

## **Jude 17 - 23**

*(Readings: 2 Peter 3:1-18; Jude 1-4)*

### **It's Over To You!**

We have spent quite some time in Jude considering the sin and doom of the false teachers. It has been a long paragraph from verse 5 through to verse 16 detailing who these people were and what they were doing. It has been quite a history lesson too, as Jude shows how much this spirit has shown itself before in the Church's history.

But Jude now returns to personally address those he specifically spoke to in verse 3. Not that he has forgotten about them in the verses in-between, mind you! Indeed, he had always been addressing these saints since this was to prepare and arm them to fight the foe.

Now, however, he is bringing it home to them. Thus he tells them of what is against them, and, also, even more importantly, Who is for them. So there are both negative and positive sides to this.

### **We Have Been Told What The Enemy Does**

It's in the verses 17 till 19 that we hear the negative side. There the first aspect of this text says to us: **WE HAVE BEEN TOLD WHAT THE ENEMY DOES.**

This is what the word "remember" brings into focus. It's this word, "remember", in verse 17, which is the first imperative – the first direct command - in this letter of Jude. And there are more in the verses after it. We have definitely come to the application part of the letter.

This word "remember" tells us that this should be nothing new to those there. The early New Testament Church has already clearly heard this warning before.

We read of one such warning in the third chapter of the Apostle Peter's second letter. And how similar wasn't that to what we read here? Verse 2 there even said, "I want you to recall the word spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Saviour through your apostles."

The Apostle Paul warned of this in chapter 4 of his first letter to Timothy. In the verses 1 till 3 he outlines the same situation regarding false teachers. And in Acts 20, verse 29, he had warned the Ephesians elders, "after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock."

It's interesting that in speaking of the apostles of the Lord Jesus, Jude has in mind the original twelve apostles and Paul. But as there is little known or being written by any apostles except Peter and Paul, we can take it that they are those he is specifically referring to here.

It's certainly not himself. Jude is very careful to keep himself apart from any possible connection with that office.

So Jude's words are nothing new. Indeed, in verse 18 he quotes 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3 verse 3. He does that here because he wants to re-emphasise the nature of the time period they are in. "The last times" is the period of time between Christ's first and second comings. And it's in this period of time – however long it will be – that there will be false teachers trying to destroy the Church of Christ from within.

There is even a description given of what those false teachers do. It is said they scoff. This means they are dismissing the orthodox faith. They are claiming the high spiritual ground! Anyone who couldn't see how superior they obviously were could only be 'old-fashioned' or 'puritanical'!

These false teachers were so Spirit-filled they knew better than God Himself! Thus there was no room for the Law in their Christian lives. Naturally that meant they also rejected all the warnings in Scripture about men just like them. While they knew that Word, they were hell-

bent on going their own way – the way that is the attractive broad freeway and not the narrow way.

But in verse 18 Jude also has the Lord's Word for us today. While we are nearly two thousand years later, we too are even more so in the last times. And how many scoffers aren't there around us and amongst us today, attacking God's Word?

Now, those apostates only show clearly in their scoffing how spiritually bankrupt they are. And it's a scoffing that will only exacerbate the closer the end of this period comes – it will get much worse. That's what following their own ungodly desires tells us.

So what those people do is the exact opposite of what the sincere believer does. You desire to do God's Will; they want to do their own thing. You want to show how grateful you are to the Lord for all He's done for you; they curse His Name or despise Him! They will even go out of their way to go against God's Word and His true people. They are so full of themselves! And so you will know it is close to the end when these people are so blatantly out there while trying to say they belong in here!

You wonder that, don't you? When you see or hear or read of such heretics in the Christian Church you wonder why they don't just go. They obviously don't belong! Surely they must see that?

Ah, that's just the issue, isn't it? They're blind. But they'll tell you they can see alright! Thus what verse 19 next describes is no surprise at all. That's why Jude uses a contemptuous phrase to describe them. It's the same phrase as we have read in verses 12 and 16. Jude calls them "these men," or "those men," as some versions have it." They are clearly contrasted with the "dear friends."

It's these men that Jude says are making divisions or separations in the church. They are creating schism and factions. This is what those proclaiming heresies inevitably do. And they were doing it then in the way of a type of Christian Pharisaism. These would have been seen in their keeping to their own group at the Love Meal, as verse 12 noted. They were despising the simple pastors set over the church, as verse 8 spoke of. They were attaching themselves to the rich, as verse 16 tells us.

They were 'special' alright! Didn't they let you know that! And, you know, Jude agrees with them. They are 'special'. They are different than the ordinary, every-day believers. But only because of what they did not have!

As Jude goes on, for all their claims to be super-spiritual this is the exact quality they don't have! They only "follow mere natural instincts." They "do not have the Spirit."

Jude lays before us what these people truly are – false Christians. They are counterfeits! For all their carrying on about how spiritual they were they missed the Holy Spirit Himself!

Well, we have picked that up already, haven't we? Anyone who sets themselves up against God's Word also goes against His Spirit, because the Word and the Spirit always go together. So how much isn't this early form of Gnosticism also found in the Church of today? How many believers aren't justifying what they do because it feels right for them, even if it goes against God's Word? And what about those preachers who lift their Sunday messages right off the pages of self-esteem and self-help books? They don't come before the all-holy and all-powerful God and humble themselves under His Word!

### **We Must Keep Looking Up To The Lord**

Having shown this negative side, though, Jude now turns to the positive. In the verses 20 and 21 he says to us, WE MUST KEEP LOOKING UP TO THE LORD. This is our second aspect.

Note again, congregation, the tender address. "Dear friends" he begins again. He separates them from the false teachers and he does it now with some true teaching. This is what Jude

means by “your most holy faith.” For this is not now about dividing and breaking apart but about helping each of us spiritually and strengthening the unity of the church.

This is the same as Paul has written of in Ephesians 4:12. In his own words Jude is preparing God’s people for works of service, so that Christ’s Body may be built up. That’s why the faith spoken of here is the body of Christian doctrines which the apostles taught. This is not subjective faith, that personal trust you have in the Lord Jesus, but the objective faith – the facts of the gospel.

Notice how verses 3 and 20 complement each other. At the beginning of this letter Jude urges his readers “to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.” And now in verse 20 he commands them to build themselves up in this “most holy faith.”

This means that the Scriptures have the supreme place in the Church. It’s only God’s Word that is unique in the message it teaches and in the changes it makes in us. Nothing else will do it.

Doesn’t this also challenge us to keep meeting together in public worship and fellowship? Wherever we can we should be encouraging each other in this way.

And to be open to doing this they must “pray in the Holy Spirit.” It’s only by looking completely to the Lord that we’re truly blessed. As Paul says in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 10 verse 4, the weapons we have are not the weapons of this world.

Now, “praying in the Spirit” has become misunderstood amongst many Christians today. They have been taught that this is a special prayer – a super-spiritual prayer. But it is actually the simple, believing prayer. As Romans 8:15 tells us, it’s through the Spirit of sonship that we come to cry, “*Abba, Father.*”

This is nothing more and nothing less than personally communing with your Lord. This is the praying in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests Ephesians 6:18 describes. For there it is put very much in the context of your everyday spiritual warfare. We need to keep putting on the full armour of God. And prayer is the line we have to keep open to God so that we receive His instructions about how to fight and where to fight.

It’s what prayer opens us up to which Jude turns to next in verse 21. Because this means you keep yourself in the sphere of God’s love. That’s the communion you join yourself with. Jude wants us to know that this is something we have to keep ourselves in here. In verse 1 he addresses them as men who’ve been found by the love of God. And in verse 2 he had prayed that this divine love, along with God’s mercy and peace, would fill them. But here he urges them to fulfil their side of the covenant of love with God. This is our striving to do God’s will by loving Him with all our heart and soul and mind.

It was what our Lord had taught in John 15. The love of God which Jesus spoke of there in verse 9 has to be echoed by us. As verse 10 of John 15 goes on to say, “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s command and remain in his love.”

It was by flagrant disobedience that the false teachers had fallen out of love with Jesus. And so they had fallen out of love with the fellowship as well.

Then there is a fourth quality which marks out the true believer. As well our being built up in the faith, our praying in the Holy Spirit, and our keeping ourselves in God’s love, there is also the hope we have in the future. This means we are those with the assurance of our own resurrection at the end of our time here below.

Jude uses the word “mercy” to bring out what’s happening here. Because when that great and coming Day comes it will be God’s grace in Jesus Christ that brings us through. We look to being vindicated by the Supreme Judge of all.

And how much doesn't that put our lives in the right perspective now? Unlike those false teachers it's not about the thrills and spills of this short life-time now. We aren't caught up in those feelings which are so temporary.

We are being brought to eternal life – no less! We are going to be forever with the Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Aren't you looking towards that with how you live here below?

### **We Need To Show God's Love To His Own**

So, WE MUST KEEP LOOKING UP TO THE LORD. But there is also another side to this positive aspect. For WE NEED TO SHOW GOD'S LOVE TO HIS OWN. Here we have our third aspect.

This is what the verses 22 and 23 highlight for us. Turning from where we must be with the Lord we are challenged to bring others into that same communion with Him. As much as Matthew 22:37 exhorted us to love the Lord with all our hearts and with all our souls and with all our minds, so just two verses later the Lord tells us this also means loving our neighbours as ourselves. We are not saved to be free but to serve, and how much doesn't that come through here?

Those fellow believers Jude calls us to serve are found in three different groups. He begins first with calling us to be merciful to those who doubt. These are the wavering ones. They are those being distracted by the false teachers.

In 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 2:18 these ones are described. There the apostle says that they are those being enticed just as they're escaping from those living in error. So they're weak Christians. They are exactly those who can become drawn away from the truth by these heretics. They can be seduced by a nice sounding story or two.

There are many telling those stories in Christian churches today. They speak of all kinds of intimate experiences with God, and especially of how much they got the Lord to do things their way. In fact, they will be quite open about how you have to tell God what to do. I mean, He can't do it without you, can He?

Yes, that's what they teach. And how much doesn't that appeal to a weaker Christian? He or she can do something really incredible!

We have to get next to believers like this. Out of all we've been blessed in over the years, we have to guide them. Be reassuring and understanding, but be clear. They need the truth in love.

Then there are those we snatch away from danger. There is the sense here of the sudden rescue, which indeed it is. Fire is what destroys very quickly!

So there is a direct frontal approach with this second group. They're being scorched by the flames of sin so they must be straightaway saved. Time is very precious in this situation.

Again we see the influence of the false teachers. They have drawn these weaker brethren into this sin. And these brethren have become sucked right in! Unlike the first group they not wavering about following the heretics – they've got dragged right away. And it seems they don't really know it.

At the same time we must understand that our saving these people is not our work. God saves them, through us. We become to them the agents of God to pull them to safety.

Are you ready for that? Do you look for that? As you see loved ones drawn away by false teaching so quickly do you act just as quick to pull them back?

And then there is the third group. Their situation is even more subtle, for while we are told we must show mercy to them we are also told we must be very wary of them. It seems that

they have been more deeply drawn into the web of deceit. Indeed, this is why Jude pictures it as clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

The original Greek tells us here of underwear that's been dirtied by human excrement. That is how badly they have been affected. And doesn't it make us feel the strongest repugnance towards it? Ugh!

But this is exactly how much we must hate sin! It must be anathema to us! And so we must be very, very careful with these ones.

The words of Paul in Galatians 6 are helpful here. As he writes there in verse 1, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted."

For that terribly stained sinner, however, you yet have the most wonderful offer. He can have a good clean and a complete change of clothes.

This is probably an Old Testament picture Jude is referring to from Zechariah 3. There in the presence of Satan the Lord takes off the high priest's filthy clothes. While doing that the angel says to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you." Unless these folk repent and change their ways they are tolerating their sin and getting used to it. Then they're following merely natural instincts. They are on the way to betraying the gospel.

There can be no compromise here. Jude is saying the same thing as John says in Revelation 3:4 about the church in Sardis. For there were a few people there who had not soiled their clothes.

It is clear the false teachers were devastating the early New Testament Church. And we need to know that the last times this is taking place in very much includes our time. That's why we must be well trained in the truth. Through following the directions in the verses 20 and 21 we'll be ready to help those in the situation of verses 22 and 23.

But let's also realise that for some it may well be too late. They are proving they were never the Lord's own. That means they could have become joined with the false teachers. They could even be doing that false teaching.

Now, would you know it if you heard it?