

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Four Epistles: Jude

It is believed that Jude was the brother of James and that they were both the natural half-brothers of the Lord Jesus. It is striking, therefore, that Jude does not refer to a family relationship with Jesus but, in a spirit of reverence, introduces himself as a servant of Jesus Christ. He then links himself in affection and service with his brother James. From this basis he goes on to outline some key characteristics of God's spiritual family by writing, *"To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ"* (Jude 1).

Jude views those who are *"called"* as the genuine people of God, loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ. It is a striking opening verse because it establishes the assurance Christians have in spite of the difficulties they may face. Paul describes it in another way when he writes in Philippians 1:6, *"being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ."* Jude also adds that mercy, peace and love are to be multiplied. This is another important encouragement as he is about to describe circumstances where evil is multiplied (Jude 2). He was re-affirming the abounding grace of God whatever circumstances the Christian faces.

Jude wanted to write about the *"common salvation"* all Christians shared (Jude 3) but recognised that it was necessary to encourage his readers to defend the faith. The term *"common salvation"* refers to the salvation we share and enjoy. It was a great subject as Paul's letter to the Romans demonstrates. But Jude felt compelled to encourage the people of God to contend for the faith which had been delivered to them. That same message is still vital today.

The faith was taught and expounded by the Lord Jesus and His Apostles. It was the Apostles who, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote the New Testament Scriptures. Pastors and teachers give instruction in the faith (see Ephesians 4:11). But it is essential that all Christians contend for the faith (Jude 3). So often we think we can leave it to others to act in defence of the faith but Jude shows us that we are all responsible and have to be involved in this work. The faith embodies all we know of God in Christ. We must uphold and defend it actively.

Jude tells us that the faith has been *"once for all delivered unto the saints"* (Jude 3). This teaches us three things:

1. **The faith has been delivered.** It was not discovered or developed as, for example, the sciences. It is not a matter of observation, experiment and reasoning. The faith has been revealed by God and we have received it by faith.
2. **The faith has been once delivered.** That is, once for all. It was introduced by the Lord Jesus and confirmed by His Apostles. By the time that Jude wrote, the apostolic writings were all but complete. In science there are always fresh discoveries which often change earlier theories and ideas. There is uncertainty. The Christian faith was delivered once for all. There is no further revelation. It may be rejected but it does not change.
3. **The faith has been delivered to the saints.** It came through the Apostles and prophets, but it was delivered through them to the saints; we the people of God, are its custodians. Each of us is to receive it, understand it, live by it and contend earnestly for it. This battle is to be fought by the power of God, *"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ"* (2 Corinthians 10:4-5 New King James Version)

In Jude 4, Jude begins to address the state of things, which made his message so urgent. Men had infiltrated the church and undermined the Apostles' teaching and practice and attacked the person of Christ. John writes, in his first Epistle, of antichrists who *"went out"*, (1 John 2:18-19) Jude writes of men who *"crept in"* (Jude 4). John's characters were apparently intelligent and philosophic teachers who departed when their teachings were refuted. Jude's characters are more dissolute and distorted the teaching of the grace of God. Paul confronted similar teachings and practice when he writes of those who said, *"Let us sin so that grace may abound"* (Romans 6:1). It is astonishing that men can take the revelation of God's grace and pervert its teaching to excuse their sin (see Galatians 5:13, 1 Peter 2:16).

One reaction to this is to object to the doctrine of grace on the ground that it may be abused. Jude shows us that this abuse is not something new but it began in apostolic times. But he also teaches us that the way to combat evil teaching is to teach the truth which makes us free (see John 8:32).

Jude cites, in Jude 5-7, three cases of the judgement of God:

- Israel was judged because of its unbelief;
- Angels were judged because they abandoned the place and state God had appointed for them; and
- Sodom and its surrounding cities were judged because they gave themselves over to immorality.

Jude denounces the men who were now behaving in a similar way amongst the people of God, men who refused to submit to spiritual authority. Jude deals with this question of authority by introducing the contention between Michael the archangel and the devil. This incident is unrecorded in the Old Testament but the devil is described in the Scriptures as a fallen angel who once held the highest position in the angelic realm (see Isaiah 14:12-21). Such dignity was to be respected and Michael the archangel did so. Michael did not rebuke Satan but left the Lord to do it (Jude 9). Similarly, in the Old Testament, in spite of King Saul's grave failures, David held Saul in the highest respect. When David had the opportunity to kill his enemy, he remembered Saul was the Lord's anointed (see 1 Samuel 24:1-22).

Satan is not to be spoken of in a light or mocking way as he sometimes is today. Though fallen (see Isaiah 14:12-21), he still wields immense power and we cannot afford to despise him. It is only by the power of the Spirit we are able to withstand and overcome him (see Ephesians 6:10-18).

Such lack of respect is often marked by an arrogant ignorance - men abusing what they do not understand. In this, Jude compared them to brute animals (Jude 10). Like the proverbial bull in a china shop, they will simply destroy what they do not value. Man is made in God's image. He has the potential for the highest expression of action, thought and spiritual life in communion with God. It is a terrible thing when he descends into brutality, mindlessness and excess. When he does this under the guise of religion, it is the all more appalling.

In Jude 11, Jude goes on to use three further cases to condemn the evil behaviour he has outlined.

- Cain who was self willed in the things of God preferring his own thoughts to God's Word (Genesis 4:1-15).
- The error of Balaam (Numbers 22:1-24:25) who was self seeking in the things of God. He saw religion as a way to make money.
- Korah (Numbers 16:1-50) who was self assertive in the things of God. It is a dangerous thing to be self confident especially in regard to spiritual things. Korah asserted himself against Moses and Aaron. Today we see the same attitude within Christendom when the Scriptures, the Person of Christ and even the existence of God are questioned.

In Jude 12-13, Jude exposes the character of the men who endangering the Christian church.

1. They are described as "spots" in the love feasts of these early Christians (Jude 12). The word means "a jagged rock with the sea washing over it." The men who had crept into the Christian church were now boldly taking their place in the social life of the believers and presenting a spiritual menace, just as a sunken rock which endangers ships. Their priority was to feed themselves. A true shepherd would selflessly feed the flock of God.
2. They are like clouds borne along on the winds but without water (Jude 12). Clouds promise rain. These men pretended to bring refreshment to God's people but had nothing to give.
3. They were like autumn trees without fruit (Jude 12) - promising food but providing none.
4. They were like waves of the sea raging and foaming (Jude 13). The picture is of uncontrolled destructive power. The foam of the sea is used as a metaphor for their shameful acts. These men displayed no shame but rather gloried in it. It is one thing to do something shameful; it is another to feel proud of our wickedness.
5. They were like wandering stars or meteors (Jude 13) - no stability, no light and a destiny of darkness.

Having outlined in such a graphic way the awful character of the men who were attempting to undermine the Christian church, Jude in Jude 14 and 15 describes how judgement will fall upon them. It will be by the direct intervention of the Lord appearing in His glory - an appearance predicted since the days of Enoch (see Genesis 5:24). Scripture gives

little information about this remarkable man of faith (Genesis 4:17-5:24, Hebrews 11:5, Jude 14). We are told about the character of his life. He walked with God for over three hundred years! (Genesis 5:23-4). We are told of his rapture into God's presence (Genesis 5:24). He was one of only two men (the other was Elijah, 2 Kings 2:11) who did not die. We are told of his faith in Hebrews 11:5. Here, in Jude, we discover that he was the earliest of all the prophets. And what did Enoch prophesy about - a coming Lord who would execute judgement and righteousness.

In Jude 16-19, we have a further description and exposure of the corrupt men Jude was concerned about. The Spirit of God labours to make the character of these enemies of God so clear to us as to enable us to identify them. They are described as "*murmurers and complainers*" (Jude 16). They were unsatisfied people always finding fault. They are described as being dominated by their own lusts (Jude 16). They are described as being boastful in regard to themselves and flattering in regard to others (Jude 16). These pictures are very challenging. Are we building up or undermining the people of God? Do we take pride in our own achievements whilst belittling those of others? Do we flatter to deceive? Or do we have a genuine interest in the well being of our fellow believers?

With such descriptions still in our minds, Jude reminds us of the Apostles' words. For example, in 2 Peter 3:3 we read about mockers coming in the last time, walking after their own lusts. These were the men that Jude had in mind: they were sensual or natural men, not having the Spirit. The indwelling Spirit is the infallible mark of belonging to Christ. Jude also describes them as those "who make separations" (Jude 19). The Holy Spirit is the power of unity. These men without the Spirit went about dividing the people of God. When Christ reigns in the hearts of His people, they experience unity. When self reigns in our hearts, disunity is assured.

It is difficult to think of a darker picture of ungodliness than the one before us this morning. The descriptions began with the turning of the grace of God into licence and of denying Jesus Christ (Jude 4). They end with the promotion of division and the absence of Spirit of God (Jude 19). Yet these same men had managed to get in amongst the people of God. These dangerous characters could only be defeated by God's people contending for the faith (Jude 3) and being assured of the keeping power of Jesus Christ.

Although Jude warns of, and deals with, appalling behaviour he ends his letter encouraging us in the pursuit of what is good. In Jude 20-21, he again appeals to the true saints of God, and outlines what should characterise them in the presence of all the dangers he had outlined. He does this in four ways:

1. We are to build ourselves up on our most holy faith (Jude 20).

It does not say that we are to build up the faith. We have already seen that the faith is perfect and complete. It does not need building up, but we do. We have received the faith and we need to be built up on it. Jude speaks of it as "*most holy*". We do not have a most holy place as Israel had in biblical times but we do have a most holy faith. It is not to be tampered with but lived by and defended. The idea of earnestly contending for the faith is central to Jude's letter. We are not to argue or debate Scripture unnecessarily. Some Christians like to argue about doctrines but this is not Jude's meaning. As we are built up in our most holy faith, so we shall be morally and spiritually equipped to defend it when the occasion arises.

2. We are encouraged to pray in the Holy Ghost (Jude 20).

Prayer is the expression of dependence upon God. Paul reminds us in Ephesians 6:18, "*Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.*" This is the opposite of the self sufficiency condemned by Jude.

Our prayers are to be in the Spirit (see Ephesians 6:18). We are to pray as those who are controlled by the indwelling Spirit, and who consequently ask for the things that are according to the mind of Christ. Such, James tells us, is effective and fervent prayer which achieves much (James 5:16).

3. We are to keep ourselves in the love of God (Jude 21).

This means that we are to be always conscious of God's love resting upon us. We are persuaded, in Paul's words that "*nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Romans 8:39). His love will never let us go. But we need to be assured of this in our hearts. This is done by the word of God and the Spirit of God. God's word assures us of His love to us. "*God's Spirit pours the love of God into our hearts*" (Romans 5:5). T

This summer we spent a week by the sea with our grandchildren. Every day they went to the sea with them to fill their buckets. The sea was so vast; no matter how many times they filled their tiny buckets it made no impression, but the delight and pleasure they got from their buckets full of seawater ensured they went back again to the source again

and again. So it is with us. As we draw on God's love, the blessing we receive which overflows to others and simply draws us back to Him again and again.

This same love enables us to "*contend for the faith*" (Jude 3) with a Christ-like spirit - a spirit which lifts our spirits above the winning of arguments and debates. It gives us, through grace, the potential to win over opponents of Christ. We do not want to win arguments but souls; "*And he who wins souls is wise*" (Proverbs 11:30). We may find ourselves entangled in a controversy with someone who is more than a match for us intellectually, but if we are built up on the faith, prayerful in the Spirit, and keeping ourselves in the love of God, we will influence them for good.

4. We are also to be "*looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life*" (Jude 21).

This reminds of the hope we have in Christ. The blessings of faith in Christ are not confined to the present but linked also to the future. In spite of the daunting evidence of the progression of evil in today's world, we have a wonderful hope in our coming Lord. We look for His coming into the air (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17) when He will receive His people into heaven. This great action of His is described as mercy because we do not deserve it, any more than we deserved to be forgiven or redeemed. It is an act of mercy which takes us out of a world in which we are not at home and an act of grace to take us into the Father's home in heaven. Jude encourages us to keep actively looking for this wonderful event (Jude 21) and to benefit from the effect it should have on each of us here and now, "*And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure*", (1 John 3:3).

Jude's four exhortations are about the faith, the Holy Spirit, the love of God, and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. And we are to be built up on the faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keeping ourselves in the love of God, and looking for the return of Christ.

In Jude 22-23, two groups of people are designated as "*some*" and "*others*." The "*some*" appear to be people who have been affected by the evil men Jude describes earlier in his letter. They are to be carefully distinguished and treated with compassion. The "*others*", in Jude 23, seem to have become more deeply engrossed in the disgraceful practices Jude condemns. Jude wants to see them saved, but warns those seeking to do this to be careful not to become ensnared themselves in the dangers from which they are attempting to rescue others.

In dealing with spiritual dangers and the salvation and restoration of others we will always need wisdom and divine protection. Never let us think we are not capable of falling into the same temptations! Paul warns of this in Galatians 6:1, "*Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.*"

If Jude had to deal with darkness in the central part of his letter, then the clear light of the power and glory of God shine through in his closing words. He has encouraged us to contend for the faith (Jude 3), to build ourselves up on it (Jude 20) and to labour to rescue others in spiritual danger (Jude 23). Now we are directed to "*Him that is able to keep you from stumbling...*" (Jude 24). We may have doubts about being able to keep ourselves in the love of God (Jude 21). We can have no doubt that He is able to keep us from falling, and present us faultless before the presence of His glory.

We may have some tumbles on the path of faith, but we will not tumble into heaven! We shall be presented in heaven by the Lord Jesus with great joy. So we can say now as we will say then: "*To God our Saviour, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen*" (Jude 25).

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