



# **THE BOOK OF JUDE**

Exposing and Avoiding Apostasy

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# JUDE, Lesson 1

## Exposing and Avoiding Apostasy

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### INTRODUCTION (vv.1-2)

The book of Jude is one of the most fascinating and relevant epistles in all of the New Testament. It constitutes the most extensive treatment on the subject of *apostasy* and *apostates* anywhere in Scripture. To discover its importance, one only needs to ask, why did the Holy Spirit inspire an entire letter to deal with apostates? The answer must be that this is something the church needs to be aware of and prepared for in these last days. The question that immediately arises for us is: *what is an apostate? How do they get into this condition? How are we to spot them and deal with them in the life of the church?*

Dr. Alexander MacLaren points out that "It is not a test to detect heretics, but rather to unmask hypocrites, and especially unconscious hypocrites."<sup>1</sup> Here is where the difficulty lies for many saints. How does one identify and deal with false brethren *without* becoming cynical and condemning ourselves? Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones dealt with this same issue and observed, "It is not that they [false brethren] are not nice and pleasing and even helpful, they are...but in a sense that is their greatest danger. Most false believers teach what is right, but their lives are wrong, and they are not conscious that they are hypocrites at all."<sup>2</sup>

With chilling clarity, Jude identifies *who false brethren are* and *what they do in the life of a church*. However, this letter is not just a spotlight to identify apostates; it is also a *battle cry*. Jude calls every real, born again child of God to arms. Jude is an explosive epistle. Be prepared to have any cotton-candy type of Christianity dissolved in your mind! With a pastor's heart, this mighty Apostle seeks to build God's people up in Christ so that they may proclaim and preserve the Gospel "*once for all delivered to the saints*" (v.3).

Jude provides us with specific ways to protect and strengthen ourselves from apostasy. It also supplies guidance on how to respond to others who are falling or who have already fallen. The context lowers the branch for us so that we might take some of its fruit.

### THE WRITER (v.1a)

There is only one Jude, who has a brother called James and is the half-brother of our Lord, mentioned in the New Testament (*Matt.13:55; Mark 6:3; Gal.1:19; 1 Cor.9:5*). The reason the epistle is called Jude instead of Judas is obviously to avoid any confusion about its author.

### Why didn't Jude take advantage of his family connection to the Lord?

Raymond Brown states, "Possibly the reason might have a root in his reverence for Jesus Christ—an attractive modesty, bearing in mind the doubts and oppositions he had displayed during Jesus'

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<sup>1</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, p.499

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.505

earthly life."<sup>3</sup> "But Jude is not writing as a historian, but a Christian leader. When Jude became a Christian, he had to change from knowing Jesus as his brother to acknowledging him as Christ the Lord. The fact that he does not refer to his physical relation to Christ shows us that no-one is too privileged to be exempt from the need to be converted."<sup>4</sup>

## THE READERS (v.1b)

Who were they?

### 1. The Called

- Christians are referred to as the called. (Cf. *Rom.1:6-7, 8:28; 1 Cor.1:24, 26; 1 Thess.5:24; Heb.3:1*)
- The church (*ekklesia*) means to call out and speaks of those who are called out for God's own purpose. (*Matt.16:18; Acts 9:31*)

"This characterization of the readers stresses the divine initiative in summoning them to salvation through the preaching of the Gospel...and the divine choice that took place before the beginning of time (*Eph.1:4*)."<sup>5</sup>

### 2. Beloved in God the Father

This term is a rare but precious term to every believer. It is designed to tell us that we are not only loved by God but we are doubly loved in a unique and special way. This is a word of comfort that is meant to give us a sense of assurance that God's love will never fail us.

- **Romans 8:35,37-39**—Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?...<sup>37</sup> But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

### 3. Kept for Jesus Christ

- Kept how and from what?
- Kept by the Holy Spirit from apostatizing until the day of redemption. (*Eph.1:13-14*)
- Kept from being deceived by false prophets and teachers. (*Matt.24:24; John 10:4-5*)
- Kept from shrinking back in faith. (*Heb.10:39*)
- Kept from ever becoming the property and pawn of the evil one. (*John 17:11,15*)

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<sup>3</sup> Raymond Brown as quoted by D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Message of 2 Peter and Jude*, p.166

<sup>4</sup> Hiebert, p.167

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.213

"Keeping is a more comprehensive word than 'guarding,' and the idea behind the word can be best illustrated by a shepherd's care for his sheep. It is the business of the shepherd to 'keep' the sheep. That means that he always keeps his eye on them. He watches them, supervising them the whole time and taking care of them in the fields so that none strays away or gets lost. When they have to be moved, he sees to it that they are not driven too quickly, and he always makes sure that they are fed at the right time. Constant care is the meaning of the word 'keep.'"<sup>6</sup>

How does the Lord keep us?

- By teaching (*John 16:1-3; Cf. 15:18-27*)
- By warning (*Luke 10:17,20*)
- By rebuking (*Heb. 12:6*)
- By manifesting His power (*Luke 22:31-32; Cf. Heb. 7:25*)

## **THE PRAYER WISH (v.2)**

This is a typical Gospel greeting—"May mercy and peace and love be multiplied to you."

## **THE OCCASION FOR THIS LETTER (vv.3-4)**

- An intrusion from the outside—"Certain persons have crept in unnoticed."

Hiebert points out that the Greek word for "**crept**" basically means "to go down into and alongside of and settle down alongside those who are already there. It indicates a secret, stealthy, and subtle insinuation of something evil into a society or a situation...they mingle with the people of God and pretend to be true members, but in reality, they are bogus Christians wearing a cloak of counterfeit faith and piety"<sup>7</sup> (*Cf. John 10:1; 2 Pet. 2:1; Gal. 2:4*).

The word "**certain**" implies that they were a divisive minority.

- A compulsion from the inside

## **WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE? (v.4)**

### **1. Their Character**

"**Ungodly persons**" in the Greek is translated *asebes*, which means without worship. It is the opposite of godliness (*eusebeia*), which means to worship well. However, when Jude speaks

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<sup>6</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Assurance of Salvation*, p.312

<sup>7</sup> William Barclay, as quoted by D. Edmond Hiebert, *2 Peter and Jude*, p.222

of these ungodly persons, he does not mean that they are irreligious, for many of them are highly religious and deeply involved in churches. Here Jude describes one who actively practices the opposite of what the fear of God demands.

What does the fear of God demand?

- Obedience
- Humility
- Faithfulness

## **2. Their Conduct**

This does not mean they deny the doctrines of grace or reject fundamental teaching. It means they fail to apprehend the true nature of grace. Therefore, they maintain that since they are forgiven, God has given them the liberty to follow the instincts and feelings they have about everything in life. Luther says, "They consider not Him as their Lord but themselves as their own Lord."<sup>8</sup>

How does this person look?

- They seek to worship the true God in their own way. (*John 4*)
- They understand the Bible properly but refuse to accept its rules.
- They profess to believe the right things, but their actions deny it. (*Tit.1:16*)
- They reject Christ's word in the face of a former relationship or better knowledge. (*Matt 10:33*)

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<sup>8</sup> Martin Luther, as quoted by D. Edmond Hiebert, *2 Peter and Jude*, p.300

# JUDE, Lesson 2

## Exposing and Avoiding Apostasy

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### REVIEW: What You Should Have Learned from Part 1

- **The issue of apostasy** is so important for the church that the Holy Spirit inspired an entire epistle about it.
- **The called** describes Christians who are uniquely loved by God and kept for Jesus Christ, without the possibility of being lost.
- **Heretics** are those who mingle with the people of God and pretend to be true members accepting truth, but in reality, are bogus Christians wearing a cloak of counterfeit faith and piety.
- **Ungodly people** are not irreligious, but they actively practice the opposite of what the fear of God demands, such as obedience, humility, and faithfulness.
- **Apostates** do not necessarily deny sound doctrine; however, they use the grace of God as a cloak to follow their own desires.
- **The Gospel is something that all saints must understand, embrace, and use to defend against the assaults of Satan and ungodly people.**

### A HISTORY LESSON ABOUT APOSTATES (vv.5-7)

The believers to whom Jude is writing were staggering from the effects that false brethren had inflicted upon the church. In order to strengthen the readers, Jude takes them back in history to show them two things. First, apostates and apostasy have always been around in some measure, so there is no need to freak out. Second, God's judgment upon apostates is certain and terrible. He gives two examples.

#### 1. The Example of Unbelieving Israel (v.5)

The experiences of the nation of Israel are an example of many important spiritual truths. The exodus from the land of Egypt was an act of great mercy on the part of God. However, everyone who walked through the Red Sea did not walk into the land of promise. The national deliverance of Israel did not mean the spiritual deliverance of the nation. The national deliverance was a symbol of New Covenant salvation given to individuals.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians*, p.219

- **1 Corinthians 10:1-5**—For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; <sup>2</sup>and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and the sea; <sup>3</sup>and all ate the same spiritual food; <sup>4</sup>and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. <sup>5</sup>Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.
- **Hebrews 3:17**—And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?

**Lesson #1:** You can experience spiritual privileges and still miss spiritual pardon.

- **Romans 11:20-21**—Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; <sup>21</sup>for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either.

**Lesson #2:** You can enjoy spiritual partnerships yet still come short of eternal life.

- **Hebrews 4:2**—For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

## 2. The Example of Fallen Angels (vv.6-7)

The angels have also been involved in apostasy. They first fell from a position of dignity and power assigned to them by God. Angels are often referred to as rulers or principalities because of their power over earthly creatures (*Eph.1:21, 6:12; Rom.8:38; Col.1:16, 2:10, 15*). However, they were not satisfied with their position of authority and defected with Satan. Their sin was that of pride and self-exaltation. In this text, Jude refers to another act of rebellion by the angels recorded in Genesis 6:1-4, in which they sought to corrupt the human race through sexual perversion and intermarriage with humans.

Jude argues from the lesser example to the greater example to prove a point to those who infect God's church. If angels did not get away with rebellion against God's order, what chance do humans have in getting away with rebellion against God's Word?

The lesson from history is that rebellion against God's Word is nothing new. In spite of what one professes, like Israel, or one's position like the angels, or even if one possesses material riches, like Sodom and Gomorrah, judgment will come as a result of unbelief. This judgment will be inevitable like that of unbelieving Israel, inescapable like that of the unbelieving angels, and undeniable like that of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.



## A DESCRIPTION OF APOSTATES (vv.8-16)

Who are these apostates, and what are their characteristics? Jude tells us that in the same manner as the historical examples (Cain, Balaam, and Korah), the present apostates display the following traits and ways:

### 1. They are dreamers. (v.8a)

Yet in the same way these men, also by dreaming,

"A dreamer, or dreamer of dreams in the Old Testament is one who claims to have a message from God...and they are dealt with very severely because they tell lies about God...under the cloak of pretended revelation from God (or even the wrong supposition that it was a true revelation, [these dreamers are laying claim to a position of God's leading that is not there.])"<sup>10</sup> (Cf. Deut.13:1-5; Is.56:10; Jer.23:16, 32; Zech.10:2).

### 2. They defile the flesh. (v.8b)

defile the flesh,

This speaks of *moral defilement*, and the present tense indicates this as their continuing practice (Tit.1:15; Heb.12:15).

### 3. They despise authority. (vv.8c-10)

and revile angelic majesties. <sup>9</sup>But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" <sup>10</sup>But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed. <sup>11</sup>Woe to them!

The authority they reject is the authority of church leaders to apply Christ's rule in their lives (Heb.13:17; Tit.3:1). Although this inner attitude of rejection is directed toward those who are over them in the Lord, it is ultimately a rejection of Christ's lordship in their lives. "**Angelic majesties**" (*doxa*) describes angels. Jude is most likely referring to God's law, which was given at Sinai by angels (Acts 7:38, 53; Gal.3:19; Heb.2:2). Apostates not only reject the authority that God has placed over them, but they also revile (*speaking evil or hurting the reputation of*) divine things.

### 4. They go the way of Cain. (v.11a)

For they have gone the way of Cain,

What was the way of Abel's brother, Cain (Gen.3)? The way of Cain is when you *clearly understand the standards that God expects, yet choose to try and honor God your own way*. It is the effort to please God in the form of moral character, unselfish deeds, or charitable works. It is worship without atonement.

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<sup>10</sup> Hiebert, p.243

## 5. They rush into the error of Balaam. (v.11b)

and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam,

Balaam takes the mistake of Cain a step further. Balaam not only knowingly rebelled against God, but he also encouraged others to do so as well (*Num.22-24, 31:16*). Peter reveals that Balaam loved the wages of wickedness (*2 Pet.2:15*). The error of Balaam is not that he was misled, but rather he actively deceived God's people for personal profit. The objective of Jude's opponents is to deceive the church and make a profit.

## 6. They follow the rebellion of Korah. (v.11c)

and perished in the rebellion of Korah.

The rebellion of Korah is recorded in Numbers 16:1-35. Korah's primary argument was that God's hierarchy of leadership did not harmonize with his understanding that all of God's people are equal and holy unto Him. Therefore, God could not have meant what He said, so he sought to hijack God's people by setting up another style of leadership created by man. He sought to rally a revolt of 250 soldiers against Moses and the small group of leaders with whom Moses worked. Jude warns us "nice people"—who rebel against God's wisdom in appointing duly qualified leadership and teaching—that we will perish because of God's judgment. Jude is so positive that he writes the verb "destroy" in the past tense as if the action had already taken place.

These three examples (Cain, who broke relationship with God; Balaam, who desired to lead God's people into sin for profit; and Korah, who questioned God's wisdom in appointing leaders) show us that godless people who are associated with the church will be bent on destroying God's people.

## 7. They are like hidden reefs. (v.12a)

<sup>12</sup> These are the men who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves;

Reefs are **dangerous**, and a wise sailor knows to keep his ship clear of them.

## 8. They are like clouds without water. (v.12b)

clouds without water, carried along by winds;

In Palestine, a cloud was the sign of much-needed rain. However, a cloud without water was **deceptive**. It promised much but provided nothing. Jude points out that apostates make a great promise of refreshment and enrichment, but they produce nothing that contributes to the spiritual nurture and establishment of believers. In the end, they are unproductive and useless.

## 9. They are like autumn trees without fruit. (v.12c)

autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted;

The time of harvest occurs in the spring and well into autumn, but by late autumn—which is considered to be the very end of the fruit harvest—the trees begin to shed their leaves to prepare for the approach of winter. However, Jude pictures these apostates as autumn trees without fruit, meaning that they have *failed to fulfill the purpose of their existence*. It is not that their fruit was removed, but that they have not produced any fruit because they are spiritually barren and **dead**.

### 10. They are like wild waves of the sea. (v.13a)

<sup>13</sup>wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam;

Wild (*agria*) does not speak of a person's actions, but their quality or nature. It was used of plants and animals describing that which was not domesticated, but untamed, out of control, and restless. Apostates are people who are restless in the activities and untamed in their appetites. Like the wild, restless waves of the sea when it is **disturbed**, its waves fall upon the shore with its foam leaving debris on the coastline. False believers, in a similar way, "get noticed and leave a polluted mess behind them as the product of their self-willed ministry."<sup>11</sup>

### 11. They are like wandering stars. (v.13b)

wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever.

What Jude most likely has in mind are shooting stars or comets, which burst on the scene with new light but are actually headed for darkness, having broken away from God's established order. Apostates seem to bring new light on people, but ultimately, they throw people who follow them into confusion and **doom**.

<sup>14</sup>It was also about these men that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, <sup>15</sup>to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."

## APPLICATION: What Does This Mean for You?

Jesus said, "You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you" (John 15:16).

All fruit has seed, and seed produces more fruit. If you are a true Christian, you will bear fruit and produce more fruit. What is the condition?

- **John 15:5**—I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.
- **John 15:10**—If you keep my commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

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<sup>11</sup> Dick Lucas and Christopher Green, *The Message of 2 Peter and Jude*, p.203

# JUDE, Lesson 3

## Exposing and Avoiding Apostasy

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**REVIEW:** What You Should Have Learned from Part 2

- There are **two clear biblical examples** of apostasy in history: the examples of unbelieving Israel and the fallen or non-elect angels.
- **Falling away** and rebellion against God's Word brings judgment regardless of your profession, position, or privileges.
- **Judgment** upon apostates is inevitable, inescapable, and undeniable.
- **Apostates** are dangerous personally, deceptive spiritually, dead inwardly, disturbed mentally, and doomed eternally.
- **The fruit** of a person's life is the truest test of the character of his nature.

### INTRODUCTION

The tone of this letter can at first appear to be a very sharp and critical editorial of a first-century church problem, instead of a loving and considerate response to an obviously difficult group of people in the church. However, the reason for its razor sharpness lies in the Apostle Jude's understanding of the devastating effects that false teachers and brethren have on the Gospel and the church. The Gospel starts the church, and the church spreads the Gospel. Whenever the Gospel is tampered with, watered down, or distorted in any way, it destroys the church's vitality and diverts us from our main mission, which is to proclaim the good news to a lost and dying world (*Rom.1:16; 1 Cor.1:18; 1 Tim.3:15*). It is critical for the church to recognize the threats to her health and contend for her life by clinging to the message of her Master, the Lord Jesus Christ.

### A PRACTICAL DESCRIPTION OF APOSTATES (v.16)

What are they really like?

<sup>16</sup> These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their *own* lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of *gaining an* advantage.

#### 1. They are grumblers.

Jude explains that one of the character traits of an apostate is the constant expression of grumbling. A person who grumbles (*gongustai*) is not one who is simply being critical of legitimate injustices or error. There is such a thing as humble complaints. Consider many of the Psalms. However, murmuring or complaining is different in that it reveals one who has a personal, inner dissatisfaction with anything and everything in life. The word here depicts a person who is "dominated by a smoldering discontentment which expresses itself in muttered undertones."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Hiebert, p.270

**Practically**, this type of grumbling spurts out regularly against their equals, superiors, against God's laws, God's providence, and even against God's decrees. **Specifically**, these people seem to always be complaining about *what they want* or *what they have lost*.

Thomas Manton describes this sin as "the scum of discontent or the vent of impatience."<sup>13</sup> An apostate is unhappy with everything that is not in accord with his or her own liking. It doesn't have to be something that is inherently or ethically wrong, but if he doesn't like it or if it doesn't suit his own desires and course of actions, he murmurs about it. Therefore, remember that **spiritually**, grumbling reveals an unbelieving heart, and "whenever a man gets out of touch with God, he is likely to begin complaining about something."<sup>14</sup> It is one of the sins that characterized unbelieving Israel (Cf. 1 Cor.10:10-13; Phil.2:14; 1 Pet.4:9).

## 2. They are fault finders.

If grumbling describes the outward, muttered expression of this false brethren, then fault-finding points to the inner attitude of their discontentment. Discontentment is the opposite of contentment, and this is the root of their sad condition. Discontentment and covetousness are siblings who demonstrate a disdain with the condition in life that God has assigned to them. A faultfinder is one who seeks to blame because he is unsatisfied with his place in life.

- **Romans 9:19-20**—You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it?

## 3. They are people who follow after their own lusts.

Some people have learned to manage or harness their lusts and direct them like a successful business, but it is still inordinate desire out of control. Lust has many faces, but only one heart. According to Jude, the thing that drives the core of a lustful person's life is the burning desire to satisfy one's carnal appetites and receive personal honor or profit.

How does this look in the life of an apostate or a false believer? Jude describes it by using the term "*following*" or "*walking after*." This describes the real *cause* of their discontentment. The participle "walking" reveals to us a planned course of action. Their course of conduct is not governed by the Word but by their own sinful desires. They are not bent on doing God's will, but their own will, and only when it profits them personally is God's will considered. Walking conveys three practical things in the Scripture:

- A **willing** subjection.
  - **Psalm 1:1**—How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!

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<sup>13</sup> Thomas Manton, *Jude*, p. 299

<sup>14</sup> Michael Green, *2 Peter Reconsidered*, p.178

- A **constant** practice.
  - **Galatians 5:16**—But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.
- A **fond** indulgence.
  - **Romans 13:14**—But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

All of this reveals that an apostate is one who has never experienced the saving grace of God and is, therefore, unregenerate.

- **Titus 3:3**—For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.
- **Ephesians 2:3**—Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

#### 4. They are flatterers.

The first descriptions of a false believer or an apostate reveals the inner workings of their heart and soul, but now these next three traits expose how they relate to others. Their mouth speaks swelling words to impress. They don't speak out of sincere inner convictions but to impress others. They use flattery to gain an advantage. They show a warm interest in others, not to help them, but to exploit them.

- **Job 32:21**—Let me now be partial to no one, nor flatter any man.
- **Psalms 5:9**—There is nothing reliable in what they say; their inward part is destruction itself. Their throat is an open grave; they flatter with their tongue.
- **Proverbs 29:5**—A man who flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his steps.

#### 5. They cause divisions.

Not only do they cause divisions, but also, they separate themselves from the true church or true Christians.

- **1 John 2:19**—They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.

## 6. They are worldly-minded or carnal. (v.19b)

To be worldly-minded (*psuchikos*) doesn't mean to be materialistic only, but rather that one's inner state is governed by their soulish desires and not the Spirit. Worldly-minded people do what is natural to the fallen instinct of man. Their mind is set on the flesh, and it refuses to be subject to the authority of God's Word (*Rom.8:6-7*). Pleasing God is not the primary motivation of their lives (*v.8*), but pleasing themselves and others. Paul used this same word to describe the person who does not accept, welcome, or receive the things of the Spirit of God (*1 Cor.2:14*).

## 7. They are devoid of the Spirit. (v.19c)

- **Romans 8:9**—However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

## A COMMAND TO CHRISTIANS (vv.17-21)

What are we to do to amid apostasy and apostates?

### 1. Remember what you heard. (vv.17-18)

But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ,<sup>18</sup> that they were saying to you, "In the last time there will be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts."

What are we to remember? Two things in the form of a direct command. Remember who spoke to them. They were the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ—that is, those duly appointed and sent out by Jesus Himself. To heed them is to heed the Lord Jesus Himself (*John 13:20*).

Remember what they said. They said that...

- a) There would be mockers in the last time. (*2 Pet.3:1-3*)
- b) They would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. (*2 Tim.3:1-5; 4:3-4*)

Kistemaker reminds us that "neglect of factual information is detrimental to one's salvation" and renders us vulnerable to the attacks of heretics. Jude urges us to remember because "*forgetfulness of the teaching and warnings of God in Scripture is a major cause of spiritual deterioration.*"<sup>15</sup> We are to remember that Jesus and the Apostles spoke of the coming apostasy and the apostates that would arise from among God's people (*Cf.1Tim.4:1; 1 John 2:18; Matt.24:11, 24*).

### 2. Build yourselves up. (v.20a)

<sup>20</sup> But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith,

The "**you**" here is plural, which speaks of all of God's people. To "**build up**" yourself suggests growth. It is not enough just to lay down one level of knowledge and understanding. We must continue to build upon it, as Peter expressed it (*2 Pet.3:18*). Therefore, we need to take

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Green, *The Second Epistle General of Peter and the General Epistle of Jude*, p.180

advantage of opportunities to study and learn. To build "**yourselves**" suggest personal responsibility. While pastors and deacons will be there to help you, you must take personal responsibility and make the effort. The "**most holy faith**" is that body of doctrine in which our personal faith is to rest. It is that body of doctrine which has been revealed "one time for all times." The body of doctrine has to do with who Christ is and what He has and will do for us.

The idea behind the command here is to build a superstructure on an existing foundation. The existing foundation of the believer's life is Christ (*1 Cor.3:11*). Christ lays the foundation and provides the materials, but now the believer must build the house. However, the Apostle Paul warned us to "*let each man be careful how he builds upon it*" (*1 Cor.3:10*). The question is: why such caution and care? Because your stability depends upon it. The materials you build with and the way in which you build your house will either *buttress* you against the floods of heresy or give you a false sense of security.

How are you to develop your spiritual life (*house*), and what materials or activities will bring about this growth? (*Cf. Matt.7:24-27*).

What materials are you to build with?

- **Acts 20:32**—And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

The materials you are to build your spiritual lives with are called "**your most holy faith**." It is your responsibility. Jude says, "*Build yourselves...*" Each individual must foster his/her own spiritual growth. It is described as "*your **most** holy faith*," not "*your very holy faith*." "The Christian faith, as revealed in Scripture, is separate and distinct from all other faiths. It is distinct not only in its origin and transmission but also in the holiness it produces in those who ground their lives upon it."<sup>16</sup> It is not based on subjective feelings, but the objective truth, which was once for all given the saints.

### 3. Pray in the Holy Spirit. (v.20b)

praying in the Holy Spirit

Prayer is the necessary complement to the Word of God. By the Word of God, God speaks to us; but by prayer, we speak to God. The Word of God is our source of strength and comfort, but prayer is also a source of strength and comfort (*Phil.4:6-7*). Think of prayer and the Word of God as two legs upon which our spiritual well-being stands. Both are needed to be well balanced in our spiritual growth. What is meant by "**praying in the Holy Spirit**"? Jude does not elaborate, and Paul uses the same expression (*Eph.6:18*). To walk in the Spirit means to conduct or live your life according to the Spirit's direction, as found in the Word of God. Praying in the Spirit emphasizes the same thing. It means our prayers are to be in harmony with what the Spirit teaches in the Word of God (*1 John 5:14*).

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<sup>16</sup> Hiebert, p.283



#### 4. Keep yourselves in the love of God. (v.21)

<sup>21</sup>keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.

"**Keep**" here means to watch. But how do we keep ourselves in the love of God? The love of God can be interpreted in two ways, and both ideas present a perfect balance for us. It can mean **our own love for God**. In other words, watch out or pay attention to your personal devotion and love for Christ. Don't allow anything to divert your affections away from loving Christ supremely. Make sure that nothing lures you away from loving God above all things, even your most precious earthly relationships (*Cf. Matt.10:37; 22:37; 1 Cor.16: 22; Rev.2: 4-5*).

The second way the love of God can be understood is **God's love for you**. Jude says that, as a believer, keep far away from anything that clouds a consciousness of God's love for you. Sin and disobedience can cloud our consciousness of God's love. However, Jesus says that there is only one thing that can drive the dark clouds of doubt away (*John15:9-10*).

#### APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION:

How does this apply to us today?

- If one of the distinguishing marks of the last days is apostasy, how well are you prepared for it? **How well do you know your most holy faith**, which can guard you against the winds of apostasy?
- Is your current level of commitment to the **study of Scripture** enough to keep you from drifting away?
- **How should you respond?** Review the four duties for safeguarding yourself against apostasy. Identify where you're lacking. Acknowledge it. Commit yourself in prayer to building a fortress of faith around your heart so that your life can stand like a skyscraper for Christ in these last days.

# JUDE, Lesson 4

## Exposing and Avoiding Apostasy

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**REVIEW:** What You Should Have Learned from Part 3

- There are **outward traits** that reveal the inner condition of a person who is on the verge of falling away or who is already an apostate, which we should be careful to also examine in ourselves.
- We must **remember** what Christ and the Apostles taught about apostasy because forgetfulness of God's Word is a major cause of spiritual decay.
- The way to fortify your life against falling away is to build yourself up by understanding and applying **the essentials of the Christian faith**.
- **Prayer** and **obedience** are two deterrents that keep the believer from falling away. Prayer immunizes us from fainting while fighting, and obedience keeps us conscious of the love of God for us.

### INTRODUCTION

Our last study concluded with some clear instructions from Jude concerning what we are to do amidst apostasy. This epistle provides us with specific ways to protect and strengthen ourselves from apostasy, as well as guidance in how to respond to others who are falling or who have already fallen.

However, before we consider what our response is to be towards others, you must not miss the spiritual encouragement and strong incentive for loyalty to God that Jude gives to believers. In exhorting us to *build our faith* (v.20), *watch our love* (v.21a), and *wait for our hope* (v.21b), which are the three marks of genuine saving faith, Jude affirms the blessed doctrine of the Trinity to remind us of how secure we are. We are to "*pray...in the Holy Spirit...keep ourselves in the love of God...and wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" The reason Jude does this is that "the very heart of the Christian Gospel depends on the Trinity."<sup>17</sup> Wherever salvation and security are taught in the Scriptures, the Apostles often remind us that the entire Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is our guarantee of eternal life.

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<sup>17</sup> Sinclair Ferguson, *A Heart for God*, p.13

## **A CHALLENGE FOR THOSE WHO FALL AWAY (vv.22-23)**

What is our responsibility toward God and others?

Beginning in verse 22, Jude identifies three groups of people who are victims of apostasy. By using the term "*victim*," we are not seeking to remove personal culpability, but rather, the term should be interpreted as those who are "affected or influenced by" false teaching or false teachers. In the same way that we as sinners are *victims* of the fall, some are *victims* of apostasy.

Before we identify these groups, we must answer this very important question: **Can a true believer fall away from faith or be an apostate?**

- **Matthew 24:24**—For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.

The word "**if**" in this verse is a second-class condition in the Greek language, which means it's not possible at all. False Christs and false prophets will not be able to deceive the elect because Christ's sheep hear His voice (*John 10:27-28*).

Once a person is truly born again, he is secured by the power of God (*1 Pet.1:5*) and sealed in and kept for Christ by the Holy Spirit (*Jude 3; Eph.1:13*). Although the last days are marked by some falling away and giving heed to doctrines of demons by means of hypocritical liars (*1 Tim.4:1*), those who truly belong to Christ will never fall away from faith or be an apostate. They may be temporarily influenced and even impacted emotionally by apostates, but they will never follow them or leave the principles and practice of the Gospel, which was once for all delivered to the saints (the church) (v.3).

- **Hebrews 10:39**—But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.
- **Hebrews 3:6**—but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house—whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.

However, some weak or immature believers will temporarily fall under the influence of false teaching and/or apostates. How are we to respond to them? "Jude encourages us to become involved in the painful work of helping those who are coming under the influence of dangerous doctrine...so he establishes two rescue missions for believers."<sup>18</sup>

### **1. Group One: Those who are doubting (v.22a)**

<sup>22</sup> And have mercy on some, who are doubting;

The word doubting (*diakrinomai*) unveils two conditions that require two different approaches. There are some who are *in doubt*, meaning that they are not *antagonistic toward the Gospel*, but because of the weakness of their faith, they have questions and inner doubts that must be dealt with in compassion and tenderness (Cf. *Eph.4:14; Rom.14:1*).

The other condition of doubting doesn't describe a person who is having a problem making a distinction about doctrine because of the weakness of his/her faith, but rather it speaks of one

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<sup>18</sup> Lucas and Green, *The Message of 2 Peter and Jude*, p.225

who is *debating or disputing the very truth that they are hearing*. James used the word to describe those who asked for wisdom but then debated the wisdom they were given (*James 1:6*). This condition describes the person who possesses an attitude of defiance toward the truth and does not have a teachable spirit. What is our response to be toward this person?

- **2 Timothy 4:2**—preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.
- **2 Timothy 2:25**—with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.
- **Titus 1:13**—This testimony is true. For this reason reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith.

On the one hand, we are called to respond with *patience* and *compassion*. On the other hand, for those who are debating, we must boldly defend the truth of the Gospel with *gentleness and self-control*.

## 2. Group Two: Those who are falling (v.23a)

<sup>23</sup> save others, snatching them out of the fire;

This next group is already sliding down the road and requires aggressive, urgent action. Jude uses a word picture of "*snatching them out of the fire*" to show us that they are in immediate danger. The condition of this group is more critical than the first, so we are called to do the work of a fireman.

What are we to do? Save and snatch. We all know that salvation is a work that only God can do (*Jon.1:9*). However, the word "**save**" here points to the instrument that God uses to effect His salvation on such people. God uses His people as vessels or agents of salvation to the elect (*2 Tim.2:10; Col.4:19*).

To "**snatch**" (*harpazo*) indicates that our actions and intent should convey a directness and urgency so as to forcibly seize them and snatch them away from the danger. Jude goes back to two Old Testament examples, which show us *what we are to snatch them from* and *how to do it*. The first example is the account of Sodom and Gomorrah (*Gen.19*). You recall that before God judged these cities, He sent two angels to get Lot and his family out before judgment came. Lot had begun to engage in the thinking and lifestyle of those who were immoral (v.1). He may not have lived in it himself, but he was playing with fire. This is how this second group is different than the first. They are actually playing with fire.

The second example is found in Zechariah 3. Zechariah is being shown a vision of Joshua, the high priest. Satan is accusing Joshua of being unworthy to serve because his garments are filthy (v.3). His garments are filthy because of sin (v.4). God shows the prophet that although Joshua was unworthy to serve because of his past sin, God could take his sin away (vv.4-5). Joshua was a "*brand plucked from the fire*" (v.3).

The fire that we are to snatch them from is the fire of sin and its judgment.

- **Proverbs 6:27-28**—Can a man take fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned? <sup>28</sup> Or can a man walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched?

**How are we to do this?** We must make their condition clear, tear down their arguments with the truth of the Gospel, and lovingly bring them out of the fire by leading them to obey the truth of the Gospel.

### 3. Group Three: Those who have fallen already (v.23b)

The first group involves those who are "*in doubt*" and are worried about falling. We are to show them compassion and patiently instruct them. The second group consists of those who are already sliding and are in danger. Therefore, urgent intervention is needed. Now in this third group, we have those who have not only become fully involved in false doctrine but may be leading others into it as well. How are we to respond to them?

and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh

**Why should we have mercy with fear?** Fear what? Whom? We should fear the contamination that involvement with people like this will bring.

- **1 Corinthians 6:6, 15:33**—but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers? <sup>33</sup> Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals."

We should fear the judgment that they are under from a holy and just God (Cf. Gal.1:8; 2 Pet.2:4, 18-22).

The fear here speaks of *a sense of caution* because it is "quite possible to approach evil with good intentions, and then, through want of proper humility and caution, end in finding it fatally attractive."<sup>19</sup> This has been the case with so many well-meaning but weak Christians who ignore God's warning to beware of "*perverse and evil men; for not all have faith*" (2 Thess.3:2).

What is our response to be? Hate the sin, but not the sinner. "Sin is the only thing that God hates, and so ought we."<sup>20</sup> This does not mean that we should befriend those who fall into this group. On the contrary, we are to flee from them. We are not to be indifferent with a "holier than thou" attitude. We are to be cautious of them, but we also need to pray compassionately for them. We are to call them to repentance, appropriating Matthew 18, when necessary (Cf. Tit.3:10-11).

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<sup>19</sup> Hiebert, p.291

<sup>20</sup> A.R. Fausset, *The General Epistle of Jude*, p.540

## AN ASSURANCE TO EVERY BELIEVER (vv.24-25)

What prevents us from falling away from Christ?

### 1. He is able to keep you from stumbling. (v.24a)

<sup>24</sup>Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,

To give us assurance, Jude takes the focus off of our ability or inability and turns it toward God's omnipotence.

- **Romans 16:25**—Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past..."
- **Hebrews 7:25**—Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.
- **Hebrews 2:18**—For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

To be kept from "**stumbling**" doesn't mean to be kept from sinning, but to be kept from falling away. The word picture here is of a horse with sure-footedness, who, although encounters various disrupting experiences, is nevertheless kept from falling into heretical errors.

### 2. He is able to make you stand in His presence. (v.24b)

and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy,

This looks to the final Day of Judgment. "*The wicked will not stand in judgment*" (Ps.1:5), but those who are elect, called, saved, and cleansed will be kept and made to stand without condemnation to behold the glory of Christ (John 17:24). We will be holy and blameless (Eph.5:27), within and without, prepared as a bride adorned for her bridegroom (Rev.19:7). Joy will be ours in abundance. The word for "**joy**" tells us of an exultant, jubilant, boundless, and inexpressible joy over the work that God has done in redeeming us to Himself! (Is.53:11).

<sup>25</sup>to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, *be* glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

What a doxology! Two names (apposition) placed side by side to identify the other—there is only one God who is a Savior, and His name is Jesus Christ our Lord. Four attributes (glory, majesty, dominion, and authority) and three references to time (the past, the present, and the future) signal to us that He is worthy to receive all the glory, for all time, in every life. Amen!

## CONCLUSION AND APPLICATION:

ACTION POINTS: This message applies very specifically to two groups of people.

- **To the committed**—don't grow weary in well-doing. Continue to apply the means of grace, but make sure that you love the Lord and love His means because they display His wisdom.
- **To the cavalier**—drifting away is often like a ship at sea. You can't feel it, but when you measure where you are today versus where you were yesterday, last week, or last year, you discover that your position has moved. Eventually, you will see and feel the effects of falling away from God. These warnings are intended by the Holy Spirit to be the means of perseverance. If you see that about your spiritual life, cry out at once! Jesus stands ready to save, heal, restore, and help you. The time is now!
- Do you have this assurance?
- Do you know for certain that you have been called and converted by Jesus Christ?
- If so, what will you do differently as a result of this study to guard you from falling away from Christ?
- How do you need to respond to those who have been touched by apostasy?
- Join the angelic choir above and the saints below in the great doxology of faith:

Praise God for whom all blessings flow.  
Praise Him, all creatures here below.  
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host.  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas Ken, *Doxology*

# APPENDIX

## DEFINITIONS FROM THE JUDE STUDY

**Backsliding:** The word "backsliding" is used two ways in Scripture and is found only in Old Testament references to the nation of Israel (*Jer. 3:22, 31:22, 49:4; Hos.4:16, 11:7, 14:4*). Backsliding is the condition of either a true believer who can be set back in their growth due to sin, or it speaks of the unregenerate person who turns stubbornly away from God.

**Apostate:** An apostate is a person who comes close to believing the Gospel savingly but comes up short. This person made an emotional, superficial commitment to salvation in Christ, but it is not real. He remains interested only until there is a sacrificial price to pay, and then he abandons Christ (*Luke 8:13; 1 John 2:19*).

**Apostasy:** Apostasy is a time where false believers remove themselves from truth. It is not an uprooting of faith because there was never a root. In reality, they never embraced the truth to begin with (*1 Tim.1:6, 19, 4:1*).

**Heretic:** A heretic is one who sits in the midst of a local church, professing to be a believer and acting like he fully believes sound doctrine, but internally stands against all or part of the truth. His actions expose his beliefs as he eventually causes factions and divisions (*1 Cor.11:19; Gal. 5:20; 2 Pet.2:1; Titus 3:10*).

## WHEN SHOULD A PERSON LEAVE A CHURCH?

Leaving a church is not something that should be done lightly. Too many people abandon churches for petty reasons. Disagreements over simple matters are never a good reason to withdraw from a sound, Bible-believing church. Christians are commanded to respect, honor, and obey those God has placed in leadership positions in the church (*Heb.13:7, 17*). However, there are times when it becomes necessary to leave a church for the sake of one's own conscience or out of duty to obey God rather than man. Such circumstances would include:

- If **heresy on some fundamental truth** is being taught from the pulpit (*Gal.1:7-9*)
- If the **leaders of the church tolerate seriously errant doctrine** from any who are given teaching authority in the fellowship (*Rom.16:17*)
- If the church is characterized by a **wanton disregard for Scripture, such as the refusal to discipline members who are sinning blatantly** (*1 Cor.5:9-11*)
- If **unholy living is tolerated** in the church (*1 Cor.5:9-11*)
- If the church is seriously **out of step with the biblical pattern for the church** (*2 Thess.3:6, 14*)



- If the church is marked by **gross hypocrisy, giving lip service to biblical Christianity**, but refusing to acknowledge its true power (*2 Tim.3:5*)

This is not to suggest that these are the only circumstances under which people are permitted to leave a church. There is certainly nothing wrong with moving one's membership just because another church offers better teaching or more opportunities for growth and service. But those who transfer their membership for such reasons ought to take extreme care not to sow discord or division in the church they are leaving. Membership in a church is a commitment that ought to be taken seriously.

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