

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 25 October 2015

No. T0908

Speaker: Mr. Ian Britton

Short letters in the New Testament: Jude - Healthy Faith

We are constantly bombarded with messages about healthy living today. In spite of all of this advice we are getting steadily less healthy! Today's talk on the epistle of Jude is entitled 'Healthy Faith', and the health of our faith is even more important than the health of our bodies.

We might summarise much of the advice on healthy living under the headings of: diet, exercise, environment and genetics. These things are important for a healthy faith too. Diet - what we feed our minds and hearts on. Exercise - how we live out our faith. Environment - how the atmosphere we live in impacts the health of our faith. Genetics - how, by new birth, we have a life that is strong and vigorous. We will certainly think about environment and exercise as we work our way through Jude, but the others will be touched on as well. See if you can identify these themes as we open up this instructive little book of the Bible.

Jude 1a - The author

"Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James." Jude is an anglicised version of the name which is translated Judas elsewhere in the New Testament. Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3 list James and Judas as being two of the four half-brothers of Jesus, and many conclude that Jude is one of these half brothers and that the epistle of James was written by his brother. Jude writes quite late in New Testament history, that is before the books of John (generally thought to have been written around AD 90), and probably around the same time as 2 Timothy, say about AD70.

Jude 1b - 2 Greetings

"To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ: mercy, peace and love be multiplied to you." Jude begins by describing his readers as "called", that is they are believers because of God's calling. He addresses himself to the called generally rather than to a particular individual, like Timothy, or a particular locality, like Corinth. Clearly the letter was initially sent to a particular church or churches, but it is intended to be read by all of God's called in every place and every age.

Next the readers are said to be *"sanctified by God the Father."* The Father Himself has set His called ones apart as belonging to Him. They are also *"preserved in Jesus Christ"*, so that Christ undertakes to keep and protect those His Father has called and sanctified. This is a lofty start, and Jude then prays that *"mercy, peace and love be multiplied"* to them! Jude is about to give some serious warnings, and make strong condemnations, and this encouraging start serves to remind his readers of their happy and secure position in God's love and Christ's care.

Jude 3 - Background

"Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." Rather surprisingly, Jude informs us that his original intention was to write quite a different sort of letter to the one we have in our Bibles! Jude had meant to write about the 'common salvation' - the salvation based on the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus that all believers have in common.

We will never know just what aspects of that wonderful salvation he intended to consider, because the Spirit redirected him to write about *"contend[ing] earnestly for the faith."* Jude felt that the faith, the whole Christian teaching and conduct, were under attack, and that believers needed to be encouraged to stand strong, and actively resist. By the time Jude was writing, all the doctrines of Christianity had been fully set out by the Spirit, through the apostles. The faith had been *"once for all delivered."* They did not need to add to it or seek it out. But it was not delivered just to the apostles, it had been *"delivered to the saints."* The faith was the possession of all Christians, and all had their part to play in contending for it. In fact, Jude expects that all believers will so value what they have, that they will **earnestly** contend for it.

Here then we have our first call to healthy exercise! All believers in Christ are to be active in contending for the faith, and in doing so, will strengthen their own personal faith, as they learn to understand and defend the teachings of the Bible, and stand alongside God in defence of what it says.

Jude 4 - The problem

“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.” The reason that this active defence is needed is that people have come into the church from outside, and are corrupting the doctrine and practice of the church. It is sad that these men had *“crept in unnoticed.”* Creeping suggests they were cunning and underhand, but the believers ought to have been alert, and these men should not have been unnoticed.

The Bible always connects false doctrine with bad behaviour, and it is no surprise to find these men marked by lewd behaviour, since they corrupt the doctrine of the grace of God, and in so doing, effectively deny both God and His Christ.

These ungodly men are polluting the environment of the church. What **should** be the pure air of Christian fellowship, and the mutual encouragement of sound Christian behaviour, are being spoiled by lewd behaviour, and denial of the Lord and His Lordship. If the believers are to maintain a healthy faith, they need to wake up to the problem.

Jude 5-15 - The ungodly described in an Old Testament context

“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. 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 judgement of the great day; 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 5-7).

Jude sets out three Old Testament examples of judgement on the ungodly. God had brought the entire nation of Israel out of Egypt, but many were judged and destroyed. They were characterised by unbelief; and being a member of God’s chosen nation did not save them. When some of heaven’s angels turned away from God in the rebellion of Satan, they were placed under judgement. They were characterised by apostasy, turning away from the truth; and being some of God’s most glorious and powerful creatures did not save them.

The same principle holds true today. Being a member of a church will not save anybody - the ungodly will be judged. The inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah were more obviously under judgement; indeed they are proverbial for their immorality. But the ungodly men that Jude writes about, had some of the same moral standards, and their coming judgement was just as certain, and should have been just as obvious to the churches they had infiltrated.

“Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries. Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’ But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves” (Jude 8-10).

The ungodly are described in four ways.

1. **“They are dreamers.”** Those whose lives are based on faith, and whose hopes are connected to heaven, are often accused of being dreamers - detached from reality. But faith in God’s realities is the solid, realistic thing, and the ungodly men are the dreamers.
2. **“They defile the flesh.”** Bad doctrine is linked to bad morals, and these men live for the flesh, and defile it with their actions.
3. **“They reject authority.”** They are those that the Lord Jesus describes as saying “Lord, Lord” (see Matthew 7:21-23) and not doing the things He says. Having rejected the authority of God and Christ, they reject the authority of anyone else who seeks to restrain what they do.
4. **“They speak evil of dignitaries.”** Having rejected all authority, they speak evil of any who have it. Jude describes a scene enacted between an angel called Michael and Satan, making plain that even one as mighty and upright as an archangel, dealing with one as wicked as Satan himself, spoke with restraint.

Perhaps we are used to seeing these four characteristics in society around us, but they are **not** acceptable in the church, and are the symptoms of the very opposite of a healthy faith. What these men were ignorant of, they spoke evil about; what they knew naturally they corrupted themselves with. Thus, in everything, through ignorance or knowledge they increased their sinfulness!

“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. These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves. They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever” (Jude 11-13).

The next three examples all demonstrate putting self before God.

- **Cain** ignored the necessity God had indicated for a sacrifice based on the giving of an animal's life, and brought a sacrifice from his crops.
- **Balaam** tried to use his limited knowledge of God to make a profit from King Balak. Balaam wanted to curse Israel, when he knew that God had determined to bless them, because it would make him money.
- **Korah** decided that he was every bit as good as Moses and Aaron, God's chosen servants. Not content with being a priest, he wanted to be a leader as well. His judgement by God was swift and final.

Deciding that we can approach God any way we choose, seeking to turn religion into a profit making exercise and pushing ourselves into places of prominence, are still very popular practices today. Let's beware of following such unhealthy examples.

Such people only spoil the company of believers and seek to feed themselves at the expense of others. They are clouds that don't even bring the benefit of rain to a dry land; they just block out the sun! They are fruit trees with no fruit on them, dead by nature, and dead by God's judgement, just waiting for a final, inevitable tearing up. They are like ever restless waves in the sea, and all they stir up are things that shame them, even if they have no sense of shame themselves. They are like stars out of place, perhaps meteors. No use for navigating, and soon to be in blackness forever, when the purpose of a star is to give light. Jude spares no metaphor to condemn these people.

“Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, ‘Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands 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”, Jude 14-15.

Jude relates a prophesy by Enoch, that is not recorded in the Old Testament. Although these men may claim to belong to God's saints, in fact, when Christ returns in judgement, the saints will be united with Him in condemning these ungodly men.

The Spirit repeats the word “ungodly” four times in one sentence, in a way that sounds a little clumsy in English, but leaves us in no doubt why these people are condemned.

Jude 16 - The hallmarks of the ungodly

“These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage.” Jude now reverts to describing the ungodly directly, rather than by example or metaphor. They are grumblers, dissatisfied with what they have, and with no sense of the contentment that is connected to godliness. They complain, no doubt finding cause for their complaints whatever others may do for them. They do not walk according to God's word but according to their own lusts, and, since the lusts of the human heart are never satisfied, only getting bigger the more they are fed, they are doomed to be never fulfilled. They talk very well, perhaps especially about themselves, and their own ideas, and willingly use their words to flatter other people, just as long as there is something to be gained!

Set out baldly in this way, their character seems strikingly unattractive, as Jude intends. The frightening thing is, that these attitudes and actions, that are so corrosive to faith, very easily creep in to our own hearts, especially if we spend much time with people like this. How easily we start to complain and grumble. How much we sometimes long to live just as we please. How prone we are to self aggrandisement and flattery. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:33, *“Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits.’”*

Jude 17-18 - Apostolic warnings previously given

“But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts.” The apostles warned believers, perhaps regularly, of the way such evil would increase as time progressed. Jude's readers seemed to have forgotten these warnings. We, who live in a much later day, should listen to them very carefully and remember.

Jude 19 - Summary of the ungodly

“These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit.” The final summary has three points.

1. **These men are “sensual”**, the opposite of spiritual, walking entirely as guided by the lusts of the flesh.
2. **They “cause divisions”** because false teaching and false behaviour always divide.
3. **They “do not have the Spirit”**. It is a fundamental truth, that all believers are indwelt by the Spirit of God, so these men are false.

The warnings and descriptions have been stark and plentiful. Let's turn happily to the positive exhortations.

Jude 20-21 - Exhortations and contrasts

“But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” In contrast to the descriptions of the ungodly, Jude goes back to his description of his readers from Jude 3 and addresses them as *“beloved.”* The “But” that starts the sentence makes a deliberate and stark contrast between them, and the people he has just been describing. Because they are unlike the ungodly, because they are beloved, by Jude and by God, because they have real, living faith, they must live in ways that are starkly contrasting. They are to prepare for the godly exercise of *“earnestly contending for the faith”* by *“building [themselves] up on [their] most holy faith.”* ‘The faith’ is complete and unchanging: **their** faith needs building up. They need good, nourishing spiritual food to strengthen them. This faith is not to be lewd and sensual like the ungodly; it is “most holy faith”, and thrives when lusts and complaining are refused, and not indulged.

Prayer is sometimes described as allowing us to breathe the air of heaven, and that is a much healthier environment than the one in Jude 5-16 that we have been considering! Our prayers are not vain repetition, or the output of our own imagination, they are to be prayers *“in the Holy Spirit.”*

We are not just to be passive, but actively, *“keep [ourselves] in the love of God.”* God, of course, will never stop loving us, but we are to keep ourselves in a state where we are able to fully enjoy, and be comfortable with, that love.

We are to look *“for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.”* We have eternal life now, but we will enjoy it to the full in our Father's house, in heaven, thanks to Christ's mercy.

A healthy faith of our own will make us able to contend earnestly in ways that are gentle, well informed, loving, wise, Spirit lead and heavenly focussed.

Jude 22-23 - Dealing with those lead astray by the ungodly

“And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.” Jude seems to distinguish the ungodly themselves (who are to be condemned) with those who are naively influenced by them, on whom we are to have compassion. There also seems to be another category who are more strongly under their influence, but not fully apostate. This last group are to be saved ‘with fear’. This means that getting close to them to try and pull them away from the great danger they are in, is risky to the person trying to help. Those who attempt it, need to have a very healthy faith themselves, and be able to resist the bad influence these people may have on them.

Jude 24-25 - The God who keeps us by His power

“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, to God our Saviour, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.” Jude ends with a lovely doxology that presents God as our Saviour, and the One who is able to make us stand, and grow, in spite of all the challenges and temptations that surround us. What a glorious God He is, greater in power than all men or angels, committing Himself to bringing us into His presence in a faultless condition, and keeping us now in a condition of healthy faith, so that we can earnestly contend for the faith He has committed to us.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.