



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for May 30, 2010
Released on Wednesday, May 26, 2010**

“Temper Judgment with Mercy”

Lesson Text: Jude 3–7, 19–21, 24,25

Background Scripture: Jude

Devotional Reading: 1 Timothy 6:3–10

Jude 3–8, 19–21, 24,25

3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

4 For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

5 I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not.

6 And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

7 Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

.....

19 These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.

20 But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost,

21 Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

.....

24 Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,

25 To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. List key features of the dangers that Jude discusses.
2. To show that the Christian community is to be strong in the faith.
3. Explain how he or she will avoid the extremes of license and legalism in the Christian life.

INTRODUCTION

The Church as Battlefield

Although we like to think of the church as a place of peace and harmony, it is also a battlefield. Satan is the primary enemy on this battlefield. He will do everything he can to shred the church's harmony. He will use various tactics to accomplish this goal.

Temptation to commit sin is, of course, the main driver behind all his tactics. When uncorrected and unopposed sin gets into the church, the result can be a cancer that spreads until the witness of the church is completely ruined. This seems to be Paul's concern in 1 Corinthians 5.

Satan especially likes to attack the church's leaders. Satan uses various approaches, and we all know of cases where church leaders exploited the sheep of the flock for their own devious purposes. Too many churches and Christians have been damaged by dynamic but unscrupulous and unfaithful leaders!

This unfortunate pattern was already in play in the first century. It is a problem frequently addressed in the books of the New Testament. The church of any century needs strong leaders who are grounded in the Scripture, secure in their faith, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. One of the greatest voices for this need is a book often overlooked or misunderstood by Christians today. This is the 25-verse book of Jude, the source for our lesson today.

A WARNING (Jude 1:3,4)

1. Who was Jude? Why did he write his letter (Jude 1:3)?

The brief letter of Jude was written by one who called himself "the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James" (vs. 1). Though there are several Judes in the New Testament, most Bible scholars believe this one was the brother of Jesus and of James, who wrote the epistle by that name. If so, it is remarkable that he did not mention his relationship with Jesus but saw himself only as His servant (bond slave). Nevertheless, writing for his Master, he deserves to be heard.

Jude's term of endearment for his readers signals the fact that they were Christian believers. Indeed, he had been eagerly planning to write to them about their common salvation—that is, the salvation they all shared. Circumstances, however, dictated that he write instead to exhort them to uphold the faith.

The verb translated "earnestly contend" (Jude 1:3) is an intensified form of "agonize." It likens the Christian's struggle to a wrestling match. The faith for which we are to struggle is the message of truth "once delivered unto the saints." Jude emphasized the fact that this faith was given once for all and is therefore never subject to change. It is based on eternal truths grounded in God's nature and so should never be compromised (cf. Gal. 1:6-9; Heb. 4:14; 2 John 1:9).

2. Is "contending for the faith" the job of our pastors?

Contending for the faith is the job of the entire church; it is not the job of just the preacher and the elders. Each of us has our own circle of influence. For some people in that circle you may be the only one with enough credibility to call them back from involvement in false doctrine.

We are able to contend for the faith by becoming well-versed in Scripture. When that happens, we are able to give clear explanations to refute misconceptions, ask

probing questions about conflicting belief systems, etc. But refuting error isn't enough. We must then go on to set forth the correct doctrine in a loving way.

3. Against what kind of impostors did Jude warn the church (v. 4)?

Jude now sets forth some things for his readers to keep in mind. The need to contend earnestly was paramount in Jude's thinking because of men who have "crept in unawares" among believers. It is clear that these were not merely Christians who had gone astray but unbelievers who had infiltrated the church to poison minds and misdirect actions. They had slipped in secretly because they had imitated the saints.

Although they may have been unnoticed by believers, God was well aware of them. They had been marked for divine condemnation long beforehand. Their downfall was written both in God's eternal counsels and prophetic predictions (Jude 1:14,15; cf. Isa. 8:19-22; Jer. 5:13,14). Their doom had been determined.

Jude characterized these frauds as "ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness" (Jude 1:4). They deliberately twisted God's grace into a license to engage in immorality.

The final item in Jude's list is the most important: these false teachers deny both the *Lord God* and the *Lord Jesus Christ*. This seems to be Jude's primary point of contention, the very crux of his letter. This problem includes more than a tacit denial by devious and self-serving actions. It is, rather, the false teachers' explicit opposition to the central teaching of the church, the lordship of Christ. This problem includes any who may teach, "No, you really don't need to believe that Jesus is Lord." Such teaching can be an issue for those having a Jewish background, who might affirm the *Lord God* but refuse to confess the *Lord Jesus*. Jude's point is that for a Christian to deny Christ as Lord is a denial of God himself.

A REVIEW (Jude 1:5-7)

4. What illustrations did Jude use to show that God punishes rebellious sinners (v. 5)?

Jude recognized that his readers had been informed of what happened to unbelievers, but he reminded them of it again through three historical examples (vs. 5-7). The first of these was the unbelieving generation of Israelites who came out of Egypt. These were the favored people who had seen God's power in the plagues on Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, and the guidance of the fiery pillar in the wilderness. They had been miraculously fed and clothed, had been healed of fatal afflictions, and, most important, had seen the glory of God hover over Mount Sinai.

Despite these privileges, there remained unbelievers. When the time came to enter Canaan and conquer it by faith, they drew back (cf. Heb. 3:16-19). With the exception of Caleb and Joshua, their dead bodies were left in the desert. A holy God would not be mocked.

5. Whom did Jude use as a second example of disobedience to God (v. 6)?

Jude's second illustration of apostates whom God destroyed involved "the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation." Angels are ministers of God who have varying degrees of authority and specific areas to administer. The angels mentioned here rebelled against God's authority and the positions to which He had assigned them.

No doubt these were angels who followed Satan in his revolt (Isa. 14:12-15; Ezek. 28:11-19; Rev. 12:7-9). Since then they have served him in attempting to thwart the purposes of God's kingdom (cf. Eph. 6:12).

Because of their disobedience, God has kept them "in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day" (Jude 1:6). The "chains" here could be

taken figuratively as the restrictions God has placed on these fallen angels in this dark world as they await their final doom.

The judgment to which our text refers is that which will occur after the millennium, when Satan will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10; cf. Matt. 25:41). Thus, Jude again made his point that God punishes all rebels.

6. God rained fire on Sodom and Gomorrah. Of what is this a foretaste (v. 7)?

Jude's third example is "Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them." They were guilty of "giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh." The verb that describes their fornication indicates their utter abandonment to this immoral way of life. "Strange flesh" speaks of their perverted desires.

The account of these cities' destruction in Genesis 19 portrays their lust. The men of Sodom demanded that Lot's two angelic guests be turned over to them to be sexually abused. They would not be appeased by the offer of Lot's daughters and even when stricken with blindness continued to search for a way to enter the house (vs. 4-11).

Sodom, Gomorrah, and nearby cities were punished with a rain of fire and brimstone (Gen. 19:24,25). But this was a mere foretaste, says Jude, of the punishment of eternal fire that God will bring upon all such sinners. And that punishment includes those who threatened the early church with false teaching and ungodly behavior.

7. Why is it important for us to consider both the *love* and *holiness* sides of God's character? What will happen if we emphasize one of these to the exclusion of the other?

The acts of judgment that Jude describes embarrass some Christians who prefer to emphasize God's love, grace, and forgiveness over His holiness, justice, and wrath. The idea of God's punishment is something no one wants to think about, much less experience. His love and grace are much more attractive concepts.

However, great revivals of the past, such as the Great Awakening in the United States, often began with strong teaching on the wrath of God and the need for repentance. The book of Romans is perhaps the most comprehensive explanation of God's grace in Scripture, yet it begins with an exposition of God's righteous wrath against sinful humanity (Romans 1:18-3:20). It is the reality of God's coming judgment that makes the gospel truly to be such "good news."

AN EXHORTATION (Jude 1:19-21)

8. What specific things about the false teachers did Jude warn the church about (v. 19)?

In the interlude not included in our lesson text, Jude continued his warnings. He described in graphic terms the sins of the false teachers. They despised authority (vs. 8-10). They followed the errors of Cain, Balaam, and Korah (v. 11). Their empty profession brought disgrace on the church (vs. 12,13).

Though they were under God's judgment (vs. 14,15), they continued to court the favor of men (v. 16). Believers had been warned about all this in advance (vs. 17,18).

Jude returns to the false teachers and adds charges. These men *separate themselves*, meaning they are sectarian in spirit and divisive in practice. Their teachings cause fragmentation in the church (compare Romans 16:17, 18; Titus 3:10, 11). They are *sensual*, worldly—the opposite of spiritual.

They also are fixed on gratifying the desires of the flesh. This usually refers to sexual gratification, a charge Jude makes repeatedly. This is emphasized when Jude

says they do not have *the Spirit*. They are complete charlatans no matter what their claims might be. If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ (see Romans 8:9,14).

9. How can believers build themselves up in their faith (vs. 20,21)?

Jude urged his readers not only to be on the alert for evildoers but also to give attention to their own spiritual state. "Beloved" marks them out as true believers in contrast to the pretenders. They were urged to do four things.

First, they were to be building their lives upon the solid ground of their holy faith. This is to be a continual process of self-edification, and it must take place on a solid foundation that has already been laid—the faith. This faith refers to the message of salvation through Jesus Christ "once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 1:3) by the apostles. There is no other foundation on which saints can build. They do this by refreshing themselves in God's Word, maintaining personal fellowship with Him, and drawing on the encouragement of others in corporate worship.

Second, Christians are to be praying in the Holy Spirit. This too is obviously an ongoing activity. In contrast to the apostates, believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and He plays a vital role in their prayers. Those who are filled with the Spirit pray in His will (Eph. 5:18-20; 6:18) and can trust Him to convey their prayers to the Father even when they do not know how to pray (Rom. 8:26,27).

Third, believers are told to keep themselves in God's love. This does not imply that they must strive to merit His love, for it is always a gift of His grace. Rather, they are to walk in the consciousness of His love as they obey His will. Jesus Himself said, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love" (John 15:10).

Fourth, Christians are to be "looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude 1:21). This means expectant waiting for His return. It is called His "mercy" because it will be the final evidence of the mercy that brought our salvation. It is also the consummation of the eternal life that was given to us when we believed.

Expectant awareness of Christ's return is the key to fulfilling the rest of Jude's exhortations—edification, prayer, and obedience. Those who await His coming purify themselves as He is pure (1 John 2:28; 3:2-3; Titus 2:11-14).

A DOXOLOGY (Jude 1:24,25)

10. How did Jude encourage his readers at the end of his letter (v. 24)?

Jude leaves no illusions about the evil influence of the corrupt teachers. He told his readers to be merciful to some in their midst who had begun to waver or even become contaminated (vs. 22,23). But he did not leave them depressed or doubtful about God's work in their lives. His final doxology lifted them to the realm of His power. He first expressed praise for God's preservation (v. 24). He "is able to keep you from falling." Error will not triumph, either in God's grand plan or in the individual believer's life, for His power will uphold His own (Rom. 8:28-39).

Furthermore, He is able "to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 1:24). In contrast to those whose garments are "spotted by the flesh" (v. 23), Christ's own will stand before Him in glory without fault, clothed in His righteousness (cf. Eph. 5:27). This presentation will be accompanied with "exceeding joy" (Jude 1:24), both for Him and for the redeemed.

11. What are some methods we can use to rescue others from false doctrine or immorality? How do we ensure that we don't fall into their errors while attempting to rescue them?

There's a certain truth to the old cliché "People won't care how much you know until they know how much you care." In that respect, maintaining friendships with those who are wavering in their faith is important. Even so, sometimes we must

break a friendship to demonstrate the seriousness of the issue at hand (1 Corinthians 5:9–13; Titus 3:10).

There are many methods to use. We can ask probing questions about their beliefs, gently challenging them to reconsider. We can set an example that pricks their consciences and calls them back to faith. We can bring them into relationships with other believers and try to steer them away from friendships that are destructive to their relationship with God. Essential ways of keeping ourselves strong in the process are to develop a thorough knowledge of Scripture, pray deeply and continually, and remain in fellowship with other believers for accountability and encouragement.

12. What kind of God does Jude portray in his doxology (v. 25)?

The final sentence describes our heavenly leader in marvelous terms. He is *only wise*, meaning that only God possesses absolute wisdom and understanding. His purposes may not always be clear to us, but they are perfect. Although we battle for Him, we remember that He is *our Saviour*, the one who has rescued us so that we might help rescue others.

We may be presented for recognition, but all the honor must go to God. We bow to Him in His *glory and majesty*, the trappings of the King of kings. We cede to Him all *dominion and power*, the authority of the Lord of lords. This is both a present and a future reality, *now* and forever.

Jude closes with the traditional *amen*, a Jewish way of saying, "Let this all be true!" It is a way of releasing the prayer to God, allowing Him to rule utterly in our lives.

PRACTICAL POINTS

- 1.** Contending for the faith is always necessary because apostates will always exist (Jude 1:3).
- 2.** Apostates can be identified by their unbiblical teachings and their denial of the biblical Jesus (v. 4).
- 3.** All apostates, past, present, and future, will be judged and punished for eternity (vs. 5-7).
- 4.** The ways of the apostate are carnal and contrary to the ways of the Holy Spirit (v. 19).
- 5.** True believers are on guard against apostasy (vs. 20,21).
- 6.** The God who saved you can certainly keep you from stumbling into apostasy (vs. 24,25).

CONCLUSION

Doctrinal Differences, Great and Small

Two extremes to avoid in our Christian walk are *license* and *legalism*. *License* is the idea that "anything goes." It is what Jude fights against. The danger we face in fighting *license* is that we will go the other extreme and become *legalists*.

But what is a legalist? This is not a title that people usually apply to themselves. It is always "someone else" whom we think of as a legalist. No one wants to be known as the Supreme Legalist or the Legalist Par Excellence. We think of legalists as uncompromising, joyless nitpickers who are always correcting our speech and behavior in the tiniest of details.

The Pharisees are examples of legalists in that they crossed the line from contending for the faith to engaging in doctrinal minutiae. No human understanding of God can be perfect, so those who demand complete uniformity are chasing the wind. This does not mean, however, that just any teaching should be tolerated or even allowed to receive a hearing.

The history of the church has shown that doctrine must be defended and protected or it will become corrupt, losing its original power. Who are the guardians

of the truths of the church? Fortunately, we have the Bible as a fixed depository of doctrine. We can always go back to the source, the Scriptures, and check our teachings against the words of the inspired authors who wrote these books. Because we are not engaged in adding or subtracting from Scripture, we have a resource that transcends time and culture and can be applied to any human situation.

The church will always need faithful, experienced teachers who have immersed themselves in the Word. The church will always require defenders who will rescue the prey of self-serving teachers who would lead them astray. Jude knew this well, and we should not hesitate to heed his example.

PRAYER

O Lord our God, may we never take the teachings of Your Word for granted. Even as we make allowance for the doctrinal differences among believers, may we never develop a spirit of accommodation when it comes to false teaching. Keep us pure and spotless. Keep us from the fire. Guard us from error. We pray this in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

The Christian faith is worthy of our passionate defense.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON:

Next week's lesson we begin a quarter on Christian commitment. Study 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10, "[Visible for God.](#)"

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