

Contend for the Faith

The Believer's Attitude Regarding False Teaching

Jude 20-23

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June 13, 2010

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Scripture

The Letter of Jude deals with the subject of false teaching, which is the greatest danger to the Church of Jesus Christ today.

As we study Jude 20-23 today, we will see how Jude expresses the believer's attitude regarding false teaching. Let's read Jude 20-23:

²⁰ But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. ²² And have mercy on those who doubt; ²³ save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh. (Jude 20-23)

Introduction

The Lord Jesus Christ had at least four half-brothers and two half-sisters (cf. Matthew 13:55-56; Mark 6:3). Two of his half-brothers wrote letters that are part of the New Testament canon. James wrote the Letter of James and Jude wrote the Letter of Jude, the letter we are currently studying.

Jude did not believe that his older half-brother, Jesus, was anything special while he was alive. However, some time after Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, Jude came to believe that Jesus really was the Messiah, the Son of God, and Savior of sinners.

After Jude came to saving faith, he was called to become an itinerant minister. He travelled all over the ancient world preaching and teaching the glorious truths of the gospel of God's grace.

Review

About 30 years after his conversion and a lifetime of ministry, Jude decided to write this letter in the mid-60s AD.

Jude began to write this marvelous letter to believers to encourage them with the wonderful truths “about our common salvation” (v. 3a). However, he “found it necessary to write appealing to [the believers] to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (v. 3b).

Why? Because word had reached Jude that false teachers had “crept in unnoticed.” They perverted the grace of God into sensuality and denied the deity of Jesus by their character, their conduct, and their creed (v. 4).

Jude said that God's attitude toward false teachers was displayed in implacable judgment. He pointed to God's attitude in his judgment of unbelieving individuals, rebellious angels, and sinful communities (vv. 5-7).

Jude then gave a description of false teachers. He said that false teachers were immoral (they “defile the flesh”), insubordinate (they “reject authority”), and irreverent (they “blaspheme the glorious ones”) (vv. 8-10).

Further, Jude said that false teachers disobeyed God (v. 11a), they influenced others to disobey God (v. 11b), and they led a full rebellion against God (11c).

He compared false teachers to five natural phenomena: hidden reefs (v. 12a), waterless clouds (v. 12b), fruitless autumn trees (v. 12c), wild sea waves (v. 13a), and wandering stars (v. 13b).

Jude noted that false teaching existed in ancient times (vv. 14-15), it exists in the present (v. 16), and it will exist in the future (vv. 17-19).

Lesson

As Jude began to draw his letter to a close, one important question remained: what should be the attitude of believers regard-

ing false teaching? In other words, how do believers practically contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints?

In our lesson today, Jude expresses the believer's attitude regarding false teaching.

I. **Believers Avoid False Teaching by Growing Spiritually (20-21)**

First, believers avoid false teaching by growing spiritually.

Jude turned his attention back to the Christians when he started writing about the believer's attitude regarding false teaching. He said in verse 20, "**But you, beloved. . .**" This is the first time since verse 3 that he has addressed his readers directly. So, it is clear that he is now directing his closing remarks to believers.

Specifically, believers avoid false teaching by growing spiritually in four particular areas.

A. *In Doctrine (20a)*

First, believers avoid false teaching by growing spiritually in doctrine.

Jude said in verse 20a: "But you, beloved, **building yourselves up in your most holy faith. . .**"

Building yourselves up in the Greek is a command. It is not optional. Jude wanted his readers to understand that spiritual growth for the Christian is not optional. It is absolutely necessary.

But in what way are believers to build themselves up? Jude said that believers are to build themselves up **in your most holy faith**. This harkens back to verse 3 where Jude said, "Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints."

The faith or the **most holy faith** refers to the objective body of biblical truth. It is the gospel. It is the essential truths of the Scriptures that relate primarily to salvation. It is biblical doctrine.

Believers must grow spiritually in doctrine. Practically, how does that happen? It centers on the Word of God. It means that Christians must read, study, memorize, and apply the Word of God to their own lives.

The apostle Paul concurred with this view when he said to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:32, "And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

Some of you are growing in doctrine. You read the Word, study the Word, memorize the Word, and apply the Word to your lives. That is great. And I encourage you to keep pressing on.

But some of you are not growing in doctrine. You rarely if ever read the Word, you certainly don't study the Word, you cannot quote a single verse of Scripture because you have never memorized it, and any application of the Word is purely coincidental and accidental. May I say to you that you are in danger of falling prey to false teaching?

Friends, attending Sunday Worship Services is great. But you need to do far more than that if you are going to grow spiritually in doctrine.

B. In Prayer (20b)

Second, believers avoid false teaching by growing spiritually in prayer.

Jude said in verse 20b: "**. . . and praying in the Holy Spirit. . .**"

This expression does not refer to speaking in tongues. It refers rather to praying for that which is consistent with the Holy Spirit's will.

Now how do we know what prayer is consistent with the Holy Spirit's will? How do we know what the Holy Spirit's will is? Well, the Holy Spirit's will is clearly revealed in the Word of God. We come back to the Scriptures. It is imperative for believers to know what God's Word says. It is by studying the Word that we

will discern also what the will of the Holy Spirit is when we pray.

I remember a church member in a previous church say that she was going to divorce her husband. Frankly, their relationship was not a great relationship but there were no grounds for a biblical divorce. When I said that she had no biblical grounds for divorce she said that she believed that the Holy Spirit was leading her to divorce her husband. I told her the Holy Spirit will never—and I repeat, never—lead in a way that is contrary to the revealed Word of God.

Frankly, sometimes people do not want to do what God's Word says, and so they say that Holy Spirit is leading them in that path. And that is simply not true. That is blatant disobedience to God and his Word.

C. In Love (21a)

Third, believers avoid false teaching by growing spiritually in love.

Jude said in verse 21a: “. . . **keep yourselves in the love of God. . . .**”

This is very important. It means that believers are to keep themselves in the sphere or realm of God's love, or the place of his blessing. How do we do that? We do that by staying obedient to God. God promised blessing to those who remained obedient to him and his Word.

One of my favorite illustrations of this has to do with Abraham. Do you recall that God called Abraham to himself when he was still living in Ur of the Chaldeans. He travelled hundreds of miles and God finally brought Abraham to the land of Canaan, and there God appeared to him and said to him, “To your offspring I will give this land” (Genesis 12:7). Abraham settled near Bethel where he built an altar and called upon the name of the Lord.

In the next scene we learn that there was a famine in the land (Genesis 12:10). I have no doubt that things were tough for Abraham and his family. Nevertheless, instead of seeking the Lord's

will, he decided to go down to Egypt to sojourn there. On his way to Egypt he told Sarah to say to the Egyptians that she was his sister, because she was a beautiful woman. He did not want anyone to kill him in order to get her. Then, while they were in Egypt, Pharaoh was told about Sarah's beauty and he sent for her. But the Lord sent all kinds of afflictions to Pharaoh and his household. Eventually, Pharaoh found out that Sarah was Abraham's wife and not his sister. So he sent Abraham away with Sarah. Abraham then went all the way back to Hebron. He went back to his altar and called again upon the name of the Lord in prayer (Genesis 13:3-4).

Now, what is so fascinating to me about this is that Abraham was in the centre of the love of God from Ur to Hebron. God spoke to him and led him there. Then a famine came. Without seeking the Lord and his will, Abraham decided that he knew better than God and travelled hundreds of miles to Egypt. There he got his wife to lie (to save his own skin), and he got into all kinds of difficulty. Eventually he headed back to Hebron, with his tail between his legs. During his entire trip to and from Egypt there is no mention of the Lord. Why? Because Abraham was not obeying God, and he moved out of the sphere of God's love and blessing. It was only when he returned back to Hebron that he reconnected, as it were, with the Lord.

Sometimes you wonder why you are not experiencing the love of God. Perhaps it is because you are not walking in obedience to God. Examine your life. See if there is any area in your life where you are not obeying God.

D. In Hope (21b)

And fourth, believers avoid false teaching by growing spiritually in hope.

Jude said in verse 21b: **“. . . waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.”**

If you are a believer, you have already received the mercy of God. And you have already received eternal life at the moment you

believed on the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, what Jude referred to here is the *final mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ* when we are joined to him for all eternity.

Believers are people who have hope. Hope, not in the sense that we use it when we say that we hope it does not rain, meaning that we wish it would not rain. But rather, biblical hope has to do with a sure and certain outcome that we have not yet received.

This is the hope that sustains believers. And it especially sustains believers who are going through great difficulty, trial, or persecution. No matter what happens, they are confident that they belong to Jesus and he will greet them when life ends for them.

So, believers avoid false teaching by growing spiritually in doctrine, prayer, love, and hope.

II. Believers Help Others Avoid False Teaching by Reaching Out (22-23)

And second, believers help others avoid false teaching by reaching out.

Here we see the great pastoral sensitivity of Jude. He was concerned about believers. He wanted to be sure that they knew the great danger that false teaching posed to the church. He wanted them to be able to avoid false teaching by growing spiritually in doctrine, prayer, love, and hope.

But, Jude was also concerned about false teachers and the people who believed their false teaching. He wanted believers to reach out to them with the truth of the gospel.

Jude remembered that this was how his half-brother Jesus treated him before he was converted, and how Jesus also treated false teachers. Jesus denounced the Pharisees as false teachers, and yet he had meals with them and taught them the truth of God (Luke 7:36, 40-50; 11:37-38; 14:1).

Jude identified three categories of people that should be reached with the truth. From the church's perspective, these people are a mission field to be reached with the truth of the gospel.

A. *To the Confused (22)*

First, believers help others avoid false teaching by reaching out to the confused.

Jude said in verse 22: “**And have mercy on those who doubt.**”

False teachers are a great danger to the church. In fact, as I have said previously, false teaching is the greatest danger that faces the church. False teachers promote heretical doctrine and licentious lifestyles. Their teaching confuses many people in the church.

So, how are we to treat those who are confused? Jude said that we are to **have mercy on those who doubt**. We are to show them kindness, compassion, and sympathy. We are to expose them to the truth of the Word of God and help them understand the error of their way.

Sometimes people confuse love and the truth. In my previous church we had a sudden influx of people. I learned that they had left another local evangelical church because the pastor denounced Freemasonry. People thought that I should just accept Freemasonry as being compatible with biblical Christianity. But it is not. Freemasonry is contrary to biblical truth and is heretical. I remember one lady telling me that I was not being very loving when I said that. I told her that when a doctor diagnoses cancer in a patient, the loving thing is to tell the truth, not ignore it. Similarly, the loving thing to do is to correct heresy by telling the truth, not ignoring it.

B. *To the Convinced (23a)*

Second, believers help others avoid false teaching by reaching out to the convinced.

Jude said in verse 23a: “. . . **save others by snatching them out of the fire. . .**”

Apparently, Jude recognized that there would be a regression. No longer are people simply confused about what the truth is, they

are actually convinced that the false teaching is true.

The challenge here is much greater than when dealing with the confused. Dealing with the convinced requires a much greater sense of urgency.

Jesus actually modeled how he dealt with such people. To those who were confused, unsure, and filled with doubts, he patiently and gently presented the truth of the gospel. We see this, for example, in his dealing with the women at the well in Samaria in John 4:10-26). Jesus was very kind and gentle in his dealing with her.

On the other hand, to those who were committed to false teaching, such as the scribes and the Pharisees, Jesus bluntly warned them of the seriousness of their position. He sternly warned them that they were in danger of the fire of hell (Matthew 12:1-37; 15:1-14; Luke 11:37-54; John 8:12-59).

This is not always easy to do. We don't want to come across to others as unkind and hardnosed. And yet, for most of us, we are more likely not to say anything than say something that might offend. Certainly, we are not to be offensive in the way in which we speak. We should always speak with love. But we must speak. We don't want someone to ask us, "Why did you never tell me the truth?"

C. To the Committed (23b)

And third, believers help others avoid false teaching by reaching out to the committed.

Jude said in verse 23b: **“. . . to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.”**

These people are the most committed to error and false teaching. They are probably even among the leaders of the heretics. And yet we are called to reach out even to the committed.

Jude again writes with great pastoral sensitivity, teaching believers to reach out **to others** and **show mercy with fear**. We are to be very wary when dealing with such a false teacher. We are to

be very careful when dealing with them.

At this point, Jude used very graphic language. He said that we are to hate **even the garment stained by the flesh**. The word for **garment** is really an undergarment—or underwear. To be **stained by the flesh** means “to be stained by bodily function.” Just as we don’t like to touch other people’s underwear, we are to be very wary of getting too close to false teachers so that we are not stained by their false teaching.

And yet, we are to reach out to them too. We are to be very careful and very wary. But we are to reach out to them also with the truth of the gospel, in hopes that they will repent and believe in Jesus.

So, believers avoid false teaching by growing spiritually in doctrine, prayer, love, and hope. And believers help others avoid false teaching by reaching out to the confused, the convinced, and the committed.

Conclusion

The spiritual survival of us who love Christ, especially in times of growing false teaching, requires the utmost perseverance and care.

We must be defensive—remembering what Scripture teaches about the presence of false teachers.

We must also be proactive—diligently practicing the disciplines of Bible study, prayer, and obedience as we eagerly anticipate Christ’s return.

And finally, we must exercise bold discernment in taking the offensive and reaching out to false teachers and those influenced by their heresies.

The Christian life has always been a pilgrimage (Hebrews 11) and a spiritual battle (Ephesians 6:10-18), but its end will be triumphant (Revelation 18-22). Amen.

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*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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PRAAYER:

O Lord our God, we thank you for the half-brother of Jesus, Jude. Thank you that you brought him to yourself in salvation after Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. Thank you for his lifetime of ministry. And thank you for this marvelous letter that he wrote.

This letter served as a warning to the believers in Jude's day. But it has also served as a warning to believers throughout the generations.

We live in an age of great apostasy and false teaching. Help believers here today avoid false teaching by growing spiritually in doctrine, prayer, love, and hope. And may believers here today help others avoid false teaching by reaching out to the confused, the convinced, and the committed.

And all of this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

To you who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ:

May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. Amen.