

False Teachers who Infiltrated the Early Church

Jude 12-25

Jude 12-16: *“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; ¹³ raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. ¹⁴ Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, ¹⁵ to execute judgment 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.” ¹⁶ These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage.”*

Background Notes

There are two kinds of false teachers within the Christian church today: false teachers who are true believers, and false teachers who are unbelievers. False teachers who are believers are trusting in Christ for salvation, but they are off base when it comes to some other area (or areas) of doctrine.

Unbelievers who are false teachers are the unregenerate - they are apostate. They turn away from the truth. They deny the deity of Christ. They do not believe in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross as substitute for the forgiveness of our sins. They deny the bodily resurrection of Christ. They teach that there are many ways of salvation. Some of these false teachers leave the church, but unfortunately many of them stay and continue to spread their false doctrines within the flock.

In this epistle Jude denounced the unregenerate false teachers, the apostates of the 1st century, who had infiltrated the early church (v4). Verse 19 makes it very clear that they were unbelievers, because they did not have the Holy Spirit.

In verse 14 is a quote from “Enoch’s prophecy.” Where did Jude get this prophecy? The Lord probably revealed this information when He inspired Jude to write this epistle.

Doctrinal Points

1. False teachers are described by five metaphors.

In order to save time and be concise, I’m going to read some excerpts from a devotional essay I wrote some time ago on the epistle of Jude. It’s entitled **“Five Metaphors”** and it can be found under the link for *Devotions for Growing Christians* on the Growing Christians website: <http://www.growingchristians.org/devotions/five-metaphors>

“Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Jude purposely chose five metaphors to describe certain individuals who had infiltrated some of the churches near the end of the first century. “Hidden reefs, clouds without water, trees without fruit, wild waves of the sea and wandering stars” are all metaphors that were used to vividly portray the men who had crept into those churches.

The five metaphors in verses 12 & 13 not only denounced these infiltrators, but they also exposed their deceptive characteristics and insidious tactics. Furthermore, the metaphors not only revealed the nature of these first century heretics, but they also vividly portray the character and tactics of false teachers and apostates within the church today.

*“**Hidden reefs.**” The imagery of the first metaphor, "hidden reefs," is quite graphic. The apostates of the book of Jude looked fine on the surface. They were even participating in the fellowship suppers or "love feasts" of the early Church. But under the deceptive surface, their teachings were the hidden means of shipwreck for unsuspecting believers.*

In the same way, false teachers who are hidden in “Christian” churches today could easily shipwreck the faith of the unwary. Many of the cults, for example, claim to be “Christian,” and don't look dangerous on the surface. They have nice church buildings and pleasant smiles, and they emphasize the importance of loving God and doing good. But below the surface they are like hidden reefs that cause the shipwreck of unsuspecting seekers. The cults, by definition, deny the deity of Christ and, in the final analysis, they practice a works-oriented religion.

*“**Clouds without water.**” The second metaphor used for the apostates of Jude's day was "clouds without water, carried along by winds." This metaphor is also very descriptive, especially if you live in the Middle East. After the long and hot dry season, the thirsty land craves the coming of the rains. How disappointing, then, when fast-moving clouds arrive without water. They give every impression of promise, but they produce no rain.*

How descriptive - not only of the teachers in Jude's day, but also of many false teachers within Christendom today. They give the impression that they have water for thirsty souls, but there is no substance or life to their message.

A characteristic of the clouds without water is that they are carried along by winds. This part of the metaphor definitely suggests that the apostates were governed by the prevailing winds of the culture. Many false teachers today are likewise carried along by the prevailing ideas of the culture in which they operate. Believers in every generation are called on to withstand the satanic winds of the culture in which they live.

*“**Autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted.**” This is the third metaphor that Jude used to expose the unbelieving teachers and their false teachings. In the Middle East, if a fruit tree hasn't produced fruit by autumn, it's obvious that something is wrong with that tree. If a further examination shows that the tree has no root system, the evidence is that the tree is dead. In fact, it's doubly dead - **no fruit** and **no root**.*

What an accurate picture of unbelieving religious teachers - in that day and now! For example, the typical unbelieving “Christian minister” has plenty of good activity going on in the church, but over the long haul that church produces no real spiritual fruit.

The reason there's no fruit is that salvation in Christ alone is not preached, because it is not believed! Warnings about the judgment to come are not proclaimed because these so-called ministers don't believe that there is a coming judgment or a literal hell! God's verdict on such fruitless and rootless trees is that they are doubly dead.

***"Wild waves of the sea."** The fourth metaphor for the heretics within the church is "wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam." Think, for example, of the shameful behavior of some militant homosexual activists who are within the ranks of Christian churches and ministries today. As wild waves of the sea, they crash head-on into divine barriers when they openly preach and practice a lifestyle that is clearly condemned by God's Word. While we must reach out and do what we can to rescue people who are being swept under by these wild waves, we must stand firm and unmoved on the standards of the solid rock of God's Word.*

"Wandering stars."** "Wandering stars" is the last of the five metaphors that Jude used to draw a verbal picture of the heretical leaders. How tragic, but how graphically true, is this picture of unbelieving leaders in the Church today. They pose as guiding lights for the searching parishioners, but in actuality they lead them astray from the truth. **We must constantly set our compass course by the fixed star of God's Word!

The Scripture leaves no doubt as to the destiny of these wandering stars. They are marked out for condemnation (v 4), and will be consigned to black darkness forever (v13).

The five metaphors selected by the Holy Spirit had the effect of opening the eyes of many first century Christians, and exposing the heretical infiltrators. It is the intention of the Holy Spirit to use these five metaphors in Jude to help unmask unbelieving leaders within the Church today, and lay bare their subtle ensnaring tactics." (From "Five Metaphors")

2. True disciples are preserved by five activities.

Jude 17-23: *"But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: ¹⁸ how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. ¹⁹ These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit. ²⁰ But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. ²² And on some have compassion, making a distinction; ²³ but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh."*

In these verses, Jude reminded his readers that the apostles had predicted the rise of false teachers who would cause divisions. He then exhorted his readers to be involved in five activities that would protect them (and us) from the false teachers and their false teaching.

a. **Build yourselves up in the faith** (v20). We are built up in our faith by studying and obeying the word of God.

b. **Pray in the Holy Spirit** (v20). Praying in the Holy Spirit means to pray as guided by the Holy Spirit and in line with Scripture. (It does not imply praying in tongues.)

c. **Stay in the love of God** (v21). Don't let anything negative come between you and your walk with the Lord. Stay in the sunshine of His love!

d. **Keep looking for the Lord's return** (v21). The blessed hope of the Lord's return is certainly evidence of His mercy toward us. Focusing on the imminent return of the Lord has a purifying effect on our lives.

e. **Show compassion to the deceived** (verse 22). One category of deceived people would be the young and naïve believers who are taken in by some aspect of false teaching – both in Jude's day and today. Show compassion to these unsuspecting and untaught believers! Draw them back from false teaching gently - with truth and love.

Another category of deceived people would be unbelievers who are involved in all kinds of immorality – the immoral lifestyle that was condoned (and even practiced) by the false teachers. Try to rescue them from their gross sins before they end up in hell - but be careful not to allow yourself to become contaminated in the process (v23).

For example: A Christian couple, former students of mine, got involved in a ministry to help people who were involved in pornography. Sadly, they got too close to the problems and sin from which they were trying to rescue people. As a result becoming involved in the sin of pornography, their marriage ended in divorce, and there was a lot of other bad fallout in and from their lives as well.

So be careful. Be a true disciple! True disciples are preserved by five beneficial activities.

Practical Application

Don't worry about stumbling in Heaven.

Jude 24-25: *"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,"²⁵ To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen."*

The last verses of Jude are a benediction - one of the most beautiful benedictions ever written! There is great and encouraging truth in this doxology. It gives believers the assurance that God is able to preserve us from falling into the error and sin of insidious false teachings - if we remain rooted and growing in the Lord.

As in Jude's day, believers today are vulnerable to doctrinal error - but the Lord is able to keep us from stumbling and falling into error. And here is even better news: when we get to Heaven, we will be presented before Him without fault! In Heaven, we will not have to worry about falling into error or sin - because we will be faultless (v24). We won't have to worry about stumbling in Heaven!