

XV. Jude the Obscure

April 20/22/23, 2020

Jude 3-4; cp. 2 Peter 2:1-3

Aim: To understand the urgency of Jude's epistle and its application for the church today.

Helm: Jude the Obscure he would have remained, an unheralded figure in history, if not for the single action of writing this letter. Yet by it he is known. And with it he proves himself valiant, one willing to forego the camaraderie of fellowship in order to take a stand against those who have crept into the church in mockery of Christ's name.

Moo: Most New Testament letters (especially Paul's) move into a thanksgiving and prayer after the initial salutation and greetings. But Jude skips these points, getting right to the heart of what his letter is about. In these two verses, he explains the occasion and the theme of this letter. The occasion is the intrusion into the readers' Christian assemblies of false teachers, impious people living and propagating a heretical form of the faith (v. 4). To meet the needs of this occasion, Jude focuses on a single theme: maintaining the truth of the Christian faith as it has been handed down from Christ and the apostles (v. 3).

Benton: It should not surprise us...that Jude is concerned for the truth. In these verses he gives us something of a synopsis; he sets out the theme of his letter in a nutshell.

Helm: Verse 3 gives us the *theme*, while verse 4 reveals the letters occasion. The theme is an appeal to 'contend for the faith.' After that we are clued in that verse 4 supports the theme by the little word 'for.' And reading on it becomes obvious that the occasion for the letter rests in Jude's knowledge that *the faith is being challenged* by opponents he only will call 'certain people.'

A. Theme (Jude 3)

1. Common Salvation (3a)

³*Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation...*

a) *Beloved*

Moo: The word 'love' plays a central role in the opening of Jude's letter: the readers are 'loved' by God the Father (v. 1); Jude prays that they may experience that love more and more (v. 2); and now he addresses them as those whom he also loves: 'Beloved' (*agapetoi*; NIV 'dear friends').

Gardner: 'Dear friends' is a translation of the Greek 'beloved' or 'loved ones.' Certainly, it reflects Jude own care for these people, but it also continues Jude's theme that these people are loved by God. For the third time in three verses, Jude draws attention to God's love for them. They are 'loved by God' (v. 1), Jude prays that they will know that 'love in abundance (v.2), and now addresses them as those who are 'beloved' (cp. Col. 3:12; 2 Th. 2:13).

b) *Eager to Write*

Gardner: It is always good to draw attention to things we have in common as Christians. Too often one Christian can appear critical of another and too often Christians can be so sensitive to well-intentioned advice from another Christian that they take it as a personal insult.... We all

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[need to] learn to draw attention first in any conversation to those things we have in common, those things in which together we can rejoice and for which we can give thanks to God. Jude does just this. He talks of the ‘salvation we share.’ Whatever events had overtaken him just before he began to write this letter, Jude wanted them to know that he had not just thought about writing to them because he has heard of problems in their church. He had been going to write about the greatest joy and privilege in life and this was held in common between him and the Christians in this church.... The wonder of salvation is that, in His mercy and love, God has saved His people from His own judgment which, in their sin, they deserve. This is what Christians and Jude and his readers have in common, and this is what we all share, forgiveness and the right not to face God’s judgment on the last day. It was about this wonderful truth, this life-changing reality, that Jude had originally intended to write, but now he is forced to turn his pen to dealing with specific issues.

Benton: Jude was not someone who relished controversy. Rather, he relished the gospel and rejoiced in its encouragements. He liked being positive rather than negative. He would have much preferred to write a letter of rejoicing in the glories of Christ and the privileges which Christians share. But sometimes we have to postpone what we would like in order to do what is needed. Sometimes Christians have to risk being labeled intolerant and to fight for the truth. As Jude writes, this was such a time. The church was under threat from persuasive immoral heretics. It was no good shirking responsibility. Jude felt compelled to stand up and be counted for the cause of Christ.

MacArthur: Jude initially made ‘every effort to write’ regarding the ‘common salvation’ he shared with his readers. ‘Effort’ (*spoudē*) connotes hastening or speed, and could mean Jude hurried in vain to write, or that he tried hard but could not complete what he originally planned to say. Whatever the case, the presence of false teaching restrained him, impressing him with the urgent need to call the church to battle. His initial notion was to speak positively of the shared blessings of salvation. But that very salvation was under assault by apostates, hence his change of subjects.

Moo: We are to imagine Jude preparing to write generally and joyfully about the salvation that he and his readers share together, when he learns about a new and serious threat to his readers’ faith: the false teachers. Consequently, he discards the letter he was about to write in order to warn his readers of this new threat.

2. Contend for the Faith (3b)

...I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

a) Necessity

...I found it necessary to write appealing to you...

MacArthur: Like Paul, who wrote to the Corinthians, ‘For necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel’ (1 Cor. 9:16), Jude felt ‘the necessity’—a heavy burden or mandate—‘to write.’ *Agchō*, the root of the noun rendered ‘necessity,’ means literally ‘compress.’ Jude recognize he was a watchman for the truth (cp. Ez. 3:16-21) who could not simply watch in silence as his readers slipped into error. His fervent passion for the sound doctrine, especially regarding the gospel, made even the thought of false teaching a heavy burden

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on his heart (cp. 2 Cor. 11:28). And he and his readers would not be able to share a ‘common salvation’ if they lost the gospel.

Gardner: For Jude there was a God-inspired need to write urgently asking the church to contend or fight for the faith. In 1 Corinthians 9:16, the apostle uses the same word for the compulsion from God that he felt to preach the gospel, a compulsion that overtook all other considerations. So it is here with Jude. He feels compelled by God to write this letter. They must ‘contend for the faith.’

MacArthur: Jude could not resist ‘appealing’ (*paralaleō*, ‘exhorting, encouraging’) to his readers that they ‘contend earnestly for the faith.’

b) Contend

...to contend for the faith...

MacArthur: The powerful expression ‘contend earnestly’ translates a present infinitive (*epagōnizomai*) and stresses the need to defend the truth continuously and vigorously (cp. 1 Tim. 1:18; 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7). It is a compound verb from which the English word *agonize* is transliterated. From Jude’s day until now, true believers have always had to battle for the purity of the salvation gospel.

Helm: The word translated ‘contend,’ when verbalized, sounds like our word *agonizing*. It possesses the idea of athletes who, in an effort to win, find themselves intensely struggling, competing, even fighting with all their might. Interestingly, the word also seems to attach itself to things that are intrinsically worth of full-orbed and all-engaging effort. Or, as a Greek-English Lexicon puts it, ‘effort expended...in a noble cause.’ ... This is what Jude is after. He aims at enlivening the church of his day to an immediate and intense struggle, a very real fight requiring all of their available energy.... We are being asked to read standing in readiness. Jude is finished with pleasantries; some required action is at hand. Urgency and immediacy move him. He wants contenders, and he wants them now. And with this letter he means to raise them up. If Jude were to write a letter to the church in our day, he wouldn’t change a thing. We need this generation of Christians to contend.

Moo: ‘Contend’ is a strong word. It refers to the exertions of the athlete and is similar to the word Paul used in 1 Corinthians 9:25 (‘competes’). Paul later applied this same term to his and his coworkers’ energetic defense of the gospel (Col. 1:29; 1 Tim. 4:10; 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7). Thus, Jude urges his readers not simply to resist the false teachers’ perversion of the faith they are actively and energetically to fight for it. Jude himself spells out some of the detailed components of this struggle in verses 20-23.

Benton: Not only are we to defend the truth against false teachers. The word ‘*contend*’ here implies that, but it implies much more as well. We must go on the offensive. We must positively spread the true gospel. Jude’s call to contend for the faith is therefore also a call to evangelism and apologetics. Preachers are to preach the Word. Individual Christians are to witness for Christ. By our lives we are to commend the gospel. By our support we are to encourage missionary endeavors. By our prayers we are to battle in the heavenly realms for the advance of the ‘faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.’

Benton: But the battle to contend for the faith is not simply a struggle for doctrinal purity of evangelistic potency. As the rest of the epistle of Jude makes clear, it is a struggle to maintain a godly lifestyle within the church, as the lifestyle which ought to be the resulting fruit of the

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gospel in people's lives.... To contend for the faith means concerning ourselves with Christian duty as well as Christian doctrine.

Benton: We must contend for the faith whether the gospel is popular or whether it is not. We must do this when society believes in God and when it does not. We must do this when it is intellectually respectable to be a Bible believer, and when it is not. We must do it when the established church hierarchy are good men committed to the truth, and when they are heretical liberals who sneer at the old gospel. Ewe must do it when Christianity is the dominant faith in a country, and when it has to jostle in the religious market place of a pluralistic society.... The church's primary call is not to be popular among people, but to be faithful to God. The call to battle is clear: 'Contend for the faith.'

c) *The Faith*

...to contend for the faith...

MacArthur: In referring to 'the faith,' Jude is not speaking of a nebulous body of religious doctrines. Rather, 'the faith' constitutes the Christian faith, the faith of the gospel, God's objective truth (i.e., everything pertaining to 'our common salvation'; cp. 2 Tim. 1:13-14).

Helm: What does Jude mean by 'the faith'? He means faith in all its *fullness*.... For Jude, 'the faith' is not merely a list of propositions. When defined fully, it includes the life-changing activity of God, conformity to its moral imperatives, and complete obedience to Jesus. Jude means all of this and then some! There is a fullness to the apostolic faith.

Gardner: What is 'the faith' for which they are to fight? ... 'The faith' is the truth which the apostles have preached about Jesus, and concerns the 'salvation we share' with them. Elsewhere in the New Testament the same word is used to summarize the content of the Christian gospel that had been preached; so, for example, we read of the apostle Paul in Galatians 1:23 who is now 'preaching *the faith* he once tried to destroy.' In other places, the same idea is caught up in the word 'gospel' (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:17). There is a need to fight for this gospel truth which has led to their salvation. Without this unique truth there would be no salvation for Christians to share.

Moo: 'Faith' has [an] objective meaning here. It describes what Christians believe—such things as Jesus' atoning death and resurrection, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, salvation by grace through faith, and (especially in Jude's situation), the holy lifestyle that flows from God's grace in Christ. These essentials, Jude claims, are not open to interpretation, for this faith 'was once for all entrusted to the saints.' But this faith has come under attack.

Benton: Benton: In our verses Jude underlines two things about this precious gospel.

(4) Once for All

...that was once for all...

Benton: First, it is complete in its truth.... God's truth has, of course, been revealed over many centuries. There has been a process of revelation.... Yet that unfolding revelation of God's truth came to completion in the time of the Lord Jesus and His apostles.

Benton: With the coming of Christ and the giving of the New Testament, revelation of God's truth for salvation is complete. There is no more to be added, for there is nothing more to be added. Jude underlines that for us when he tells us to 'contend for the faith that was *once for all* entrusted to the saints.' If the truth is all there in Scripture, then we must be alert to all those

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religious people who try to add to it... There is no more new revelation and there is no secret teaching of Jesus we need to know hidden in the sands of an archaeological dig, or in some as yet undiscovered ‘Gospel’ locked away in the vaults of a museum. The faith has been *once for all* given to the church.

Gardner: This was ‘once for all’ delivered. In normal English usage we might say that they had received it ‘once and for all.’ It was not to be change. Throughout the history of the church, heresy has entered as leaders and teachers have begun to think they know better than the simple basic ‘once for all’ gospel of Jesus and His death on the cross for sinners.... Jude reminds his readers that the gospel message is unchangeable. The message of Christ dying for the sins of all who believe in Him the message of the resurrection, of conversion and forgiveness never changes.

MacArthur: *Hapax* (‘once for all’) refers to something that is accomplished or completed one time, with lasting results and no need of repetition. Through the Holy Spirit, God revealed the Christian faith (cp. Rom. 16:26; 2 Tim. 3:16) to the apostles and their associates in the first century. Their New Testament writings, in conjunction with the Old Testament Scriptures, make up the ‘true knowledge’ of Jesus Christ and are all that believers need for life and godliness (2 Pe. 1:3; cp. 2 Tim. 3:16-17).

(5) Delivered to the Saints

...delivered to the saints.

Gardner: The saints here are those who are members of Christ’s church. The word ‘saints’ means ‘the holy ones,’ those referred to in verse 1 as ‘called, and loved by God.’ Of course, Jude has in mind specifically those to whom he is writing. They must continue to uphold and fight for the truth that they first heard and which first led them to Christ.

Benton: Second, it is entrusted to the church.... The word ‘*saints*’ means ‘holy ones,’ but in the New Testament it does not refer to special holy people, or people who have performed particularly heroic deeds in the service of God. It is simply the New Testament word which is used to refer to all Christians. We are all holy people as we have been cleansed from our sins and set apart for God in Christ.... Heaven truth has been ‘*entrusted to the saints*’ (plural). It is the work of the church together to guard and look after the truth of the gospel.

Gardner: This faith was ‘entrusted.’ The Greek word here might be translated as *handed down*. This does not imply a great length of time between the first time it was preached and the time Jude’s readers heard of the faith. Rather, the word brings to mind the handing down of teaching by word of mouth. It is a technical word from Jewish ways of teaching. The apostle Paul used it when relaying the instructions for the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:2, 23. The word suggests a finished and complete body of teaching, received by the people from their authoritative teachers. In the New Testament, that teaching is therefore specifically linked with the apostles. What Jude is saying is that the message of the gospel which they had heard was the *apostolic* message.

Benton: The body of Christian truth which Jude calls ‘*the faith*’ is the treasure of God given to the church. It is the church’s great treasure because by it people are saved and taken from the abject poverty of sin and given the riches of eternal life in Christ. So it is that the church has sought to defend the faith and contend for the faith (cp. 2 Tim. 1:13-14).

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Gardner: Two thousand years later, we may express that message in modern and relevant ways. We speak it in our own language rather than Greek, but we cannot and must not change the message, for it was handed down from the apostles and it is unique and unchangeable. No wonder it is worth fighting for when people try to introduce new ideas or new teachings!

Helm: Jude’s word for the church is this: ‘On your feet. The time for leisure is past. Contend. Agonize. Exert maximum effort. The Christian faith, in all its fullness and completeness, is worthy of your struggle.’ May Jude’s noble theme shake us from any complacency and bring us into apostolic conformity.

B. Occasion (Jude 4; cp. 2 Pe. 2:1-3)

4For 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.

2 Peter 2:1-3 – ¹But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. ²And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. ³And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

1. Certain People (4a)

4For certain people...

Helm: The disdain in Jude’s voice is palpable – ‘certain people.’ Throughout the letter Jude speaks in this derisive way when mentioning his opponents. It becomes his angry mantra. The *certain creeping people* of verse 4 become simple ‘these people’ by verses 8 and 10. And ‘these people’ are disgustingly relegated to ‘these’ by the time he reaches verse 12, 16, and 19.

Moo: ‘Certain men’ has a contemptuous ring; Jude does not bother to name or even to number them. Perhaps his scorn arises partly from their manner of working.

MacArthur: Although Jude’s description of the apostates as ‘certain persons’ is vague, their specific historical identity is not essential to his main point—namely, that any and all spiritual pretenders pose a clear and present danger to the church, whatever their error. Nor did Jude consider it necessary to detail the nuances of their particular false theology. It might have been an incipient form of Gnosticism or an early version of Nicolaitanism (a heresy that perverted grace and promoted wicked and immoral behavior; see Rev. 2:6, 15). Whatever the case, Jude’s readers knew who the apostates were and what they taught. Thus, he warned them to be on their guard. In the same way, contemporary Christians must also be aware that similar heretics still threaten the church today (Mt, 7:15; 24:11; Acts 20:29).

2. Crept in Unnoticed (4b)

...have crept in unnoticed...

MacArthur: Jude’s warning was not merely hypothetical; the false teachers were already present. The word translated ‘crept in unnoticed’ (*pareisduō*) appears only here in the New Testament. It

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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 apostates were in position to ‘secretly introduce destructive heresies.’

Moo: Rather than straightforwardly opposing the faith, these people pursue their agenda by stealth—they have ‘wormed their way in,’ as the REB puts it. It is not that they are hidden from the readers, working in secret so the faithful are not even aware of them. Rather, they hide their real nature and purpose. Jesus warned about ‘wolves in sheep’s clothing’ (Mt. 7:15)—these false teachers are just such wolves.

Benton: No false teacher arrives in the church with a placard around his or her neck saying, ‘I am a false teacher.’ They do not announce their treachery against Christ. Many of them, having been deceived themselves, are not aware of their own error and therefore are very sincere in their belief that they are saying and doing the right thing (2 Tim. 3:13). Whether consciously or unconsciously, false teachers always come in disguise (cp. Mt. 7:15). As God’s vulnerable flock we need to be alive to the subtle methods and disguises of such wolves. Often false teachers are immensely plausible. Jude says the false teachers have ‘*secretly slipped in among you.*’ There is a stealth and underhandedness. They have insulated their way into the congregations.

Gardner: Certain persons had ‘secretly slipped in among’ them. Obviously, this is only a minority of the congregation, but they will be able to cause untold harm if nothing is done about them. The very fact that they have gained entranced secretly makes it clear that there is a deliberate attempt to infiltrate and to change the church... It is a sad fact that also in our generation there have been repeated attempts by different groups to ‘worm their way into’ churches. These false teachers are often not immediately recognizable. How nice it would be if they wore a placard around their necks saying ‘I am a false-teacher!’ But the truth is that they will often appear to be very friendly and kind, but their aim is to change the teaching of the church by adding to or taking away from the once and for all delivered faith.

Benton: Their *teaching* often seems very plausible. All the ‘best’ and most destructive heresies are made up of half the truth. That is why the church can be taken in. These half-truths are usually mixed with ideas which particularly appeal to our fallen nature. They flatter us, or they spell out what seems to be an easier path which leads to heaven. Their *persons* often seem very plausible too. They can be extremely charming people in their dress and demeanor. Often, they are very affable and able to make a congregation relax with their humor. Frequently they are highly educated.... Sometimes, they are even able to perform what appear to be supernatural signs and miracles (cp. Mt. 7:22-23).

Gardner: Time and again in recent years churches have been taken away from what was ‘delivered.’ Instead of focusing on the gospel of Christ crucified, people are encouraged to focus on self, on wealth and personal gratification, or even on health. Instead of focusing on imitating Christ in day to day life, people focus on being more like those around them in the world in which they live. The temptation for Christians to follow such bad teaching often lies in the fact that what is being taught has at least some basis in Scripture. So often, Christians fail to realize that what may have started with Scriptural teaching has been grossly distorted and given a priority or a position way beyond that found in the Bible. The balance of the gospel is lost and people are led astray.

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3. Condemnation (4c)

...who long ago were designated for this condemnation...

Benton: He seeks to encourage us. We are not to lose heart in the face of rampant false teaching. Jude tells us, concerning false teachers, that ‘*Their condemnation was written about long ago.*’ Where was it written about? Jude has the Scriptures in mind. Later in his letter, in verse 11, he is going to cite three examples of false teachers of previous generations who troubled God’s people. But throughout Old Testament history people arose to oppose God’s true servants.... Not only, by implication, has their presence among us been predicted, but their *condemnation* has been foretold as well. Read the Old Testament stories.... They are bound for destruction. Their destiny has been writ large for a long time. So, do not be frightened or dismayed by them. Certainly, do not be tempted to follow them. Rather, do your duty and contend for the faith.

MacArthur: From the earliest times of redemptive history, God has promised to judge apostates with the utmost severity. The perfect tense of the participle *progegrammenoi* (‘beforehand marked out’) suggests that long ago God pronounced damnation against all apostates. They are sons of wrath whom He has ordained for this prophesied condemnation. Jude would also refer to their condemnation in verses 14-15 of this letter. The Old Testament prophets also made man predictions concerning the judgment of apostates (Is. 8:20-22; Jer. 5:13-14; 8:12-13; Hos. 9:7-9; Zeph. 3:1-8), as did the apostle Peter (2 Pe. 2:3-6).... The verdict against these apostates was pronounced long ago, meaning that their inevitable, final judgment is unalterable.

Gardner: Where were these ungodly people spoken of previously and what is the condemnation of which Jude speaks? The words ‘long ago’ suggest Jude was not thinking of something he or even the apostles had said earlier. The fact that he now goes on to use examples from the Old Testament and from the book of Enoch suggests that he was looking back to much older prophecies and events. In the past, there had been examples of the judgment that comes on the ‘ungodly.’ The early church was to take note of what was written beforehand and what happened in the past (cp. 1 Cor. 10:6).... ‘This condemnation,’ as Jude calls it here, has all been written about before. The verdict for such behavior is already known, and it will be carried out on the last day at the return of Christ. The examples that are to follow in this letter served in God’s plan as something of a ‘foretaste’ of the final dreadful judgment to be faced by all those who are godless in their behavior and deny the Lord Jesus.

Moo: Jude introduces the evidence for the false teachers’ condemnation that he will adduce in the rest of the letter. He makes his case by citing from the Old Testament (vv. 5-8, 11), from Jewish traditions (vv. 9, 14-16), and from the teaching of the apostles (vv. 17-18). In all these sources, he says, the ‘condemnation’ of these false teachers has long been established.

4. Character (4d)

...ungodly people...

MacArthur: As ‘ungodly persons’ (*asebēs*), the false teachers could not worship God properly. In fact, they were and are devoid of any and all reverence for Him. The early church fathers used the term *asebēs* in reference to atheists and heretics. Such people only play at religion while possessing no genuine fear of god or love for Him (cp. Mt. 23;25; 1 Tim. 6:5; 2 Tim. 3:5; Titus 1:16). Although they purport to be spiritual leaders, in reality they egregiously betray their constituent’s trust in shockingly immoral and unethical ways. They all claim to know and speak truthfully of God, Jesus, and Scripture, but their sinful character undermines that claim.

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Moo: ‘Godless’ (*asebes*) is an important word in Jude (cp. 15; also, the cognate noun in v. 18). The author sees it as the single best term to describe the men who have secretly slipped in and are threatening the faith. The word connotes a person who is ‘without religion,’ who ‘fails to worship’ (see also Rom. 4:5; 5:6; 1 Tim. 1:19; 1 Pe. 4:18; 2 Pe. 2:5-6; 3:7). It is broad enough to cover all kinds of sins and errors, but Hellenistic Jews used it especially of irreverence in an ethical sense: ‘not theoretical atheism, but practical godlessness.’ Jude clearly applies it in this way, saying almost nothing about the false teachers’ doctrinal errors but a great deal about their immoral lifestyle.

Gardner: If there is any word to sum up the general approach of these evil people it is this: they are ‘godless.’ This is a theme that Jude repeats in his quotation from the book of Enoch in verse 15 (where forms of the word appear three times), and again in verse 18 where he sums up the situation by reference to the warnings of the apostles themselves. To be godless involves bringing shame upon God. It is...not a statement that they are atheists, but rather a description of their teaching and specially their *behavior*. When the word is used in Jewish writings it is, as here, linked with the judgment that comes on the ‘ungodly.’

5. Conduct (4e)

...who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality...

Helm: What were these people doing? The answer is straightforward and clear. Certain people were challenging the faith in two ways. First, they were...*challenging the faith: taking advantage of God’s grace*. The word translated ‘pervert’ means ‘to change or alter.’ Evidently some Christian leaders were changing the intended effect of God’s grace. Rather than modeling a life dedicated to increasing conformity to the image of Christ, these people exercised their freedom by living however they pleased – in this case, continued sensuality. The word translated ‘sensuality’ is a general word meant to convey loose living marked by sexual pleasure and greed. In other words, they were gutting the faith of its moral imperatives. They altered Christian liberty – they changed and transformed it into carnal license.... Centuries later, this teaching was given a name.... Luther promptly denounced him as ‘antinomian’ – the first use of the word in history.

MacArthur: The false spirituality of the apostates could not restrain their fleshly lusts. They perverted God’s grace and changed it to ‘licentiousness’ or ‘sensuality’ (*aselgeia*, ‘sensuality, indecency, unrestrained vice’)... Then, to make matters worse, they excused their behavior by perverting the biblical concept of grace. In so doing, they demonstrated that they had never actually embraced Christ’s salvation at all; if they had truly tasted divine forgiveness, they would not have used grace as a license for sin (cp. Rom. 6:1-2; Gal. 5:13; 1 Pe. 2:16; 2 Pe. 2:19).

Moo: The word ‘immorality’ (*aselgeia*) is another key term that both Peter and Jude use to describe false teachers. It is a term that connotes especially sins of the flesh: sexual misconduct, drunkenness, gluttony, and so on. As did many before them and many after them, these false teachers twist God’s free forgiveness in Christ into an ‘open sesame’ for sinful behavior. It is as if they said, ‘Wasn’t it the essence of God’s grace that He took care of our sins completely on the cross? How, then, can there be any penalty for sin anymore? We can live as we like.’

Gardner: The specific manifestation of their ungodliness is seen in two ways, says Jude. First, they are immoral. They ‘change the grace of our God into a license for immorality.’ The best way to describe these people is that they were *antinomian*. That is, they denied the need for, or

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application of, God’s law.... The logic of the ‘ungodly’ might then proceed something like this: ‘God forgives us by grace alone, and it doesn’t matter what we do, we have not contributed to our salvation. Therefore, it still doesn’t matter what we do, because our salvation has nothing to do with our behavior. Indeed, our ungodliness or immorality will only serve to show up God’s grace all the more.’ The apostle Paul anticipates a similar danger in teaching about grace in Romans 6:1: ‘What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase?’ Peter also spells out the danger of antinomianism in 1 Peter 2:16: ‘Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.’

Benton: The devil’s purpose behind the false teaching is always somehow to legitimize sin. He wants the church to be duped into thinking that morality does not matter.... Paul recognizes in his letter to the Romans that some people were already seeking to misuse the grace of God.... He pre-empts the question of his opponents when he writes, ‘Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase?’ (Rom. 6:1). His resounding answer is, of course, ‘By no means!’

Helm: The truth is, this verse unmasks *our* propensity. Who among us, if left alone by the Holy Spirit for a single second, might not risk all Heaven holds for a moment of earthly satisfaction? Daily, the temptation is to presume upon grace. Presumption is our greatest sin. This verse belongs to the church. According to Jude, many are heading ever so unwittingly toward condemnation, never having been saved at all.... According to Jude, a personal encounter with God’s grace does not permit us to play fast and loose with the moral imperatives of God’s Word. To be a Christian means being saved *from* sensuality and *to* sanctification.

Benton: Even sections of the contemporary evangelical church which seek to be faithful to the Scriptures also face attempts to turn the grace of God into a reason to embrace sin within the church. ‘Does God not love adulterers, or thieves, or homosexuals, or alcoholics?’ we are asked. The implication is that if God loves them, then we should accept people as they are within the fold of the church. But this is to pervert the truth of the love of God. Yes, God loves all sinners, and every true Christian is still a sinner. But part of becoming a true Christian is to sincerely own Jesus as Lord and seek with God’s help to obey Him. This means that, whatever our besetting sins, we must be seeking to fight against those sins in our lives, not trying to legitimize them or say they do not matter.

6. Creed (4f)

...and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Helm: Challenging the faith: casting off God’s authority. The second challenge that occasioned Jude’s letter comes in the closing words of Jude 4. He writes of those who ‘deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. Not only were Jude’s opponents antinomian – they were anti-authority. They rejected the notion, either by their teaching of de factor by their loose living, that Jesus was their King.

MacArthur: Apostate false teachers view themselves as their own masters. Therefore, they refuse to honestly acknowledge the sovereign lordship of Jesus Christ. They will not submit to Jesus as divine ‘Master’ (*despotēs*, ‘sovereign ruler’) and ‘Lord’ (*kurios*, ‘sir,’ ‘owner,’ used as titles of deference and honor); nor will they give Him the honor He singularly requires as God the Son and the Savior of sinners. Thus, they ‘deny’ Christ His rightful position as God (Jn. 5:23), as King (Mt. 25:34; Jn. 1:49-51; 12:13; 18:37), and as Messiah (Mt. 2:4-6; Mk. 8:27-29; Lk. 2:25-35; Jn. 4:25-26). In so doing, they confirm that they are counterfeit.

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Benton: Jude tells us, [finally], that the false teachers ‘*deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.*’ Classically heretics have more often than not held erroneous ideas about the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.... False teachers come with heretical doctrine. The heretics whom Jude is opposing were marked by denying Jesus Christ as our only Master and Lord.... Jude has chosen a very unusual word to assign to Christ. He says that the false teachers deny Jesus Christ as our only *despotes* (Sovereign or Master).... This is a word only used of Christ here (v. 4), and in the parallel epistle of 2 Peter. The use of this peculiar term in and of itself seems to imply that the false teachers did have a deviant view of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Gardner: These people are living out a denial of the Lordship of Jesus in their lives. They are not so much teaching that Jesus is not Lord (if they had done that they would have been instantly recognizable by everyone as heretics), rather they are denying their Sovereign through their immoral behavior.... In Jude’s introduction he called himself a ‘slave’ of Jesus Christ and slavery involves obedience and service. The faithful covenant God, to whom Jude called our attention in verse 1, calls His people to covenant obedience to the Master who has redeemed them and saved them.

Moo: Exactly how were the false teachers ‘denying’ Christ? They may have been denying Him in theory, by contesting His nature or status or by teaching things incompatible with the ‘faith once for all delivered.’ But the unique combination ‘sovereign and Lord’ draws attention to Jesus’ right to demand obedience from His followers. Probably, then, Jude is thinking of a practical denial of Christ; of people behaving in a manner contrary to what Jesus the Lord demands of His people,

Helm: Again, we are confronted with the contemporary call of Jude. Denying Jesus the place of ultimate rule is common fare *in the church* today.... Do you see the difference between how we use the *only* and the way Jude uses it? In our day, Jesus is ‘only one among many.’ According to what we read in Jude 4, Jesus is our *only* Master. We saw the importance of this idea foreshadowed in the previous study when Jude early acknowledged himself to be Jesus’ servant. Christians willingly identify themselves as under authority. For others, though, coming under any notion of authority is viewed with disdain.

C. Application

1. Contend

Benton: There are two great lessons which we need to fasten on to as we leave these vital verses. The first, naturally, is the need to be both *guarding* and *promoting* the biblical gospel. This calls for spiritual maturity in every aspect of our personalities. It calls for a sharp and biblically informed mind, for heresies are often very subtle. It requires a firm will, a courageous resolve, for we shall meet much opposition as we try to stand for the truth. It also requires a loving heart, because to pursue the inevitable controversy involved in defending the faith in a way which delights in scoring points over others is ugly and spiritually disastrous.

Helm: Jude would have us ‘contend.’ He wants us on our feet exerting great energy for the faith. Ours is a noble cause. The faith needs our action. Do nothing, and the gospel will be entirely gutted of her transforming strength. Do nothing, and the glory of Jesus will be utterly dismissed. And how are we to contend? We must ‘keep ourselves in the love of God’ (v. 21). We must

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build ourselves up in our most holy faith (v. 20). We must keep watch in prayer lest we fall into temptation (v. 20).

2. Conversion

Benton: The second lesson which suggests itself very powerfully from these verses is the need for the church to maintain the doctrine of Christian conversion. At root the false teaching which insinuates that immorality of various kinds is acceptable within Christ's church is telling us that people do not have to be changed to be saved. But that is not true. How can someone be truly born again and yet continue living the same kind of life as before? It is impossible. Although it is true that, through Christ in the gospel, God accepts us just as we are, yet He does not leave us like that. He begins a new life in us. God's Holy Spirit takes up residence in our hearts and begins the ongoing transformation of our lives.... It is essential that the church clearly maintains the doctrine of new birth and Christian conversion.

Helm: To put a concluding and contrasting picture on this, we must reject the life of the fictional character who centuries later would go by Jude's name. Thomas Hardy came out with his completed novel *Jude the Obscure* in 1895. In it he creates another Jude, one who strived to belong at Christminster, a place of noble pursuits and elevated company. Eventually he crept in unnoticed, but only after he had run himself aground on the sandbars of sensuality. Hardy's Jude changed the grace of God into an opportunity for the flesh. He rejected authority. And at the close of his life he was still defiant, saying, 'The time was not ripe for us! Our ideas were fifty years too soon.' ... Two Judes. Two destinies. One faith. One choice to make. Push back from the table toward condemnation, or stand to contend for this most noble faith.

For next time: Read Jude 5-10.