

Building Yourselves Up On

Your Most Holy Faith

Jude 1:14-25

With Study Questions

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7/23/2000*

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Preface: Evil in the Name of God

How often we hear accusations against the church! Historically and politically we hear of people killing one another in the name of God. Sociologically and psychologically we witness those who manipulate and financially capitalize via religion. This type of thing is very discouraging and is often used by our friends, to whom we seek to witness, as an excuse to avoid the Christian faith altogether.

True But Insufficient Assertions

Of course to dismiss Jesus because of the followers of Jesus is a senseless disposition. One does not dismiss mathematics because math students often get the answers wrong. One does not dismiss truth because those who seek to follow truth will often lie.

At the same time our unbelieving friend's assertions aren't altogether invalid. We would surely be fighting a losing battle if we sought to argue that there is no evil done in the name of God. The Christian faith will always be superior to those who believe it (or say they believe it.) However, what our friends must know, and what we must know, is that this evil which has infiltrated the church has not taken God by surprise, nor will it go unpunished.

Spots in Our Love Feasts

I will not bother to go into detail regarding that which was already covered in the first thirteen verses. Namely, that certain men have crept into the church unnoticed. These men are dreamers who defile the flesh preaching heresy and encouraging ungodly behavior. They are raging waves of the sea foaming up their own shame. Arguably, it is these men who bring reproach¹ upon the name of God in the world. They are also spots in the church's love feasts.

There is one thing you must know (and I think Jude wanted his readers to know) if you ever intend to be a servant in the church. At whatever capacity (pastor, deacon, elder, usher, carpet cleaner, table server or neighborly friend), at best, you're interacting with people who are every bit as sinful as you. And at very least, there will be some pretty evil people who don the name of Christ.

¹ I use the word reproach rather than persecution because we know that the world will persecute the godly. Reproach, on the other hand is when the church becomes so obscene that it devolves into an object of ridicule (1 Kings 9:7).

I. Executing Judgment

As discouraging as this is, we must not allow this to deter us from our proper course of action. It is part of God's divine plan and He will ultimately exact His judgments upon them. We are to imitate Jesus, as Peter wrote, **"Who when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed *Himself* to Him who judges righteously"** (1 Peter 2:23). Jude's readers were going to see this evil reach a fever pitch. In order for them not to think some strange thing were happening or that somehow God's plan was being thwarted, Jude writes,

"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" (Jude 1:14-16).

A Coming Judgment

Once again, Jude is not quoting from the Old Testament but from either oral tradition or the apocrypha (1 Enoch). Nonetheless, his words are authoritative. Enoch, the seventh from Adam, who walked with God, even prior to the flood, foretold of the men with whom the early church must contend. These detractors from the true faith, many of whom were ethnic Jews but not true Jews (Revelation 2:9; 3:9), would soon find themselves to be under the heavy hand of God's judgment (first with the destruction of the temple [Matthew 24] and then ultimately before the tribunal of God Himself.

Not Well-Meaning

One thing I think it is important to note here is that these aren't well-meaning ministers who may be mistaken about this or that verse or even doctrine. These are ungodly malcontents who continually complain, only think of themselves, only gratify themselves, and will ingratiate themselves to those in the church in order to gain advocates. Jude reminds them of what the Apostles taught,

Divisive “Last Times” Mockers

“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” (Jude 1:17-19).

Tares Among the Wheat

As the old covenant was coming to an end and the new covenant was beginning, Christians had to be aware of the fact that, even in the church, things were going to become quite evil. The fact that the new covenant had begun, and the full expression of God as seen through His Son, Jesus had commenced, was far from a guarantee that the church would now be fully chaste and pristine. There are tares among the wheat, and even the wheat could stand some improvement.

Spirit or Flesh?

Jude warns his readers that the church would have carnal people, walking according to their own lusts and causing divisions. It has been my observation that much of what we see today done in the name of the Spirit are actually the inclinations of the flesh. People believe the Spirit guides them by their feelings. We all must remember that if it is what we feel like doing (whether good or bad) by definition, it is the flesh and not the Spirit. Jude says these dreamers do not have the Spirit.

II. But You...

Jude finally arrives at a positive exhortation to those who have not gone the way of Cain.

“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” (Jude 1:20-23).

Building Faith

Instead of following the faith of the false teachers, who turn the grace of God into lewdness and the denial of God altogether (verse 4), they are to build themselves up in that most holy faith that was once for all delivered to the saints (verse 3). As the church father, Polycarp, wrote to the Philippians, **“If you study the Epistles of the blessed apostle Paul you can be built up in the faith given to you.”**² Since the context of this passage is the refutation of the false teacher promoting a false faith, the building up in the faith must be the knowing and embracing of the foundation of the Christian faith, namely the apostles and prophets, i.e. scripture (Ephesians 2:20).

Prayer

Instead of being carnal, divisive people, who walk according to their own lusts, we are to pray in the Spirit. Again, praying in the Spirit does not mean allowing our prayer life to be governed by fleshly inclinations we try to pass off (even to ourselves) as the Spirit. There are at least two elements of praying in the Spirit.

One is to pray in such a way as to know we are praying to our Father who hears us when we cry out Abba Father. His Spirit has witnessed with our spirit in such a way that we can know this.

Secondly it is to pray in a manner consistent with the Spirit-inspired, self-revealed will of God, namely the Scriptures. To neglect prayer is to neglect God’s clear call. Christians never graduate from the need for a prayer life.

Keep in Love

We are told to keep ourselves in the love of God. Whether he means God’s love for us or our love for God or our love for each other is not specified. It is safe, and a general rule however, to seek to know and walk in the sphere of God’s love in every respect. Any understanding of the Christian faith which rules out God’s love for His children or neglects the call for His children to love Him and each other is a false understanding of the faith.

Looking for Mercy

It is interesting that Jude writes for us to keep in love and look for mercy and not vice-versa. Those are who kept by the power of God through faith (1 Peter 1:5) most assuredly can look for, and expect, the mercy of God to be theirs unto eternal life.

² Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude* (Eerdmans, Reprinted 1998), p. 199.

Compassion

Finally, the Christian is not to be ambivalent toward those in their midst who are in danger of falling prey to the false teachers. Although this is a difficult text with some variance, it seems to suggest that we gently and compassionately lead some away from error while others must be pulled out violently, as if they were in a fire. All the time being careful to avoid being tainted by the filth of the sinful garment.

Benediction

Jude finishes with a beautiful benediction.

“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” (Jude 1:24, 25).

Presented Faultless

Just in case we begin to think that it is by our own power that we can quarantine these false teacher and insulate ourselves from their disease—just in case we begin to think that it is by our own excellence and ability that we will succeed in presenting ourselves faultless before the presence of His glory—Jude gives glory where glory is due.

Kept From Stumbling

It is Jesus who is able to keep us from stumbling **“Though (we) he fall, he (we) shall not be utterly cast down; For the Lord upholds (us) him with His hand” (Psalm 37:24).** It is He who presents us faultless, without spot or blemish, before a glory that would otherwise consume us like fire.

Wisdom, Glory, Majesty, Dominion and Power Forever

And just in case we begin to glory in our own wisdom and sensibilities, we learn that it is God our Savior, who alone is wise, and the source of all wisdom. All glory and majesty are rightly ascribed to Him. All dominion and power rightly belong to Him, not merely in the future, but now and forever. And it is this God in whom we trust and stand. Amen.

Questions for Study

1. Has evil ever been done in the name of God, religion or Christianity?
2. How would you respond to someone who used this as an excuse to reject the Christian faith altogether?
3. Are evil people in the church something outside of God's ultimate plan?
4. What should our response be to evil? Discuss the example of Jesus as taught in 1 Peter 2:23.
5. What will happen to those who seek to detract from the true Christian faith?
6. Are these detractors well-meaning?
7. How is the Spirit often mistaken for the flesh among Christians?
8. How are we to build up our faith?
9. What does it, or does it not, mean to pray in the Spirit?
10. In what respect are Christians to keep in love and look for mercy?
11. How should Christians respond to those in the church who might fall prey to the false teachers?
12. Why do you suppose Jude ends with this benediction? Discuss the components of the benediction.