

“**Jude**” was the “**brother of James**,” they were likely the brothers of Jesus. But he introduces himself “**a servant of Jesus Christ**” to communicate his authority. He writes this letter in service of the Messiah. Therefore, we should receive it as the word of the Lord.

Jude reminds us that we are “**called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ.**” God called us to himself through a new birth, repentance from sin, and faith in Jesus. God called us because he loved us and sent Jesus to fulfill all righteousness, to die for sin, and to rise from the dead. Through God’s love, we are kept for Jesus who will return to raise us from the dead. Jude begins the same way he ends: reminding us that our salvation is entirely secure in who God is for us in Christ.

Jude prays God would use his letter to **multiply mercy, peace, and love** to his readers. As we speak to (or about) each other, we should pray that God would use our words to multiply mercy, peace, and love to others.

Jude addresses his readers as “**Beloved.**” This is how we should feel about each other every time we talk to (or about!) each other—as dear friends we deeply love.

“**I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation.**” Jude desired to encourage his friends with a note about their shared salvation—about Jesus’ death and resurrection; the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit; power over sin, death, and the devil; resurrection from the dead and life in the world to come. That same desire should characterize our small groups and conversations: we should be eager to talk about Jesus and how his grace is changing our lives!

But Jude is forced to write a different sort of letter. “**I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.**” The faith is under attack in their church, and they must be stirred to fight for it.

Ministry does not always (or often!) follow our preferences. We don’t get to choose the times or the situations in which we live. God brings us into churches, relationships, and situations that require us to put our personal wish dreams to death to serve the present interests of Christ.

What necessitates *this* letter is “**certain people.**” We don’t know much about what these intruders professed doctrinally. Jude’s focus is how they behaved. Blatant heresy is *not* the only means through which a church is harmed, nor is it the only means by which you can identify a threat to the faith. As Tom Schreiner explains Jude’s approach this way:

Jude exposed the moral rootlessness and utter godlessness of the intruders. By revealing their character Jude stripped them of any authority in the congregation. No thinking Christian would follow people who are fundamentally selfish.

Jude knows that no one who has come to know Jesus will follow ungodly loud-mouthed boasters who pervert the faith and indulge in sexual immorality. All he needs do is expose it and they will flee.

It needs exposing because they “**have crept in unnoticed.**” No one noticed when they entered. Like the disciples with Judas, no one suspected a thing. The enemies of the church do not look like the Joker antagonizing Batman. They often look like upstanding Christians. (To prove this, you only need look at abusers. In most cases, sexual oppressors are *not* strangers. Domestic abusers may be esteemed in the community. They are known, loved, respected—and therefore not suspected.) But God noticed them. “**Long ago [they] were designated for this condemnation.**” The prophets predicted both their arrival and their condemnation.

They are “**ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality.**” They twist God’s grace into a cover for sin—“*Christ has delivered us from judgment—so, we can indulge in sin without fear!*” But those who do this “**deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.**” This does not indicate a doctrinal error about Christ. They may have had an orthodox understanding of Jesus as fully God and fully man, but they have denied him as “**Master and Lord.**”

Jesus came to deliver us from sin—both its consequences *and* its power. He not only forgives us, he sets us free from slavery to sin so that we can walk in righteousness. Perverting the gospel into a message that enables ungodliness is a denial of Christ. So, how does the church “contend for the faith”?

In verses 5-19, Jude calls us to remember the history of God’s people. Remembering the history of God’s people will keep them from being deceived and falling away. Jude points to the exodus: “**Jesus** [the same Lord

the intruders are denying], **who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.**" The Lord saved Israel from slavery. They refused to trust him and perished in the wilderness.

Jude reminds them of the **"angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling."** These angels transgressed the boundaries God assigned and descended to earth to take human wives. God condemned them, keeping them **"in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day."**

Finally, Jude points to **"Sodom and Gomorrah."** They **"likewise"** [meaning, like the intruders] **"indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire."** In Genesis 19, angels (in the form of men) visited Lot. The Sodom demanded that Lot send them out so that they could have sex with them. Jude this "sexual immorality," the Lord destroyed them with fire. They **"serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire."**

Jude's point is: **God has always destroyed those who rebel and do not believe.** Those who rebel against the Lord will suffer eternal destruction in hell. God hates sin. He saved us to bring us out of sin. Those who exchange Christ for sin reject his sacrifice and gift of righteousness. Apart from Christ, they must suffer the penalty for their sin.

In **verse 8**, Jude begins **"Yet in like manner these people also..."** This is the first of five times that Jude uses the phrase "these people" to connect the intruders with the infamous sinners and villains of Israel's history. Understanding the history of God's people allows them to interpret the present.

These intruders **"rely on their dreams,"** likely claiming authority to engage in wickedness by appealing to prophetic visions. In the end, they **"defile the flesh"**—likely sexual immorality.

They **"reject authority and blaspheme the glorious ones."** "Glorious ones" refers to angels. The Apostles taught that the Law was delivered through "angels and mediators."¹ By rejecting the fulfillment of the Law in Christ and his righteousness—they dishonor what the angels delivered.

To illustrate their pride, Jude recalls a traditional Jewish story. After Moses' death, **"the archangel Michael"** desired to give him an honorable burial. **"The devil"** insisted that Moses was a murderer and therefore not entitled to such and claimed rights to Moses' body. Even though Michael was the highest of all angels, he **"did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you.'"** Michael did not assume authority in himself, but referred the matter to the authority of the Lord. **"But these people"** not only blaspheme angels, they **"blaspheme all that they do not understand."** They don't understand the gospel or the righteousness of God. But that does not stop them from dishonoring these things.

At the same time, **"they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively."** They understand their debased animalistic instincts and indulge them—likely through unrestrained sexual immorality. These things destroy them because sin brings God's wrath.

"Woe to them! They walked in the way of Cain." Jewish tradition remembered Cain not only for murder, but for teaching others how to sin (to "walk in his way"). These intruders are mentors in evil.

They have **"abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error."** Balaam was a prophet for hire, willing to curse Israel and lead them into destruction for pay. Like him, the intruders would lead the unsuspecting people of God into sin and destruction, all for the sake of profit.

Therefore, they have already **"perished in Korah's rebellion."** Korah led a group to challenge the authority of Moses and Aaron. God responded by opening the ground and swallowing them. The same end will come on all who reject Christ's authority.

Jude is passionate here—and rightly so—unleashing a litany of illustrations describing the danger at hand. **"These are hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear."** The early church celebrated the Lord's Supper with a communal meal that ended with giving thanks over the bread and cup of communion. These intruders participated in the Lord's Supper without any fear of God. Yet they likely looked pious to everyone. Like Judas, they were "hidden," which made them dangerous, like a rock formation hidden beneath the sea. Sailors would proceed thinking the water was safe. Then, upon striking the reef, they would shipwrecked. If the evil of these intruders is not exposed and expelled, the whole community will shipwreck their faith.

¹ Acts 7:38, 53; Gal 3:19

They are “**shepherds feeding themselves.**” They are viewed as leaders in the church, but instead of feeding the sheep, they destroy the sheep to feed themselves.

They are “**waterless clouds, swept along by winds.**” When they first appeared, the intruders seemed promising. Like a cloud on the horizon during a drought, everyone expected so much from them. But in reality, they are clouds without rain, good for nothing but to be swept away by the wind.

They are “**fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted.**” When it comes to fruit, they have none. The derecho has uprooted them. They are twice dead—good for nothing but the fire.

They are “**wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame.**” Like a stormy sea, they rage and roar with passion. But in the end, they bring you nothing more than disgusting foam.

They are “**wandering stars.**” A sailor who sets course by a wandering star will be lost at sea and perish. These wicked intruders will land you in the same place.

“**For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.**” No matter how appealing it may seem to pervert the grace of Christ into an excuse to indulge your sinful passions, you can be assured that it will only bring you destruction. This is what **the prophets foretold.**

It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied: “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, 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.”

It is absolutely certain that the Lord will return with an army to convict and destroy the ungodly. Notice the repetition here—“ungodly, ungodly, ungodly, ungodly.” The essence of sin is that it is opposite God. That is why God hates it and destroys it. Jude insists that Enoch prophesied about “these”—the people in our day who pervert the message of Christ in order to lead others into ungodliness. So, he unleashes another litany to illustrate their rebellion.

“**These are grumblers, malcontents.**” They chafe under the moral demands of Jesus’ teaching. Instead of obeying the Lord, they obey the flesh, “**following their own sinful desires.**” “**They are loud-mouthed boasters,**” proclaiming to everyone “No one tells me what to do!” They “**show favoritism to gain advantage,**” playing favorites and flattering to gain a self-serving advantage.

But this should not surprise us. “**You must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, ‘In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.’**” The Apostles told us this would happen.

“**It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.**” Look out for those who get their way poisoning the well, whispering complaints, and forming factions to help them get their way. Such people are worldly—natural, unregenerate—and they do not have the Spirit of God.

So far, Jude has spent the bulk of this letter arguing that the behavior of these intruders aligns them with the infamous sinners and villains that God destroyed in the Old Testament—and that both the prophets and the apostles warned us they would appear and be destroyed. This is a strong warning to avoid them and their error. But, we might ask, is there anything positive we can do? Yes, there is.

In contrast to the wicked intruders, “**you, beloved**” should live in a better way. Jude calls us to contend for the faith by giving us **five responsibilities.** (I encourage you to note these applications and have an honest conversation about them in your small group, strategizing how to carry these out together.)

First, believers are to be “**building yourselves up in your most holy faith.**” In 1 Peter, we learned that believers are living stones that God is building into a spiritual house. Jude calls us to cooperate in that process. This isn’t an individual responsibility; it’s a corporate one. Together, we should build ourselves up as God’s temple through the person and work of Christ. Make your small group a place where the gospel is discussed explicitly, especially in regards to your lives, relationships, and church.

Second, Jude calls us to be “**praying in the Holy Spirit.**” Our prayers should be genuine appeals to God for all we need in order to be built up, offered in awareness of and faith in the Holy Spirit. Make your small group a place where you engage in sincere, faith-filled prayer for each other and the church.

Third, “**keep yourselves in the love of God.**” In John 15, Jesus said:

As the Father has loved me, I have also loved you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commands you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. . . This is my command: Love one another as I have loved you.

Keeping ourselves in God's love means loving each other the way that Jesus loved us. We fulfill the law of Christ by bearing each other's burdens. Make your small group a place where members are actively encouraged to love each other in Christ-imitating ways. Correct divisive speech, grumbling, gossip, and uncharitable suspicion. Encourage self-sacrificial care for one another and the church.

Fourth, we do all this while “waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.”

The hope of the Christian is *not* in this life and our present circumstances. We wait for the grace that will be brought to us at Jesus' return. Make your small group a place where hope is regularly redirected to the return of Jesus, the resurrection of the dead, and life in the world to come.

These first four responsibilities work together to cultivate a culture of mercy. That matters because you can't extend mercy if you don't know mercy. A culture of mercy matters because the **fifth responsibility is to extend mercy to those who need it most.** Despite his stern warnings and promises of judgment, Jude is not a letter of condemnation. It is a letter of hope, reminding us that there is redemption to be found in Jesus. So, Jude calls us to extend mercy to three types of persons:

First, “have mercy on those who doubt.” Some have begun to doubt the gospel. Be compassionate. Sympathize with weakness. Speak and act in ways that show them Jesus' love.

Second, “save others by snatching them out of the fire.” Some have moved from doubting to living in immorality. They need you, the church, to bring them out. Embrace, protect, rescue them.

Third, “to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.” Some have gone all in—denying Christ to clothe themselves in unrepentant sin. This includes the intruders! Remember that the greatest sinners are candidates for mercy! But, we should be careful, lest in pursuing them we become like them. Mercy for such people may mean church discipline, expulsion from the community in the hopes that they will come to their senses and return to Jesus.

Finally, Jude returns to our ultimate hope. We can't do any of this in our own power. But God is able to keep us and bring us to his presence without blame and with great joy. He can do this because he is the only God and is our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord whose life, death, and resurrection purchased all the mercy we need to be saved forever. He possesses all the glory, majesty, dominion, and authority necessary to save us. We are eternally secure because he had all this in eternity past; he has it now; and will possess it forever.

So, let's stand and send ourselves out by reading Jude's prayer and blessing.

Now to him who is able to protect you from stumbling
and to make you stand in the presence of his glory,
without blemish and with great joy,
**to the only God our Savior,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
be glory, majesty, power,
and authority before all time,
now and forever.**

Amen.