

## Identifying Apostates

<sup>4</sup> For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>5</sup> But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.

<sup>6</sup> And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day;

<sup>7</sup> as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. (Jude 1:4-7)

One of my professors from seminary said that he had chosen not to fly on airplanes anymore, until the TSA stopped using body-scanners and pat-downs. He felt this had become intrusive to human dignity and modesty, and he may well be right. These scanners at the airports can now see through your clothes, see what in your pockets, scan you for any potential object you might have. And supposedly these scans will prevent terrorists from getting on board a plane.

I began imagining a fantasy device for scanning for spiritual terrorists, which you could place at the entrance of a church. If the man was a false teacher, one good scan would set off the alarm, and he'd be caught before he entered. Unfortunately, there's no such device.

But the book of Jude is something like such a device. It tells us on the one hand how to spot false teachers, and on the other it promises that God Himself will catch all of them, in the end.

Jude wants to help us to contend earnestly for the faith. Through most of this epistle, he does this in two ways: he helps us identify these false teachers, and he tells us of the judgement of false teachers. If you are serious about guarding the faith, and opposing error, then you want to know what error looks like, and you want to know that God is in control, He is going to judge, he is going to separate the good from the evil, and bring justice.

All at once, we see responsibility and sovereignty. It is my role to identify false teachers and mark them, but it is God's role to decide their eternal fate. I must oppose their teaching, but God will give them what they deserve, for leading so many astray.

In verses 4 through 7, we have just that. Jude identifies the actions and the fate of the false teachers for us, and then he illustrates the actions and the fate of the false teachers with three Old Testament incidents. Each of those incidents tells us about the character and actions of the false teachers, and tells us about God's response to them.

### I. The Identity of the False Teachers

<sup>4</sup> For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ. (Jude 1:4)

Now we saw last week that these men creep in to the church. What that means is that these people have a special designation: they are apostates. An apostate is different from a regular unbeliever, or an infidel. An infidel makes no profession of faith in Jesus Christ. He is simply a non-Christian. But an apostate is one who claims Christianity, who claims to be in the faith, in the church, in Christ but then denies it and undermines it. He wants to be recognised as a Christian teacher, even while undermining the Gospel.

Jude says that such men were long ago marked out for this condemnation. That literally means, it was written beforehand. Now, does this mean that these men were predestined to be false teachers, and they had no say in the matter? No. What was ordained before was the judgement, the punishment that comes to those who choose this path.

Now Jude gets to the real description of their character and teachings.

First, he says they are **irreverent**. He calls them ungodly. He is going to use this word six times in this short epistle, so it is central to how we should understand an apostate, a false teacher. You may have heard that word ungodly so many times that you quickly associate it with being sinful. And that would be partly correct. But more to the heart of what is meant here is the idea of being godless in consciousness. It is the idea of someone that has no fear of God, no reverence towards God. He does not fear judgement, he is not afraid of Hell, he does not tremble before God's holiness. He is irreligious, impious. This man is irreverent.

It's unfortunate today that in our modern culture, the more casual and informal a man is in the pulpit, the more people think he is real, transparent, and trustworthy, and the more reverent, rehearsed or careful he is, the more they suspect him of being unreal, inauthentic. So in former ages, the man with no respect for God would have been easily spotted with his casual and familiar ways in which he speaks about God, his cockiness in the pulpit, his egotism. But today, such men become evangelical celebrities, followed by thousands, and praised for being so real, so transparent. I agree that a hypocrite can hide behind being formal. The problem there is not the formality, but the man's heart. We have a greater problem today when a man is casual, familiar, and downright irreverent in the pulpit, and no one sees a problem. No one sees it as irreligious, irreverent, ungodly.

The second mark of the false teacher or the apostate is that he is **impure**. He turns the grace of our God into lewdness. He alters, or transforms God's grace – which refers to salvation – into a message that promotes or encourages lewdness. The word for lewdness is a word that refers to particularly moral sins of the body, immorality, gluttony, sensuality. This false teacher promotes a debauched, indecent, shameless life.

Grace, by definition is free, and sets us free. But what false teachers do is take the freeness of grace, and the freedom grace brings, and they twist that message into freedom to sin. We see the New Testament alert to these perversions in several places.

**Rom 6:1** *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?*

**Gal 5:13** *For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.*

**1Pe 2:16** *as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.*

**Tit 2:11** *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age,*

Very early in church history, false teachers appeared, saying that the body was evil, and the spirit was good, and that God was in the business of saving the spirit, not the body. So, in their twisted doctrine, it didn't matter what you did with the body, because God didn't care, and your soul was saved no matter what.

Now we are not battling Gnosticism in our day. But we can easily spot the teaching where the the grace of God is being turned into lewdness in our day.

The clearest is the Prosperity Gospel. I hate to even use the word Gospel, because Gospel means *good news*, and the prosperity gospel is not good news, since it is a lie that condemns. This is the teaching that Christ came to enable us to live in health and wealth, and that it is the birthright of a King's Kid to confess by faith the reality that you want to have. You bind and rebuke Satan, and then you speak out the reality to wish to bring to be, the house you want, the car you want, the money you want. You make sure you never speak death or curse or negatively over yourself or your loved ones. This bears only a vague relationship to the central message of the Bible, which is Christ coming to save us from sin and rebellion, giving us new life, new hearts, enabled to live new lives pleasing to Him. This message panders to the unregenerate man's lust for money and comfort, and turns Christ and His cross into a means to indulge in my wildest wealth fantasies. Why? Because I remain enslaved to the lusts of the flesh, to the things of this world.

Just this week, I read an article entitled, "Which televangelist has the best Ferrari?" And I'm not saying those men are apostate for having Ferraris. But can you imagine Paul or Peter deciding between a Ferrari and Lamborghini?

And here is what you will always find alongside the Prosperity Gospel – its preachers are nearly always on their second, third, fourth marriages. Why? Because sensuality is all of a piece. Lust for luxury, lust for extravagance, and sexual sins are sure to be there too.

Jude has one more description of these false teachers. He says they are **insubordinate**. They deny our only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ. This may mean that they actually deny fundamental truth about God, denying the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the humanity of Christ, the resurrection. But there is another way you can deny God, and that is through your works.

**Tit 1:15** To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.

You deny God when you live in rebellion to His authority. In fact, the word for Lord here is *despotes*, meaning Master. You deny your Master when you live without respect to God's authority.

We see this in what is called the hyper-grace teaching. This is the teaching that once you are saved, you do not need to confess your sins, you don't need to repent. They say we only need the letters of Paul, none of the others, and that no matter what we do, we are saved and going to Heaven. They say we will never be convicted of our sins, we need only think about the Cross, and go forward. There is an old theological word for this: it's called antinomianism. It means being against any kind of law in the Christian life, whether it is the law of Christ, or the principles of the Mosaic law. This teaching is exactly what Peter wrote of in

**2 Peter 2:19** While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. (2 Pet. 2:19)

We're seeing this spread as all kinds of sins formerly recognised as sins are now considered fine.

We are free in Christ, but not free to please ourselves. We are free to do what we were made for: to love and glorify our God. This teaching will only destroy those who believe it.

Why is it that so many prominent teachers are indicted in scandals: adultery, tax evasion, embezzlement? Because they are impure within. They are brilliant communicators, attractive personalities, highly intelligent speakers, but they have no reverence, no purity, no submission.