

Jude – The Error of Appeasement

Jude 1:1 *Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ: ² Mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.*

³ *Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.*

⁴ *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 1:1-4)*

In the years leading up to World War 2, the British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain tried to avoid war by continually giving in to the demands of Adolph Hitler. He was famous for saying he believed it would be 'peace' in our time. But the more Germany was appeased, the more it wanted to take. It became clearer that the only appeasement Hitler would accept would be a total surrender. His opponent, Winston Churchill, bitterly opposed appeasement, and said about Chamberlain, "He was given a choice between war and dishonor. He chose dishonor and he will have war anyway." Churchill said this about appeasement: An appeaser is one who feeds the crocodile hoping it will eat him last.

In the church, we sometimes find a similar situation. We find threats to Christianity in the form of false teaching, false worship, false practices. As these threats grow, Christians can just hope these threats will go away, but that is the theory of the turtle. Like Hitler, false teachings and teachers do not go away by themselves. At some point, Christians have to be willing to fight, to defend, to contend for the faith.

That's what the small book of Jude is about. The book of Jude is the fourth shortest epistle in the New Testament, behind Philemon, and 2nd and 3rd John. It's a letter that came out of an urgency in the writer's heart. He wanted to write to help his readers to stop appeasing false teachers, and to begin manning the defences, and launching some counter-attacks.

Though there were particular threats in Jude's time which are different to ours, the dangers have not grown less since his time. With the Internet, false teaching and false teachers no longer have to show up in our churches. They can do their work during the week on screens, through earphones, in books.

Like never before, we need the Spirit-inspired truths of the book of Jude.

I. Jude's Exordium

Jude 1:1 *Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ: ² Mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.*

Today, when we write a letter, we begin by addressing the person we are writing to, and we end by signing our name. In the first century, you began a letter with the author's name, and then wrote who you were writing to, and you typically added a short, polite greeting, like the Greek word *charein*.

The author identifies himself as Jude, which is the same name as Judas. Judas is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Judah. There are really only two contenders for who this author was. The first is the apostle Jude, or Judas, who is mentioned in Luke 6:16. Remember, of the twelve Jesus had two disciples named Judas: one was Judas Iscariot, and one was Judas the son of James. This obviously was not written by Judas Iscariot. The other Judas cannot be the author because here this Judas is said to be the brother of James, not the son of James.

That only leaves one other Judas, related to James. We read in Matthew 13:55 *"Is this not the*

carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? Jesus had several half-brothers and half-sisters through Mary. One of them was James, who became the pastor of the church at Jerusalem. Another was named Judas. It's he that is writing here, and identifies himself as the brother of James.

Why didn't he identify himself as 'the brother of our Lord'? The answer has to be: humility. Neither James, nor Jude, presume to use their physical relation to Christ as a boasting point. Since God can raise up sons of Abraham from stones, and since Jesus told a crowd that his true mother, brothers, and sisters are those who do the will of the Father, neither of these men use the fact that Jesus was their half-brother as some kind of qualification. Indeed, as Gentiles were now coming into the faith, they wanted to get away from the idea that ethnicity gave you spiritual standing with God. So Judah identifies himself as the brother of James, but as a bondservant, a *doulos*, of Jesus Christ. Far from claiming some sort of special relationship to Christ, he describes himself in the lowest possible relationship to Christ – a slave, a purchased possession. There was a time in Jude's life when he rejected his half-brother, but at some point, probably shortly after the Resurrection, Jude came to faith. He turned from trusting in his own righteousness, leaning on tradition, and turned to the one, who according to his human nature, was his half-brother, but according to His divine nature, was His Creator, Lord, and Saviour.

He then names whom he is writing to. He is writing to those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ. This is not aimed at a particular church, such as the church at Corinth, or the church at Rome, and that's why Jude, along with the books of Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, and 1, 2, 3 John are called General epistles. All those who are called, set apart by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ are the recipients of this letter.

Those are three ways of referring to a true, born again believer. If you are a true Christian, then at some point, God called you to salvation. You heard the Gospel, and it felt like this message had your name on it. The Spirit was drawing you in. Once you believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, you were set apart, which is the meaning of sanctified. God took you out of the Devil's family, out of being used as a vessel for unrighteousness, and put you in His family, and reserved you for His use. And not only did God call you and set you apart, He preserves you as well. The word here means to guard, to keep, to protect. If God is going to pay such a high price to redeem you, He is not going to lose you, so in Jesus Christ, you are preserved. Both of those words *sanctified*, and *preserved* are in the passive perfect, which means this is something God has completed in the past, which has continuing effects into the present.

Jude lovingly wishes his readers a multiplying of mercy, peace, and love.

Now why do you think Jude has taken all this time to describe himself, and to describe his readers? Why didn't he just say, "Jude, to all Christians, greetings"?

The answer is that Jude is setting up the content of his letter. He has to say some hard things, and he wants them to know he is not lording it over them, but is serving them. But he wants his readers to know that there is a real difference between the people he is writing to, and the people he will be writing about. He is not writing to false teachers, to apostates. He is writing to true believers about false teachers. And in these first lines, he encourages them with the truth that if they are in Christ, they are kept in Jesus Christ, they are set apart, called. This is a theme which will come up again in this book:

But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit,²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. (Jude 1:20-21)

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, (Jude 1:24)

Jude will often refer his readers back to their position in Christ as their best defence against false teaching. In fact, Jude was so excited about salvation, so enthused about the Gospel, that it was his original intention to write a letter about the Gospel.

II. Jude's Exhortation

Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation,

I was very eager, giving all my energy to the project of writing to you about the salvation we share. Jude wanted to bless his readers with something like Paul's letter to the Ephesians – a rejoicing in the unsearchable riches of Christ. And who wouldn't want to do that? As a pastor, I identify with Jude. I would much prefer to encourage the saints with their position in Christ than talk about almost anything else. But sometimes the urgent has to intrude. Something interrupted Jude's plans, and caused him to change topic.

I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

That's our main verb of this section: it was necessary. “Needful it was for me”, instead of doing what I'd have preferred to so, I chose to write what was urgent. I chose to write to encourage and strongly urge you to do something. I would have enjoyed reviewing our treasured salvation, but there is an action needed from you, and I had to exhort you to do it.

What was this urgent exhortation? Jude wanted to exhort his readers to contend earnestly for the once-for-all-delivered-to-the-saints faith. Contend earnestly translates a word found only here in the Greek New Testament. It has athletic imagery in it, picturing an athlete straining. It has military imagery in it, picturing going to do battle. The idea is Christians must militantly defend and struggle on behalf of the faith.

Christians can find themselves swept up in the spirit of the age, which is pluralism, inclusivism, relativism. The world is happy for us to believe what we want, as long as we are not dogmatic, as long as we do not call other beliefs errors, call other religions false. But if Christians do that, they are hiding their lamp under a bushel, they are refusing to be salt.

Christianity is always just one generation away from extinction. All it takes is for one generation of Christians to not earnestly contend for the faith, not defend sound doctrine, not preach a true Gospel, and then Christianity will die with that generation. Christianity must be passed on. That's why Jude uses a very interesting set of words here to describe the faith. He calls it the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

That's really one phrase. It's a body of orthodoxy, orthopraxy, orthopathy, that was delivered by Christ and His apostles to the church, and has now been handed down. Once God had spoken through the apostles and prophets, and inspired all 66 books of the Bible, the once-for-all-delivered-to-the-saints- faith. Paul often enough speaks to Timothy and Titus about what he had entrusted to them, which they must now entrust to others. One of the marks of false teachers is that they claim to have special revelation, a special direct message from God, a prophecy not yet recorded in God's Word.

But the old saying is, “if it's new, it's not true, and if its true it's not new.”

Jude wants us to take the whole counsel of God represented by the 66 books of the Bible, and defend that, and teach that to others, who will teach others also.

This is the right sense in which to speak about tradition. When biblical teaching is handed down from one generation to another, it is a biblical tradition.

This is the sense in which we use the word *conservative*. When we say we are conservative Christians, it means we believe we are commanded to conserve the whole faith that was once delivered to the saints, and hand it down unedited, not adding or subtracting from it.

Once Christians begin innovating, adding unbiblical practices, or claiming that God's once-for-all-delivered-to-the-saints message is not complete because they have a new prophecy, and message from God, those Christians are not conserving the faith, not contending for the faith. They become part of the problem.

That leads us to Jude's explanation for his exhortation.

III. Jude's Explanation

⁴ *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.*

“For”= this is the reason we must earnestly contend. Certain men have crept in unnoticed. What did they creep into? They have crept into the church, into the fellowship of the saints. The words *crept in unnoticed* translate one Greek word which occurs only here in the New Testament. It means to enter secretly, to slip in unnoticed, to join a group unaware. Who was unaware here? Not the false teachers! They were fully aware of what they were doing! It was the church that was unaware, that was not vigilant where it should have been, awake, thoughtful, discerning. The church was not alert enough to see who and what had already entered in.

The church has a peculiar vulnerability. Christians are so conscious of the importance of brotherly love, so sensitive to not being unkind, ungodly, that they often find their love turning into sentimentality, which is where we no longer love, we start to love our love, we start to love feeling that we are nice people, we start to love feeling that we are welcoming rather than extending love and welcome thoughtfully, deliberately, intentionally. And so too many churches, for fear of being harsh, unkind, ungodly, or worse, fear of being thought unkind, unfriendly, unwelcoming, leave their front door wide open, and allow all and sundry to comfortably dwell.

Let me tell you of two ways the church leaves its front door wide open. The first is when the church does not practice any form of membership. You see, membership is not an attempt to create some elite group within the church. That would be the ultimate contradiction, since we have all been humbled at the foot of the Cross. But membership is precisely where we make sure that we are dealing with people who have been humbled at the foot of the Cross – that we are dealing with fellow-Christians. Membership is simply where we take what is mentioned in verse 3 – our common salvation, found in the doctrine once delivered to the saints, and we simply ask a person to tell us if he or she has believed that Gospel, testified of it in believers baptism, and desires to identify with this church.

When a church does not practice membership, and any and every person who attends on a Sunday is as much the church as anyone else, you have just extended an invitation for a wolf to come and ravage your church. You have just said to the very kind of men Jude was warning about, “come into our church, we won't vet you, we won't check you, we won't require anything. And by the time we

do, you will have already had your meal, licked your lips, while we scurry around trying to figure out what just happened. Just hang around and you're pretty much in.”

You see, the godly Christian who has not yet joined our church because of some matter of conscience, or some particular doctrine he is not persuaded of is not the problem here. He is as close as his conscience allows him, and I welcome him, and want him to be as involved as he can be. I want to help him with that area of doctrine he may be struggling with, and I place no deadline on his membership. The problem is the wolf, the false teacher. He is not holding back because of some matter of conscience. On the contrary, the wolf is seeking every possible avenue to draw closer, to come in, to gain a platform, to build a following, to discredit and divide. He wants to be on your prayer chain, and on the Facebook group, and the mailing list, and the ministry team. He wants to find out if membership is really just an administrative detail in your church, or if there really are shepherds guarding the flock.

And the problem is this: when you don't practise membership because you want the nice godly non-member to feel at home, and never feel excluded, you simultaneously allow in the wolf. So when the church collapses all those distinctions between member and non-member because it has adherents it loves dearly, it has said to the wolf, come into this pasture, and eat all you wish. There is no shepherd here. Because practically speaking, a church which acts that way, doesn't have a shepherd, or he is asleep, or he's a coward.

These men creep in unawares when the church leaves its front door wide open. It makes no distinctions, doesn't check or vet or ask for testimonies of salvation.

I'm like you. I don't want to exclude. I don't like good people feeling excluded. But this is not about arrogant exclusion. It is about protective exclusion. I am charged to guard the flock of God, and that means guarding the front door. You are charged to earnestly contend for the faith, and that means likewise guarding the front door, listening to the testimonies of salvation when we read them out at the Lord's Table.

The second way these false teachers creep in unnoticed is when they are publicly recognised as Christians, particularly in a global Christianity connected by mass media and the Internet. False teachers make their home in the church when enough Christians keep calling them “brother” or “sister”. False teachers make their home in the church when enough Christian TV or radio stations broadcast their teachings, when Christian publishing houses publish their books, when Christian conferences invite them onto their platforms to speak, when churches invite them into their pulpits to teach. Every time this happens, those who invite these false teachers say the following: even though your words, or your deeds deny the Gospel, we still affirm you as a Christian. The boundary of the faith envelops and includes you. You are one of us, and you, too, are going to Heaven.

J. Gresham Machen had a term for Christians who extend fellowship to false teachers. He called them *indifferentists*. They were indifferent to the denials of the faith these false teachers openly committed, and consequently, such Christians were making the Gospel itself a matter of indifference. If we are not willing to draw a boundary, and say, “this is the gospel, and those who profess it are in the faith, and those, who deny it are outside the faith”, if we are not willing to do that, then truly so many will creep in unawares.

Look at what John told us to do.

⁷ For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. ⁸ Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but

that we may receive a full reward. ⁹ Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰ If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; ¹¹ for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds. (2 Jn. 1:7-11)

What does this mean? It means if someone denies one of the doctrines that are crucial to the Gospel, such as the deity of Christ, the Trinity, the resurrection, the virgin birth, salvation by grace alone through faith alone, then we do not recognise that person as a Christian. Churches must not invite into their pulpit or to their conferences those who deny the Gospel. Churches must exercise caution in which authors they recommend from the pulpit. Churches should not join groups or associations that tolerate apostasy. Para-church organisations like publishing houses and media groups must not endorse or promote false teachers.

We need to name and expose those men and women who are leading people astray. You see, unless you at some point name who you are talking about when speak about false doctrine and heresy, people don't realise you are talking about some of the people they listen to or watch or read.

Membership at the local church level, naming and exposing false teachers at the universal church level is part of how we contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints.

Who are these men, and what do they teach? We'll study that in more detail, but let me give you the flyover view here:

First, they deny Christ in some way, and they turn grace into license to sin. *who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ. (Jude 1:4)*

Second, they live in immorality, and reject authority. *⁸ Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries. (Jude 1:8)*

Look out for the man who submits to no one else, who has no theological heroes he looks up to, who has no mentors he is thankful for.

Third, they try to turn religion into financial gain. *¹¹ Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. (Jude 1:11)* False teachers are drawn to money like bees to honey. If there is profit to be made, from even the poorest of the poor, you will find them there, selling their wares.

Fourth, they tell people what they want to hear to gain advantage over them. *¹⁶ These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage. (Jude 1:16)*

False teachers are marketers. They know how to tap into human need, greed, and appetite, and turn the Bible's teachings into a formula to get those things.

Fifth, they are worldly, unsaved people, who live for their appetites, and divide the church through their false teachings: *¹⁹ These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit. (Jude 1:19)* Now some of them might get saved and leave, but the majority of them are simply unsaved. They do not have the Spirit, they are controlled by their appetites. They live only for self.

These are the marks of the false teacher. But you do not have to go round hunting for them. Instead, you must busy yourself with becoming more and more familiar with the faith once for all delivered to the saints. You must know the boundaries of the Gospel. You must know Christian doctrine and practice well enough that you can sense when something is wrong. The training for those who identify counterfeit bank notes is not to expose them to all the counterfeits, because there are

innumerable ways of counterfeiting. Instead, they have those people become so familiar with every details of the true bank note, so that they can instantly spot a deviation.

We must know our once-for-all-delivered-to-the-saints faith. We must know it and love it well enough to militantly oppose denials of it when we encounter them, so that those whom we disciple will receive the faith as we received it.