

Heresy in the Church?

Bible Reading - The letter of Jude (NLT)

¹ This letter is from Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ and a brother of James.

I am writing to all who have been called by God the Father, who loves you and keeps you safe in the care of Jesus Christ.

² May God give you more and more mercy, peace, and love.

³ Dear friends, I had been eagerly planning to write to you about the salvation we all share. But now I find that I must write about something else, urging you to defend the faith that God has entrusted once for all time to his holy people.

⁴ I say this because some ungodly people have wormed their way into your churches, saying that God's marvellous grace allows us to live immoral lives. The condemnation of such people was recorded long ago, for they have denied our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

⁵ So I want to remind you, though you already know these things, that the Lord first rescued the nation of Israel from Egypt, but later he destroyed those who did not remain faithful. ⁶ And I remind you of the angels who did not stay within the limits of authority God gave them but left the place where they belonged. God has kept them securely chained in prisons of darkness, waiting for the great Day of Judgment. ⁷ And don't forget Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighbouring towns, which were filled with immorality and every kind of sexual perversion. Those cities were destroyed by fire and serve as a warning of the eternal fire of God's judgment.

⁸ In the same way, these people—who claim authority from their dreams—live immoral lives, defy authority, and scoff at supernatural beings. ⁹ But even Michael, one of the mightiest of the angels, did not dare accuse the devil of blasphemy, but simply said, "The Lord rebuke you!" (This took place when Michael was arguing with the devil about Moses' body.) ¹⁰ But these people scoff at things they do not understand. Like unthinking animals, they do whatever their instincts tell them, and so they bring about their own destruction. ¹¹ What sorrow awaits them! For they follow in the footsteps of Cain, who killed his brother. Like Balaam, they deceive people for money. And like Korah, they perish in their rebellion.

¹² When these people eat with you in your fellowship meals commemorating the Lord's love, they are like dangerous reefs that can shipwreck you.

They are like shameless shepherds who care only for themselves. They are like clouds blowing over the land without giving any rain. They are like trees in autumn that are doubly dead, for they bear no fruit and have been pulled up by the roots. ¹³ They are like wild waves of the sea, churning up the foam of their shameful deeds. They are like wandering stars, doomed forever to blackest darkness.

¹⁴ Enoch, who lived in the seventh generation after Adam, prophesied about these people. He said, "Listen! The Lord is coming with countless thousands of his holy ones ¹⁵ to execute judgment on the people of the world. He will convict every person of all the ungodly things they have done and for all the insults that ungodly sinners have spoken against him."

¹⁶ These people are grumblers and complainers, living only to satisfy their desires. They brag loudly about themselves, and they flatter others to get what they want.

¹⁷ But you, my dear friends, must remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ predicted. ¹⁸ They told you that in the last times there would be scoffers whose purpose in life is to satisfy their ungodly desires. ¹⁹ These people are the ones who are creating divisions among you. They follow their natural instincts because they do not have God's Spirit in them.

²⁰ But you, dear friends, must build each other up in your most holy faith, pray in the power of the Holy Spirit, ²¹ and await the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will bring you eternal life. In this way, you will keep yourselves safe in God's love.

²² And you must show mercy to those whose faith is wavering. ²³ Rescue others by snatching them from the flames of judgment. Show mercy to still others, but do so with great caution, hating the sins that contaminate their lives.

²⁴ Now all glory to God, who is able to keep you from falling away and will bring you with great joy into his glorious presence without a single fault. ²⁵ All glory to him who alone is God, our Saviour through Jesus Christ our Lord. All glory, majesty, power, and authority are his before all time, and in the present, and beyond all time! Amen.

SERMON

The scripture read to us today was the letter of Jude - the third shortest letter in the New Testament.

Not a letter often read in Church, perhaps, so who was Jude?

Well it turns out that the name Jude is a shortened form of the Jewish name Judah or Judas. It was a very common name among the Jews, but Bible scholars have narrowed it down to Jude, the brother of Jesus.

Apparently, Jude wrote his letter both to Jewish and gentile believers and its purpose was to correct a heresy which some individuals were attempting to teach members of the early Church.

So why has God asked me to talk to you about this letter today?

Heresy? Is today's Church engaged in aspects of heretical teaching? Well, bear with me for a moment or two.

The purpose of this letter was to be to teach people about the truth that salvation is available solely through faith in Jesus Christ. In verse 3 Jude says, ***'My dear friends, I had been eagerly planning to write to you about the salvation we share, but.....'***

BUT..... Instead, Jude felt he must warn them about certain immoral men circulating amongst them who were perverting the grace of God (he tells us this in verse 4). Apparently these false teachers were trying to convince believers that being saved by grace gave them licence to sin, since 'their sins would no longer be held against them', they taught.

Have you found yourself being subtly - or even overtly - taught, that, 'you don't need to worry about that little sin, or that big sin; God will forgive you because you are covered by His wonderful grace'.

God's grace IS wonderful, but His grace (His unmerited favour and unconditional love), cannot abide sin and in fact God HATES sin and evil. We are reminded of this fact throughout the Old Testament, especially in the book of Deuteronomy.

Yes, if and when we confess our sin, 1 John 1 verse 9 reassures us that ***'God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.'***

So, what's the fuss? Well, as in previous months, the message God wants me to bring today is once again a difficult one. You see, if we continue sinning and remain unrepentant, unbothered or uncaring about our sinful behaviour, then God's Word says something we need to take very seriously:

In Hebrews 10 v 26 and 27 it says this:

'Dear friends, if we deliberately continue sinning after we have received knowledge of the truth, there is no longer any sacrifice that will cover these sins. There is only the terrible expectation of God's judgment and the raging fire that will consume his enemies.'

Peter warns us similarly In 2 Peter chapter 2

There are many other Old Testament, as well as New Testament, Scriptures that give us the same or similar warnings. For example you could read 2 Kings 22, Psalm 7, Jeremiah 36, Acts 2, Luke 13, the list really is quite extensive....

Jude was only too aware of this; so much so, that he felt it imperative to warn the early Church and teach them the truth about God's saving grace, and tell them of the condemnation and punishment from God that such heretical teachers can expect.

In verses 5 to 7 he warns his readers with three examples that those who do not repent of their sin are doomed to destruction. First he reminds us that God destroyed those Israelites who did not remain faithful to Him after He brought them out of slavery in Egypt.

Secondly Jude tells us that even angels who have been disobedient to God are imprisoned awaiting judgement;

And thirdly he refers to what happened to the immoral and sexually perverted people of Sodom and Gomorrah - They were destroyed by fire.

Eight verses of Jude's short letter describe the behaviour of the apostate teachers at that time.

Here is a list of some of their character traits:

In verse 8 we learn they are immoral and reject authority. Study Bible notes strongly suggest the phrase '**live immoral lives**' here in the NLT version or '**pollute their own bodies**' as it is rendered in the NIV translation, is a direct reference by Jude to sexual perversion, and homosexuality in particular. If so, it is no wonder such men would not come under the authority of church leaders. In those days homosexuality was scorned upon. Today, there is a growing number of churches and leaders who are happy to accept overtly practicing homosexuals into membership and even into positions of leadership.

I prepared this part of my sermon on 15th January 2016 and as I did so, the Archbishop of Canterbury was spending the week with senior Bishops and church leaders at a meeting of global church delegates in Canterbury. I learned from the BBC News that on that very day the meeting took the decision to suspend the US Episcopal Church from the Anglican communion due to its liberal views about homosexuality and what it and the world calls 'gay marriage'. In God's eyes this cannot constitute a marriage - it is wicked and

contrary to His Holy Word! As we here know, Biblical marriage is the union of a man to a woman or a woman to a man.

Furthermore, I was particularly troubled in my spirit last Saturday when the BBC News reported that a new survey showed, for the first time, that more Anglicans in England support gay and lesbian couples marrying, than oppose it.

Now, I am only too aware that The Bible says we are called to love all people including those who have chosen a homosexual or lesbian lifestyle but we are to hate all sin, just as God does, whether it involves people of the same sex or the opposite sex. This is both an Old Testament and a New Testament truth.

Leviticus chapter 18 describes homosexual sex as '**detestable**' to God and Romans chapter 1 defines lesbian and homosexual sex as '**a perversion.**'

I felt a need to speak clearly about these matters today, in obedience to God, since many church leaders and preachers seem to prefer to avoid the subject.

Returning now to Jude's letter. Jude describes the apostate teachers of his time as '**ungodly men who have wormed their way into the churches**'.

Sadly, it seems to me that increasingly today, there is a blasé acceptance by the Church to permit those men and women who are worming their way into churches, to share their own teaching, which bears little or no resemblance to the Word of God!

No wonder that 2 Timothy 4 verse 3 warns us as follows:

'A time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear.'

I and many like me, believe that time is upon us!

Coming back to the Scripture passage; in verse 10, Jude tells us these false teachers scoff at things they do not understand and do whatever things their instincts tell them – he compares them to animals and says their ungodly ways will bring about their own downfall.

He goes on in verse 11 to tell us that they follow in the evil steps of Cain, Balaam and Korah and they will perish in their rebellion.

You may recall that Cain murdered his brother Abel, Balaam deliberately disobeyed God and his donkey was miraculously given a voice by God in order to rebuke the man; and little known Korah was one of Esau's sons. He rebelled by doing something expressly forbidden by God (in his case burning incense)

and God opened up the ground and it swallowed him alive killing him and his entire family.

This is quite serious stuff isn't it?

And, let's remind ourselves here of something very important. Jude is talking to New Testament Church members. And he says that people under the New Covenant grace of God who are rebellious, will be judged just as people were in Old Testament times!

Verses 12 and 13 tell us even more about these heretical teachers: they are dangerous and their teaching can shipwreck our faith, they are totally selfish, they promise things but do not deliver, and they are dead, and so bear no fruit. Jude says '**They are doomed forever to blackest darkness**'.

'**Doomed forever**', says Jude; God's grace will NOT save them or people today who are like them – unless they repent! Do not listen to or be swayed by such teachers. Let me encourage us all to check what we are being taught at Church or in Christian books, by so-called men of God, to ensure their teaching is in line with the Holy Scriptures. If their teaching doesn't stack up, discard and flee from it, lest it shipwrecks your faith. Jesus, Himself warns us about these people. In Matthew 7 verses 15 and 16 He says: "**Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves. You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act**".

So if they do not act in accordance with the Word of God then consider them vicious wolves who are out to deceive you and destroy your faith.

In verse 14, Jude quotes Enoch who prophesied hundreds of years earlier that '**these people are grumblers and complainers living only to satisfy themselves.**' 'They flatter others' he said 'in order to get what they want.'

We are to be on the lookout for signs of these things in anyone who leads our churches, and also those who are from outside our church but are invited to preach and teach our congregations.

This is why I remind you to test everything I say here against what you read in Scripture.

After telling us about these people, Jude then reminds us what the apostles said concerning these End-Times false teachers – their sole purpose would be to '**satisfy their own desires**'. He said they would create division amongst the Church (which we see even more so today with every passing decade).

What are the two biggest things that are causing division in the Church today? Homosexuality and 'gay marriage'.

And what is the root cause of people causing division in the Church with their heretical and false teaching?

Jude tells us in verse 19. ***'They do not have God's Spirit in them.'***

The Holy Spirit is 'the comforter' as Jesus called Him when he promised to send Him to us. The role of the Holy Spirit is to sanctify us, and make us holy like Jesus, in every possible way.

If these teachers do not have God's Spirit in them, then they cannot produce the fruit of the Spirit which according to Galatians chapter 5 is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

When the Holy Spirit is invited to take up residence in your soul, He will illuminate the Word of God for you. He will check your Spirit (if you consider doing or saying something ungodly), and He will gradually make you aware of false teaching.

Jude concludes now by sharing with his audience the antidote to these heretical teachers.

He says this:

'Build each other up in your faith.'

Next, he says ***'Pray in the power of the Holy Spirit'***. There truly is power in prayer, and, if God is speaking to you today, or convicting you of something that's not right in your life, please do feel free to ask one of us to pray with you privately before you leave.

The third antidote to false teachers is this: ***'Await the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ who WILL bring you to eternal life'***. He could say that because his hearers were born again believers. What an awesome promise for all who truly believe – that Jesus will bring us to eternal life.

He goes on:

'Keep yourselves safe in God's love.' And ***'Show mercy to those whose faith is wavering.'***

Finally Jude says, ***'show mercy to still others, but do so with great caution, hating the sins that contaminate their lives.'***

If a brother or sister in Christ confesses some sin or other to you, pray with them and encourage them, but be sure to remind them that God hates all sin, but also that He will forgive all who truly repent.

I am done now, but I want to close by summarising this important, and difficult teaching...

Jude wanted to talk to the church of his day about salvation, but found it more pressing, more urgent to talk about a heresy in the Church.

He said false teachers were teaching that '**God's marvellous grace allows us to live immoral lives**'.

He wanted to warn the people, and I believe God wants to warn us today, that continual unrepentant sin will bring upon us '**condemnation**' – that is the word that Jude uses.

Heretical teachers wormed their way into the churches Jude was addressing, and I believe that the level of unbiblical and untrue teaching in some parts of the Church is worse **now** than then. Jude says these people '**will perish in their rebellion**' and that the unrepentant are '**doomed forever**'.

To counteract the work of these false teachers Jude says we are to '**build each other up in faith**', to '**pray in the power of the Spirit**', and to '**await the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ who will bring to eternal life**' those who are living a repentant lifestyle and trusting and obeying Him.

We are also to '**show mercy to others, hating sin and keeping safe in God's love.**'

God's love is unconditional, so much so that He still loves deeply those who have even chosen to reject Him, but salvation is conditional.

Salvation, means to be saved by God from the consequences of our sin. Salvation is available only by believing that Jesus died for our sins, and by demonstrating in our daily lives our gratitude to God by obeying His teaching, confessing and turning away from our sin, and being born again, that is inviting the Holy Spirit to change us totally from the inside out.

For those who recognise this truth and are working it out in their daily lives, we can – as Jude puts it - be '**safe in God's love**' and '**await the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ who will bring us to eternal life**'!

Amen