why might it be hard to resist the influence of false teachers within the congregation? What skills do we need to have to be able to effectively stand against them?

How can we protect ourselves from falling from such error?

Notes for study 13: Jude's Letter

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In Peter's letters, the problems had arisen from the outside. But in this case, the problems and the attacks were coming from the inside of the church. This rebuke of the false teachers is not particularly directed at them (they would hardly read it or take any notice of it), but rather to the Christians who were trying to be faithful in the face of error and subterfuge.

Introduction: The Important Things

From the introduction and conclusion, we can glean quite a lot of information about Peter's purpose in writing the letter, and the things that he regards as important.

The primary purpose of the letter was *encouragement* (1:5:12) in spite of the fact that they were *scattered* and felt as if they were *strangers on the world* (1:1:1). They must have felt forsaken by God because they *have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials* (1:1:6), although this would only be *for a little while* (1:1:6; 1:5:10). They could be assured that in contrast to their relatively short time of suffering, we have *an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade* (1:1:5). Like the suffering that we experience, *Jesus also suffered* (1:1:11). This was according to *the prophets* and *even angels longed to understand these things*, but it was reserved for us according to the foreknowledge of God (1:1:2; 11; 12). Just as God restored Jesus in the resurrection from the dead (1:1:3), so Jesus will *restore us*, and *make us strong, firm and steadfast* (1:5:10) so that we are no longer *strangers in the world* (1:1:1) but *chosen* (1:5:13) by *obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkled of His blood* (1:1:2) to *the new birth into a living hope* (1:1:3).

The Salutation

The letter begins with Jude giving a salutation to the brethren "...who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ..." (1:1 NKJV).

Jude has a connection with the brethren, which comes out in 1:3 "...Dear friends ... about the salvation we share..." and 1:20 "...dear friends, build yourselves up...". People have some sort of connection with their friends, and some sort of common interest. It might be a common past (such as our school friends), common hobbies, common sports, or common work situations. In this case, the glue that binds Jude to these brethren is their *common salvation*, and their love for God.

They had been *called* which is a term almost synonymous with *christian*. That is, that Christians are "*the called*" (Romans 8:28) because "*they have obeyed from the heart that form of teaching that was delivered unto them*" (Rom 6:17). God's call goes out to everyone, everywhere, "*for God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*" (2 Pet 3:9), but it is up to us to make the *choice* to obey Him. When we do, then we are numbered amongst *the called*. He also uses the term *sanctified* which means "set apart", or "made holy". We are sanctified – *set apart as God's people* – by God the Father. We are different to the world and we should live our lives in recognition of that fact.

We are *kept* (NIV) / *preserved* (NKJV) in Jesus Christ, which has the idea that He causes us to stand firm in the gospel, and (in the context of the epistle) rejecting the false teaching. At the end of the letter, Jude uses the same word "...*keep yourselves in the love of God...*" (1:21 NKJV), which shows that the action of remaining in God's protection is not one that relies solely in the domain of God. Rather, it requires action on our behalf. God provides the *means* of salvation (the blood of Jesus), but it is up to us to accept it, and to continue faithfully.

The Doxology

This is a fancy word for a short word of praise to God “...*Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance...*” (1:2 NIV).

Perhaps his reference to these three words is a way of showing facets of God's grace to humankind. All three describe what God does for us. "Mercy" is his compassion, "peace" is his gift of quiet confidence in the work of Jesus, and "love" is his generosity in granting us his favors and meeting our needs. (NIVBC)

The Two Letters

Jude intended to write a longer letter, however due to the urgency of the situation with the false teachers, he wrote one of the shortest letters of the New Testament. The letter he (apparently) didn't write was most likely a letter of encouragement. “...*Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.*”⁴ *For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord...*” (1:3-4 NIV).

Green¹ writes:

Jude never intended to write this letter! Proposing to *write* (does the present infinitive *graphein* suggest ‘in a leisurely style’?) about *the salvation we share* he was driven to snatch up his pen (aorist infinitive *grapsai*) by the news of a dangerous heresy. Instead of a pastoral letter, he found himself writing a broadsheet. The phrasing here suggests it was a somewhat unwelcome task, but *I felt I had to write...*

Jude makes a comment about “the faith”. The term describes a system of faith (religion), rather than our individual (personal) faith. There are some things that we must observe about Jude's statement:

1. It was “**The** faith” and he uses the definite article to espouse it as specific. It was not one-of-many faiths, but a singular and unique religion. The gospel of Christ is unique amongst the religions of the world. It stands alone, and it stands on the claims of Christ as being the only genuine religion. Jesus said “...*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father except through me...*” (Jn 14:6), and by that one statement He made every other religion invalid.
2. It was **delivered** (entrusted), and Jude describes it in the past tense. The gospel was foreshadowed in the Old Testament, and began to be delivered in the teachings of Jesus (Mk 1:1). The good news (the gospel) was then spread throughout the then known world in the first century, beginning from Jerusalem, and in accordance with the commandment of Jesus (Acts 1:8). With Jude being written around the same time as 2nd Peter, it was at the end of both Peter and Paul's life (AD 68) and the task of taking the gospel to the world had been completed (which is not to say that the task does not need to continue to the lost, but rather that it had been taken to the four corners of the then known world).
3. It was **once for all** (time) delivered. The gospel is complete, and it does not need an on-going revelation. God has given to us, *everything that we need for life and godliness* (2 Pet 1:3). The miraculous spiritual gifts of the first century were partial (1 Cor 13:12), and were only able to give a part of God's revelation. But when the New Testament was written, with it came God's complete and perfect revelation (2 Tim 3:16-17). Whilst there are things that we *desire* to know, God has revealed to us everything that we *need* to know, and we need to *reason out* the things that God has said in His *revelation*. It is often not 1 + 1 = 2; but rather that there is sufficient evidence for us to draw a conclusion beyond reasonable doubt.

¹ Green, Michael “Tyndale New Testament Commentaries; 2 Peter and Jude” ISBN 0-8028-0078-5 p. 170

4. It has been **entrusted** to the saints, and our task is to take it to the lost in the world. God's work of reconciliation is complete through Jesus, and He is now seated at God's right hand (Heb 10:12-14). The apostles have taken Jesus' teaching, written down for us, and established God's church. Their work is also complete, and the task left for us is to take the gospel to the lost, wherever they are in the world.
5. We need to **contend earnestly** for it. We cannot sit back and do nothing. We need to work at our own salvation (Php 2:12), and we need to work at sharing the gospel with others (Mt 28:18-20).

The Present Situation

The urgency of the situation was caused by the false teachers who had "*...crept in unnoticed...*" (1:4). Jude introduces the situation and aptly describes their methods – they had deliberately come into the church through subterfuge. Their motives were impure "*...ungodly men...denying the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ...*" and they must have had sexually perverted tendencies "*...turned the grace of our God into licentiousness...*".

Jude reminds his readers to look back at history, to see how God dealt with those who sinned in past generations "*...But I want to remind you, though you once knew this...*" (1:5 NKJV). He then gives three examples of the Lord's judgement on unbelievers:

The disobedient in the wilderness wandered around for 40 years because they did not trust and obey God, even though He had brought them out of Egypt "*...the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe...*" (1:5 NKJV). Although they had seen the miracles that resulted in their release, had partaken of the Passover feast on the evening before they left, had been protected by God when the Egyptians tried to follow them, and had escaped miraculously through the Red Sea, yet they still rebelled. They rebelled again when they had no water, but God provided a rock of living water, they rebelled again when they had no food, but God provided quails and manna. They rebelled even though they saw the pillar of smoke by day and the pillar of fire by night. And they rebelled when Moses was on Mt Sinai receiving the Law for 40 days. Finally, they rebelled when God said to go and take the land, but they didn't trust Him. As a result, only two of the adults over 20 years old who left Egypt were allowed to go in and possess the land. (It's a fascinating story – it's in Numbers chapter 14).

The angels who did not keep their domain were sent to *tartarus* (although here he describes it as "darkness"). We discussed this at 2nd Peter 2:4. Some people relate the incident of the angels to Gen 6:4, and conclude that the angels left their proper place and came and mingled with women (the implication is sexually). The pseudepigraphical book of Enoch, from which Jude quotes in v. 14 espouses this interpretation. We must remember that just because Jude quotes from the book does not validate it as "scripture" any more than Paul quoting from the Greek poets (Acts 17:28) validates their writings as inspired! It was simply recognition of accepted literature of the time. Whatever else we might say about this, we can note that there was belief and recognition in the first century of the facts that Jude presents. We must also note that Jude wrote by inspiration, and therefore the facts that he reports must be true – the angels *had* left their proper domain, and God regarded it as sin!

Sodom and Gomorrah gave themselves over to sexual immorality, and God made an example of them. Their sin was predominantly the practice of homosexuality, which Jude describes as people who had "*...gone after strange flesh...*" (1:7 NKJV) or "*...sexual immorality and perversion...*" (1:7 NIV). Although some people today might regard it as an "alternate lifestyle", Paul said it is against nature (Rom 1:26). So, God regards it as unnatural, strange, and perverted. If man thinks differently, then he puts himself in opposition to God, just as those in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah did. Jude reminds us not to forget what God thinks about such behaviour, and how He demonstrated His disapproval of it.

The false teachers have similar characteristics to those of the past “...likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries...” (1:8 NKJV), and they will receive a similar judgement from God.

Jude presents a line of argument that is illustrated from Jewish apocryphal literature to make the point that God is the one who has all power. “...But 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!”...” (1:9 NIV). The false teachers were apparently denying the authority of Christ, and must have been claiming some sort of self-appointed authority.

The false teachers should have learned from the example of the powerful archangel Michael (see Rev 12:7; cf. Da 10:13, 21; 12:1; 1Th 4:16). Jewish literature tells of a struggle over Moses' body. One writing in particular, the apocryphal Assumption of Moses, refers to the devil claiming the right to Moses' body because of his sin of murder (Ex 2:12) or because he (the devil) considered himself the lord of the earth. Yet in spite of Michael's power and dignity, he dared not bring a "slanderous accusation" against the devil but referred the dispute to the sovereignty of God. So if he, a mighty archangel, had respect for celestial powers, Jude says, how much more should the mere human false teachers do so! (NIVBC)

In contrast to the respect that Michael had for God's authority, the false teachers “...speak abusively against whatever they do not understand...” (1:10 NIV). They are trying to display their knowledge, but in reality they are just displaying their ignorance. In fact, their so-called “knowledge” is only that which can be obtained at a basic level “...what things they do understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals--these are the very things that destroy them...” (1:10 NIV). Jude gives us another hint here that Gnosticism is behind the false teaching, and the claims that they were making of “knowledge bringing enlightenment” was totally false! In fact, they had no real knowledge of the true and living God, and therefore they would be destroyed because of their “lack of knowledge”.

Jude pronounces condemnation on them “...Woe to them...” (1:11) and cites another three example to support what he says:

They have gone the way of Cain who ignored God's commands and offered his “own religion” to God. It was done on the basis of works, not by faith (Heb 11:4), and he then murdered his brother because his own motives were evil, whilst Abel's were based on faith and obedience to God's commands (1 Jn 3:12).

They have followed the error of Balaam for profit. He was greedy, and led God's people into disobedience and immorality. Jude parallels 2 Pet 2:15-16 with the example of Balaam.

They have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion. Korah and others rebelled against Moses and Aaron (Num 16:1-35), and God's wrath was displayed, killing them and the 250 people that supported them. Korah rebelled, but was overthrown – not by Moses, but by the Lord. The same fate awaits these false teachers.

Jude's condemnation of these people doesn't end there – in fact he piles rebuke upon rebuke, six in all. “...These 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. ¹³ They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever...” (1:12-13 NIV).

They are spots (blemishes) in your love feasts, which shows their defiled condition and contrasts with the purity that they ought to have. They are “hidden reefs” (“spots / blemishes”) which lie hidden ready to make shipwreck those innocent people who stumble over them. Love feasts – literally *agape* feasts – were a time that the early church came together, most likely referring to partaking the Lord's Supper. Some have drawn a connection between the abuse of the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor 11 and Jude 12, concluding that the church came together for a

“fellowship meal”. However, this is not a necessary conclusion. Paul criticised the Corinthian church for turning the Lord’s Supper into a common meal. Jude describes something that the early church did as a “love feast”, but he doesn’t tell us what it is. When we partake of the Lord’s Supper, we remember with love (*agape* love) the sacrifice of Christ, and His love (*agape* love) for us. The Lord’s Supper then, better than anything else in portrayed scripture, could be described as a “love feast”.

A contrary view is given by the much respected scholar Everett Ferguson² who provides much evidence that partaking of a common meal together was a common practice of the early christians. He says, inter-alia:

The Greek word for love, *agape*, was used by Christians in reference to certain of their religious meals together. Thus one specialized meaning for *agape* was “love feast,” the shared meal which was an expression of and proof of brotherly feeling and mutual concern. ... As they were separated in time, and perhaps in location, the love feast continued to be an important social and religious function of the Christian community. ... The love feasts were clearly church activities, ... it was a “church dinner,” although held in a private home...

We must remember that the secular writings (as cited by Ferguson) might help us understand the *practices* of the early church, they do not provide the *authority* for them any more than they provide authority for a clergy-laity system. [In fact, the passages and writers cited by Ferguson discuss the roles of the “clergy”]. We need to establish our *authority* from the scriptures, and from them alone. What we can observe, is how the christians in the first and second century understood the application of what the New Testament says.

The point that Jude makes is that these false teachers are blemishes and hidden reefs waiting to trip us up in our worship as we partake of the “love feast”, and *they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves*.

They are shepherds who feed only themselves. There are numerous examples of false shepherds (Jn 10:12-13), who draw away disciples after them (Acts 20:30). They are not motivated by serving God, but by serving themselves for dishonest gain (1 Pet 5:2).

They are clouds without water who promise everything, but deliver nothing. Jude again mirrors what Peter has said in 2 Pet 2:17.

They are autumn trees without fruit. Long after the (summer) time for the harvest has gone, they still haven’t delivered anything. Not only have they not provided any fruit, they have no root – there is no substance to them at all – it is impossible for them to provide anything. The gardener will come along and tear the tree up at the root, which Jude describes at “twice dead” – once because they failed to provide fruit, and then again they will be permanently torn up. The same thing will happen to the false teachers. Not only do they have nothing to contribute (“once dead”) they will face the righteous judgement of God and be dealt with permanently and justly (“twice dead”).

They are raging waves from the sea who are wild and restless. The foam on the sea shore leaves a grimy residue, and spoils a picturesque beach. The aggression of the waves also erodes away the shore. In the same way, the false teachers erode away the faith of the brethren and leave behind only an nasty and unpleasant residue.

They are like wandering stars in a sky full of blackness. In ancient times, people used the stars to navigate. They were able to predict with great accuracy where the stars would be in the sky, and could therefore find where they were on the land. But stars that were unpredictable and wandered around the sky were totally useless for navigation. They might as well disappear into the blackness of space. In the same way, the false teachers have a place reserved for them – in the blackness of darkness (away from the light of God) forever.

² Ferguson, Everett “Early Christians Speak – Faith and Life in the First Three Centuries” ACU Press, ISBN 0-89112-045-9 pp 125-132

Prophecy of the Coming Judgement

“...Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousand of His saints, to execute judgement on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him”... ” (1:14-15 NKJV).

“...Enoch walked with God, and He was not, for God took him...” (Gen 5:24). In the genealogies he is listed seventh (including Adam). The prophecy that Jude records is not given in the Old Testament, but is commonly recognised as being quoted from the apocalyptic writing of First Enoch. This book is not regarded as canonical (a part of scripture), and in fact is pseudepigraphical (the writer claims to be someone he is not). We should note that Jude does not call the quote as coming from scripture. The readers clearly understood the source of the quote, and it does not provide a startling revelation, but simply a statement and example of how the Lord will return in judgement.

Jude emphasises the point that he is making by repeating two words – “all” and “ungodly” four times. The condemnation is complete – it applies to “all” of the false teachers, and they are fully engrossed in their practice and doctrine. All who are *ungodly*; their *ungodly* deeds; their *ungodly* practices; they are *ungodly* sinners.

The final condemnation is made to their practices “...*These are murmurers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage...*” (1:16 NKJV). Clearly, they would try to influence people by their cunning speech, whilst complaining about and murmuring against those who opposed them. “...*These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit...*” (1:18 NKJV).

Contrast to the True Believers

In contrast to the false teachers, the Christians were exhorted to remember the true doctrines they had been taught, and the prophecies concerning these people. “...*But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. ¹⁸ They said to you, “In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires.”...*” (1:17-18 NIV). Jude again parallels 2nd Peter (2 Pet 1:12-15; 2nd Pet 3:2-3) and reminds the brethren of the predictions of the apostles (of whom Peter was one).

Rather than the destructive action of the false teachers, the brethren needed to strengthen themselves. Jude gives them four areas of instruction “...*But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. ²¹ Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life...*” (1:20-21 NIV).

Build yourselves up is an instruction for them to grow in the faith. *Your most holy faith* is a description of the truth delivered by the apostles. We grow by having fellowship and sharing with their brethren and exhorting one another to continue on the faith.

Pray in the Holy Spirit is an exhortation to pray according to the Spirit’s will. The Holy Spirit abides in all Christians (Acts 2:38-39), and we need to understand what God wants from us, and seek to do it. Of course, God’s will is only revealed through scripture, which was given by inspiration through the action of the Spirit to the apostles and prophets (God’s revealed will). But we also need to understand God’s un-revealed will, and allow God to lead us through His providence. An example in the scriptures is how God used Ruth to bring about His purpose.

Keep yourselves on God’s love is an exhortation to faithfulness. His love is fully revealed in Jesus, and to reject Christ and His commands is to reject God and His love.

Look for God’s mercy is an instruction for us to focus our attention on Christ’s return, and the eternal life which follows. We do not deserve the reward, and because of our sins we actually deserve to be punished. But God shows mercy towards us, and does not inflict the punishment that we deserve. Instead, that punishment was born by Jesus on the cross.

Dealing with the Situation

Jude gives instruction (with very pastoral leanings) about dealing with the situation. He has already condemned the false teachers, but what about those who are influenced by them? Three groups are mentioned in the NIV, whilst the NKJV only mentions two. “...*Be merciful to those who doubt; ²³ snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear--hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh...*” (1:22-23 NIV).

Those who doubt are caught in the middle between the sweet-talk of the false teachers and the truth practised by the faithful brethren. Rather than condemning them, they need to be shown mercy. This follows on directly from the previous instruction of looking for God’s mercy ourselves. We are all caught in sin, and we all deserve condemnation. It is only because of God’s mercy that we escape the punishment of eternal death. In like manner, we must show mercy to others.

Others need to be snatched from the fire which is a description of those who have good hearts but have been swept away with the false teaching. The picture is of rescuing someone who has slipped into a fire and needs to be dragged out.

Others are stained by the corruption and deserve mercy. They might not have actually been involved in the corruption, but have been tainted with the reputation of the false teachers. These people also deserve mercy, and the association with the false teachers needs to be regarded as one would regard contaminated and defiled clothing.

The Benediction

Jude closes with a benediction that reminds us that in the face of our trials, God is all powerful “...*To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy-- ²⁵ to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen...*” (1:24-25 NIV).