

Contend for the Faith

The Invasion of False Teachers

Jude 4

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Scripture

Several weeks ago I began a new series of studies on the Letter of Jude, which I have titled, “Contend for the Faith.”

The Letter of Jude is an extremely important letter. It is extremely important because it is so relevant to our contemporary situation. Even though Jude wrote almost 2,000 years ago, he was addressing an issue that is exactly the same as one we face today. And that is the issue of false teaching creeping in to the church.

After beginning his letter with the normal introductory greetings, Jude immediately gave the reason for writing this letter. Jude wrote his letter to call believers to unite against heresy.

Let’s read about it as we study the invasion of false teachers in Jude 4. I will read Jude 3-4, although I will focus on verse 4:

³ Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. ⁴ **For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.** (Jude 3-4)

Introduction

Pollster George Barna offered an end-of-year review at the end of 2009 about what people thought about faith and Christianity. Here is part of what Barna discovered:

“Now that we are comfortable with the idea of being spiritual as opposed to devoutly Christian,” Barna pointed out, “Americans typically draw from a broad treasury of moral, spiritual and ethical sources of thought to concoct a uniquely personal brand of

faith. Feeling freed from the boundaries established by the Christian faith, and immersed in a postmodern society which revels in participation, personal expression, satisfying relationships, and authentic experiences, we become our own unchallenged spiritual authorities, defining truth and reality as we see fit.

“Consequently, more and more people are engaged in hybrid faiths, mixing elements from different historical eras and divergent theological perspectives,” Barna stated. “In some ways, we are creating the ultimate ecumenical movement, where nothing is deemed right or wrong, and all ideas, beliefs and practices are assigned equal validity. Everyone is invited to join the dialogue, enjoy the ride, and feel connected to a far-reaching community of believers. Screening or critiquing what that community believes is deemed rude and inappropriate. Pragmatism and relativism, rather than any sort of absolutism, has gained momentum.”

Some of the survey findings that related to this theme included:

- About half of all adults (45%) say they are willing to try a new church or even a new form of church.
- 71% say they will develop their own slate of religious beliefs rather than accept a package of beliefs promoted by a church or denomination.
- Only one-third (34%) believe in absolute moral truth.¹

We live in a culture in which a growing number of people do not believe that there is such a thing as absolute moral truth. And sadly, that view is growing in the church as well. But, worse, we see that the church is being invaded not only by those who do not believe in truth but even by those who teach heresy.

Lesson

Jude’s letter is a call to Christians to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. In today’s lesson I want to observe the invasion of false teachers.

¹ <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality/325-barna-studies-the-research-offers-a-year-in-review-perspective>.

I. False Teachers Have Entered the Church (4a)

So, first, notice that false teachers have entered the church.

Jude said in verse 4a, **“For certain people have crept in unnoticed. . . .”**

Truth has always been under attack.

It began in the Garden of Eden, when Satan twisted God’s Word and convinced Eve to disobey her Creator. This is so important that I want you to see it for yourself. Turn to Genesis 3:1-6 and notice how Satan distorted God’s Word:

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.

He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” ² And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

Ever since that day Satan, the father of lies (John 8:44), has tirelessly continued his vile offensive against divine truth (cf. Acts 20:29-30; Ephesians 6:10-18). As John MacArthur points out:

His goal is simple, to resist the advancement of God’s kingdom at any cost. His tactics are stealthy, as he baits his victims through deception and distortion. And his strategy is successful among unbelievers (within God’s sovereign limits), as the muddled quagmire of modern religion makes abundantly clear.²

² John MacArthur, *2 Peter and Jude* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2005), 157–158.

Even in Jude's day, divine truth was under attack. I have told you that Jude was a traveling minister. And within one generation of Jesus' death and resurrection, error and heresy was creeping in to the church.

Jude would have heard about false teaching and heresy creeping in to the churches in Asia Minor. Of the seven churches mentioned by John in Revelation, only two did not receive a rebuke (Smyrna and Philadelphia). Five of the churches mentioned in the book of Revelation received a rebuke:

1. Ephesus—for a loss of first love (2:1-7);
2. Pergamum—for false teaching (2:12-17);
3. Thyatira—for a lack of discernment and a toleration of heresy (2:18-29);
4. Sardis—for dead works (3:1-6); and
5. Laodicea—for being spiritually blind, bankrupt, naked, and lukewarm (3:14-22).

Jude said that **“certain people have crept in unnoticed.”** The word translated **crept in unnoticed** (*pareisduō*) appears only here in the New Testament. It has the connotation of slipping in secretly with an evil intention. In extrabiblical Greek it described the cunning craftiness of a lawyer who, through clever argumentation, infiltrated the minds of courtroom officials and corrupted their thinking. Having already permeated the church, the false teachers were in position to “secretly bring in destructive heresies” (2 Peter 2:1).³

God's church has always been attacked from those outside the church. People who make no profession of faith, who openly declare that they are not committed to the church oppose the teaching of the church. We understand that. That is normal.

However, what Jude warned against, and what we have seen in every generation since the beginning, is that there are **certain people who have crept in** to the church **unnoticed**, and they “se-

³ John MacArthur, *2 Peter and Jude* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2005), 158–159.

cretly bring in destructive heresies.”

I am currently reading a book by Iain D. Campbell titled, *Heroes and Heretics: Pivotal Moments in 20 Centuries of the Church*.⁴ Campbell gives a bird’s eye view of each of the preceding 20 centuries showing how the church in every century has had to deal with heretics.

Today there are almost 7 billion people in the world.⁵ Of that number just over 2 billion claim to be Christian.⁶ Included in that 2 billion are the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and all Protestant Churches. The Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church’s official doctrine regarding salvation, for example, is false and in error. And vast groups of Protestant Churches are liberal and thus false and in error.

These false teachers have entered the church. They teach in her pulpits, on the radio, in seminaries, in colleges, on the internet, write books, and so on.

I believe it is fair to say that there are far more false teachers in the church than there are true teachers in the church today. Just because someone calls himself a Christian teacher does not mean that he is teaching the Word of God properly.

I remember when I was studying theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. In an exam that was given by one of my professors (Dr. S. Lewis Johnson), I was asked to describe the theology of a certain theologian. As part of my answer I said that the theologian was a self-described “Calvinist.” When I got my paper back from the professor, he wrote in large red letters on the front of my exam, “A man is not always what he claims to be!” And then he went on to explain in what ways this particular theologian was not a Calvinist.

It is important to check out what a teacher teaches. You need to be like the Bereans, of whom it was said in Acts 17:11, “Now

⁴ Iain D. Campbell, *Heroes & Heretics: Pivotal Moments in 20 Centuries of the Church* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2009).

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_population.

⁶ <http://www.religioustolerance.org/worldrel.htm>.

these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” They had Paul and Silas teaching them the Word of God. And yet, they checked to make sure that what they were teaching was in accordance with infallible, inerrant, absolute truth of God’s Word.

II. False Teachers Face Certain Judgment (4b)

Second, false teachers face certain judgment.

Jude said in verse 4b, “For certain people have crept in unnoticed **who long ago were designated for this condemnation. . . .**”

God has promised to judge false teachers. And this judgment upon them has been promised for a long time.

A little further in his letter Jude referenced the condemnation of false teachers again in Jude 14-15:

¹⁴ It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, ¹⁵ to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him.”

The apostle Peter, whose second letter is very similar to Jude’s letter, puts it this way in 2 Peter 2:3-6:

³ And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

⁴ For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; ⁵ if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; ⁶ if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is

going to happen to the ungodly. . . .

Jude's brother, James, gave this warning in James 3:1, "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness." Anyone who teaches the Word of God needs to keep that in mind. But those who distort and destroy God's Word are promised sure judgment and God's condemnation.

III. False Teachers Deny the Deity of Jesus (4c-e)

And, third, false teachers deny the deity of Jesus.

Jude said in verse 4c-e, ". . . **ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.**"

Jude's portrayal of false teachers is wonderfully helpful to us. Fundamentally, false teachers deny the deity of Jesus Christ. And they deny the deity of Jesus in three ways.

A. *By Their Character (4c)*

First, false teachers deny the deity of Jesus by their character.

Jude said in verse 4c that false teachers were "**ungodly people.**"

False teachers are fundamentally **ungodly people**. Basically, "**ungodly people**" (*asebēs*) means "godless, without fear and reverence of God. It does not mean irreligious, but one who actively practices the opposite of what the fear of God demands. It is one characterized by immoral and impious behavior."⁷

The Early Church Fathers used the term *asebēs* to refer to atheists and heretics.⁸

These **ungodly people** claim to teach God's truth about God,

⁷ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, electronic ed. (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

⁸ John MacArthur, *2 Peter and Jude* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2005), 161.

Jesus, salvation, and so on. But, when you examine their lives closely, you notice that they do not practice what they preach.

B. By Their Conduct (4d)

Second, false teachers deny the deity of Jesus by their conduct.

Jude said in verse 4d that false teachers were those **“who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality.”**

The word **“sensuality”** (*asélgeia*) means “lasciviousness, license, debauchery, sexual excess, absence of restraint, insatiable desire for pleasure.”⁹

False teachers cannot restrain their sinful lusts and passions. And then, to make matters worse, in order to justify their **sensuality** they **pervert** the Word of God and say that God’s **grace** allows them to conduct their perverted behavior.

We see this, for example, with false teachers who endorse and/or practice homosexuality.

C. By Their Creed (4e)

And third, false teachers deny the deity of Jesus by their creed.

Jude said in verse 4e that false teachers **“deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.”**

How do false teachers **deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ**? They do it by their *teaching*. They may say, for example, that there are many ways to God. They may say that Jesus is just one of many ways to God. They may explain away Jesus’ miracles. They may explain away Jesus’ Virgin Birth and his resurrection.

And false teachers also **deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ** by their *actions*. They do not live their lives in con-

⁹ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, electronic ed. (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

formity to the Word of God. If one looked at their daily lives, one cannot notice a discernable difference between a false teacher and a non-Christian in the manner in which he lives.

And so, by denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ, false teachers confirm that they are counterfeit, or as Paul put it to Titus in Titus 1:16, “They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.”

Conclusion

In *The Story of Christian Theology*, theologian Roger Olson writes:

A popular misconception—perhaps a Christian urban legend—is that the United States Secret Service never shows bank tellers counterfeit money when teaching them to identify it. The agents who do the training, so the legend goes, show bank tellers only examples of genuine money so that when the phony money appears before them they will know it by its difference from the real thing. The story is supposed to make the point that Christians ought to study truth and never heresy.

The first time I heard the tale as a sermon illustration I intuited its falseness. On checking with the Treasury Department's Minneapolis Secret Service agent in charge of training bank tellers to identify counterfeit money, my suspicion was confirmed. He laughed at the story and wondered aloud who would start it and who would believe it. At my request he sent me a letter confirming that the Secret Service does show examples of counterfeit money to bank tellers.

I believe it is important and valuable for Christians to know not only theological correctness (orthodoxy) but also the ideas of those judged as heretics within the church's story. One reason is that it is almost impossible to appreciate the meaning of orthodoxy without understanding the heresies that forced its development.¹⁰

¹⁰ Roger Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999) 20-21.

It is certainly true that Christians need to know the truth. But, as Olson points out, it is also true that Christians need to know what error is as well.

This is particularly important because the church throughout the world has been invaded by false teachers. And you and I need to know how to spot false teachers. We will be able to spot them by their character, conduct, and creed.

May God help us to stand for the truth. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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PRAAYER:

Our Father, thank you for your Word. Thank you that your Word is the word of truth. We don't have to guess at what truth is. You have revealed it to us in the Scriptures.

Help each one of us here today to know the truth so that we can defend the truth against the invasion of false teachers.

And all of this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

To you who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ:

May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. Amen.