

Jude

Tonight we will start the book of Jude. Jude is a neglected book of the New Testament. At the beginning of this course I said that we might study Jude if we had time. I then decided that we should pay attention to all the books.

How do you make sense of a book like Jude? It is a difficult one. Here is some advice about how to read difficult books. First, sit down with your favorite translation, and read the book. Then, get a version that is really different, like today's English version or the New Living Bible or the King James, and read it in that. Go back and read it again. Read it many times until it starts to sink in, and you start to see some patterns. Write down a few notes to yourself, and read a good introduction to it. A study Bible, or a Bible dictionary is a good thing to use too.

It is easy to make mistakes about Jude. Some people say Jude is a book that is all against heresy, that it is a harsh book denouncing false teachers. They say it is trying to repudiate some heresy, and trying to do it by threatening the judgment of God on unbelievers. Critics think that it was written by somebody who had very little of the love and tenderness of Christ, and was simply insisting on Christian orthodoxy, getting angry at groups that were deviating. That is a critic's viewpoint. Even conservative Christians can view Jude essentially as a negative book that denounces heretics.

Now it is certainly true that there is warning, and even denunciation of falsehood in the Book of Jude, but there is a lot more to it than that. Look at verse 3, in which he says, "Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints." What he is saying essentially is, "I want to write you a really positive letter of encouragement, but now this trouble has come up, and because I care about you, dear friends, I am now writing you to urge you to fight for the faith that has been delivered over to you." Why does he have to do this? Because verse 4 says, "Certain men, whose condemnation was written about long ago, have infiltrated among you. They are godless." Now what is their godlessness? What is their heresy? The answer is that they are changing the grace of our God into a license for immorality, and they deny Jesus Christ our only sovereign and Lord.

Here is the central charge that we are going to notice throughout the book of Jude. The central charge is that they are perverting the grace of God. They are denying the practical implications of the lordship of Christ. Here is a profile of these false teachers, of these men who are condemned and are driving us away from the true faith that has been entrusted to us. Their main problem is that they see the generous grace of God as an occasion for license, self-indulgence and sensuality. They take the liberty that is given to them by the grace of God and say, "Because of Christ's grace, we can live any way we wish." This is what verse 4 means; it is a rejection of the lordship of Christ. It is a contemporary problem, too. The idea that people have today is that Christ can be your Savior, but He does not have to be your Lord. He delivers you, washes away all of our sins; all you have to do is say, "I'm sorry," and then you are forgiven. That means you can live any way you want.

The heresy that Jude describes is not a heresy of some defective Christology or some doctrine they got wrong. Rather, they challenge the basic idea that Christ is Lord. Look at the way he describes them. In verse 7 he compares their lusts to the lusts of Sodom and Gomorrah. In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. Verse 8 says, "They defile their flesh. They pollute their bodies." In verse 12 he says, "There are blemishes at your love feast, eating without the slightest qualm," as if when they go to the love feast, or the Lord's Supper, they indulge their lusts by eating large amounts of food. Verse 16 and 18 discuss how they follow their instincts.

They are like unreasoning animals, malcontents, and they are divisive. Verse 19 says, “They lack the Spirit.” They only understand the things of the flesh. The NIV says, “Shepherds who feed only themselves”—literally it says, “They shepherd themselves.”

‘Shepherding themselves’ can mean two or three things. It may mean that they are leaders who are only interested in their own well-being. However, I think it means that they do not have any shepherds over them. Shepherding means to take care of the sheep, give them food and so forth. Their desire is to feed themselves well. They do not have Christ, the great Shepherd, over them. They do not have any under shepherds in the church over them. They have rejected authority. Their interest is simply in taking care of themselves. Jude says in verses 5-7, “They are going to be punished, the way that self-indulgent generation that came out of Egypt was punished, the ones that always wanted meat, always wanted more to eat and drink. They will be punished the way rebellious angels were punished. They will be punished the way Sodom and Gomorrah were punished by eternal fire.” They have left their place. They have perverted religion.

But that is not all there is to it. The church has a responsibility, not to simply to warn the false teachers about judgment, but to be prepared by building itself up. “Guard yourselves against them,” he says. Our responsibility is to be prepared.

In verse 22 there is a textual variant. A textual variant is when there are two words that are very close to each other and both make sense, but they have slightly different meanings like, ‘dove’ and ‘dive.’ In verse 22, there is one word that means ‘have mercy’ and there is another word that means ‘rebuke.’ They are close enough in the Greek that half of the old copies of the Greek New Testament use each word. I believe, as do many other people, that the better word for verse 22 is, “Reprove those who doubt.” In other words, as you deal with heretics who live this way, they are not all hardened. Some of them may not be entirely sure they are living the right way. With this group of people, work with them to reprove them.

The other group of people you should “snatch from the fire and save them.” Again, the idea is that some of them may be very open to being corrected and brought back. We should denounce them, “win them and show mercy mixed with fear toward even the clothing stained by their corrupted flesh.” The act of mercy is to show them their mistake, reprove, rebuke and show them their error. Some people may be very open to being corrected, so you could snatch them out of the difficulty. With others, you want to have mercy that is mixed with fear. What he means by that is, as you mercifully try to bring them back, be careful and beware because they may try to persuade you too, and their corruption may corrupt you. So be merciful, but do not be overly confident in your ability to win them back. Go in with fear and trembling. Go in realizing that you could be weakened, and that you are prone to error and could possibly fall. Go in resolving to hate their sin. There is a saying, “Hate the sin, love the sinner.” This seems like it is directly from Jude. There is no place in the Bible where it actually says, “Hate the sin, love the sinner,” but this is very close. Be afraid of it, but do not be too afraid. Even though you are responsible to keep yourself and not fall, verses 24 and 25 say, “To him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy...” It was a place for fear, but remember that God keeps you. “To the only God, our Savior, be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord before all ages now and forevermore.” Thus, the message of Jude.