

Jude's Brief History of Rebellion Against God

Jude 5-10

As we are three weeks into the Jude series, I want to just give a brief recap.

The book of Jude was written by Jesus' half-brother who went from a point of severe doubt and even disdain for his brother Jesus as Messiah, Savior and Lord instead was moved by the Holy Spirit to a place of devotion. Sometime in his life, after his brother and Savior and Lord, rose from the dead, Jude had a conversion. So, Jude set out to write a letter to the Church scattered all over the Mediterranean but instead was compelled to warn the Church that false teachers, ungodly people had crept into the Church unseen and unknown to many and were doing damage to the Church because they were teaching the people to embrace a false Gospel. Nevertheless, Jude is confident that Jesus will prevail, will preserve His Church (meaning you and me), and deliver us blameless with great joy before the throne of the Lord. So, Jude calls us to fight for the truth of the Gospel but he also encourages us by saying the victory has already been won. When we join Jesus in contending for the faith delivered once for all, we join the winning side.

Someone may ask today "Why talk about this? Is this really a big problem?" In Jude's day all teachers (false and faithful) were people who went from town to town and church to church, getting as they went from place to place. This is actually how Jesus taught. It was uncommon, if not unheard of, for a church to have its own teacher—like we are used to and enjoy today. That's why this issue of false teaching was such a big deal and a very important topic for Jude—the teaching was like a box of chocolates. You never knew what you were going to get! When I was in college I did supply preaching for small congregations that could not afford a pastor. They never knew who was stepping into their pulpit Sunday each and every Sunday and woman once said to me after I preached somewhat unimpressively, "We're just glad to have someone who preached the Bible."

The obvious question today is, "If I am preaching about false teaching, aren't I myself? How do we know I am not indulging in false teaching now?" It's important for us to talk about false teaching today for two reasons. First, I'm far from perfect and an educated, Biblically literate, faithful congregation is actually the Church's best defense against heresy, bad doctrine and corrosive ideas. My life has been changed, my walk with Jesus impacted and my ministry improved because mature believers at various times lovingly corrected me.

Second especially today we are all subject to a lot of voices today—actually thousands. Some of these voices we're aware of and some we're not. Most of us listen to podcasts or read books by other teachers and preachers. It's important that we have a discerning heart and mind. We are also exposed to theology everywhere. As the Church's influence has waned in our culture, we have not become less religious. We have actually become more religious and religious ideas, thoughts and philosophies creep in from every corner. Even people who claim to be anti-religious promote some authority that demands our absolute trust and allegiance, whether it is the religion of government, environmentalism, education and science, hyper-patriotism, race, Marxism, hedonism or consumerism. We are made to yearn for something greater than ourselves and we cannot escape being very religious. Everyone is religious about something and our religion, our or faith is in that the authority to whom we give our absolute trust and allegiance. That thing impacts our life more than anything else.

One of the most difficult events I encounter in ministry is watching someone clearly stray from Jesus' true Gospel of grace and salvation through His work alone, what Jude called 'the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints,' and embrace a false faith, a

counterfeit gospel and give their absolute trust and allegiance to it. Sometimes the false teaching began with a book or a podcast they subscribed to or a relationship. And I have seen people, even elders and pastors, wreak havoc in their lives and the lives of people they love because they embraced a counterfeit gospel taught by the kind of teacher Jude warns against.

At its root, Jude says this false teaching, is a disdain for Jesus' glory and an outsized love for their own humanity.

But these people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively.

Jude 11

What is blasphemy? Blasphemy is a big, powerful very loaded word. It's actually very, very simple. Blasphemy is consciously degrading God, minimizing God, willfully misrepresenting God to others. Blasphemy is consciously revealing God to be someone Whom He is not. It is a verbal assault on the sacred. And blasphemy is serious. Jesus said when we blaspheme God, particularly the Holy Spirit, we commit a sin that God will not forgive.

Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.

Mark 3:28-29

But blasphemy, if we listen to Jesus, is also something else. Blasphemy is also doing the same to human beings who are created in the image of God. Blasphemy is denying that human beings or any human being is created in the image of God. This is why Jesus said, "Whoever calls his brother a fool makes themselves liable to hell," meaning whoever shames their brother (or sister) publicly or says they are beyond redemption or outside of God's grace or good for nothing. It should bother us, even frighten us that culturally we seem to be unable to stop calling people fools by pointing out their shame, faults and failures and placing them beyond a point of redemption and God's grace.

Yet, that is something we are being taught to do. We are being instructed by false teachers who have crept in among us that we need shame people, cast them out, paint them as irredeemable and even deny their basic humanity in order to show proper outrage for their sin. And when we do it, we blaspheme the image of God in them and we also blaspheme the God who died for them whose grace can absolutely redeem them, forgive their sin and repair their breached relationships.

Jude said these false teachers blasphemed all they do not understand and **embrace all they can understand instinctively.**

These false teachers didn't understand things of the spirit, things which cannot be discerned through the five senses or reasons. They didn't understand anything they could not control, anything beyond their grasp. They dismissed that anything of any eternal significance. They did not believe something could be greater than them, Someone to whom we might be responsible or accountable or answerable to. The Greek word understand is also translated as *know*, which in Biblical parlance means to be intimate with or close to. So, they blaspheme things they have never met or become close to, especially Higher Things, especially God. And rather than seeking God, they curve in on themselves and everything they do, eventually leads back to themselves.

I once got into an e-mail debate with a college biology professor who invited me to join a group of pastors who opposed the teaching of Intelligent Design in public schools. Intelligent Design, in case you don't know, is the general idea that because the earth, the universe, shows manifest signs of design that it is statistically highly probable, around 99.999999%, that it clearly has a Designer rather than appearing by random chance as Darwinian evolution implies. I e-mailed telling him I didn't support that and we went back and forth debating intelligent design. I am sure he was writing straight from his education and I was consulting some books on my shelf and my favorite internet search engine. Finally, after weeks of going back and forth, I made a point he could not refute. I won the debate and he replied saying, "I just cannot agree with you because if I did it would mean that as a scientist I am responsible before God and I will not do that." I have no doubt this man was brilliant and very well educated but he was starting at the wrong point—what he could understand instinctively through his own mental and spiritual resources rather than allowing the God of the cosmos to reveal His glory to him. And we may say "Isn't that what scientists do? Aren't scientists supposed to be unbiased, neutral observers free from religious bias?"

Jude says we are made to be religious and so cannot escape bias—either we are biased toward Jesus or biased toward ourselves.

Most historians believe one of the greatest scientists to ever live was Galileo, the Italian scientist. He's known as the father of modern science. Galileo is also known for falling into conflict with the Church during his lifetime and because of that some believe he was not a Christian.

But he was...devout and faithful. And he grounded all his science in the basic conviction that everything exists made by God for the glory of God. His prayers, which he wrote down for all to see, are beautiful. Here is a sample:

Whatever the course of our lives, we should receive them as the highest gift from the hand of God, in which equally reposed the power to do nothing whatever for us. Indeed, we should accept misfortune not only in thanks, but in infinite gratitude to Providence, which by such means detaches us from an excessive love of Earthly things and elevates our minds to the celestial and divine.

Everything begins with God—even science. It is all under His authority.

John Calvin, in his 1538 Catechism, correctly identified these two trends of thought when he claimed that “**the carefree disregard of God’s power and false confidence in our own capacity are the two most harmful plagues of all.**” As we exaggerate our human capacity and mitigate the glory of God, we court destruction.

You may have heard of an annual prize given out called a Darwin Award. The Darwin Award is a prize that you don’t want to get because it is always awarded posthumously. It is given to handful of people who distinguish themselves by failing to acknowledge reality, painstakingly obvious reality, and pay the ultimate price for it.

Last year one of the winners was a man who as he drove home, saw an injured bear alongside the side of the road. Rather than calling the authorities for help, the man decided to snuggle next to a wounded ferocious animal to take a selfie.

It did not end well for him.

In 2019, two men won the award when they tried jump their car over an open drawbridge across a Texas river.

The all-time Darwin award winner is from Washington State. He decided to rob a firearms store apparently during a busy time of day because he believed it would be filled with people he could rob. He also stepped around a marked police car sitting near the door and the uniformed officer on a coffee break, was standing at the counter. When he walked in the door, he announced he was robbing the place and fired his gun into the air to demonstrate he was serious.

It was his first and last attempt at armed robbery.

So just like ignoring the reality of snuggling up next to a wild, injured thousand-pound bear; simple physics or robbing a store filled with armed citizens—ignoring reality about God and His glory also places our life in jeopardy.

In the time we have left, we'll talk about the three examples Jude provides of human beings, angels and demons who blaspheme God and embrace only what they can understand instinctively. In each case they have seen God's glory and determine instead to follow their own, natural, sinful instincts rather than submit to God. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and determined to put their ultimate trust and allegiance in created things rather than worshipping the Creator.

Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day— just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.

Jude 5-7

The first example Jude shares comes from the book of Numbers. We are told there about God's people, the Hebrew slaves, God miraculously delivered from captivity in Egypt to freedom. Jude refers to an episode when the people sat right on the edge of the Promised Land—the land the Lord promised to them. The Lord commanded Moses to send spies into the land. The spies took 40 days to get a good look and saw that the land was indeed good and filled with plenty to eat but they also saw that the people were big, like giants, and lived in cities behind tall and thick stone walls.

They came back and reported all this to the people and the people fell into despair because they thought there was no way, they had the capacity to seize that land. They cried all night and said they wanted elect a new leader, someone other than Moses, to take them back to Egypt.

And the Lord was very angry and they only survived then because Moses plead with God on their behalf. Moses begged God to spare their lives and be the merciful God, Moses knew Him to be. The Lord replied:

"I have pardoned, according to your word. But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD, none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these ten times and have not obeyed my voice, shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. And none of those who despised me shall see it."

Numbers 14:20-23

The Lord was greatly angered because His people had seen His glorious work. They had witnessed Him deliver them from Egypt by parting the Red Sea. They doubted His unmatched power ten times or once for every plague He brought upon the Egyptians to set them free. But they chose instead to fear the power of mere men. They exaggerated human capacity to keep them from the Promised Land and minimized God's ability to keep His promise. And because of that, none of them entered the Promised Land—which meant they wandered in the wilderness for a couple generations until everyone set free from Egypt dropped dead.

There are false teachers today, who are telling us to fear. They are trying to convince us that Jesus is not powerful enough, that He is not able to keep His promises and so we must resort to other powers, principalities and people to protect us. We need to put our faith in government or guns or wealth, masks, fences, science, experts, or education. We are being conditioned, even in the Church, to fear the future, to fear the unknown, to fear others, fear what will happen to the Church, fear for our kids and to go to extreme lengths to make sure we are safe because God is not in control, not sovereign over all things. And so, we must rely on other things, created things to keep us safe.

The opposite of faith is not doubt. Its fear. Fear is just another form of blasphemy. The good news, the Gospel, the faith once delivered for all the saints promises us we can live without fear and if we fear the Lord, meaning revel in His glory, we will not fear anyone or anything in this world.

The second episode Jude refers to appears many places throughout Scripture. The Bible describes multiple times the rebellion of one-third of the angels in heaven against the Lord and His subsequent binding of some of them until the final judgment. One of those places is in Revelation Chapter 12:

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world –he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

Revelation 12:7-10

Once again, a lot like God's people whom He set free from slavery, the angels that rebelled against God, knew His glory. They saw it first-hand and up close. In fact, they saw it more closely than even we have. But rather than receive and enjoy His glory forever, they chose to seize God's glory and attempt to displace Him.

There are teachers today encouraging us to do the same, to seize God's glory and put ourselves on the throne of our own lives. There are teachers today, inside the Church, who say “If it is to be, it is up me.” They teach a gospel of self-help. They say things like, “Jesus never gives you more than you can handle,” or “God helps those who help themselves.” They preach messages like, “Six Things You Can Do to be More Successful at Home and at Work” or “Making Yourself Happy.”

It's a counterfeit

The third episode Jude raises is perhaps the most infamous. Sodom and Gomorrah Genesis teaches us were destroyed because of sexual immorality. That's true but it's even a little more complicated than that. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were was likely located near the Dead Sea at the lowest point in the world where it is hot and dry but fertile –today about an hour's drive from Jerusalem.

Their wickedness was well known to all. But one day two angels visited a man named Lot. They met him at the city gate of Sodom where they were seen by all. Lot invited them back to his home to stay where he could feed them, clean them up and give them a place to stay the night. But before they could even go to bed, the men of Sodom surrounded the city and demanded that Lot send the men outside. Genesis tells the story:

The men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house. And they called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them.” Lot went out to the men at the entrance, shut the door after him, and said, “I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly.

It is an ugly episode and I'm even censoring some of it because we have children present. The men of Sodom tried to break the door down but the angels struck them blind. And then they warned Lot to get his family, all of his family, out of the city and don't look back as you leave. The next morning the Lord rained down fire on Sodom and on Gomorrah wiping them out from the earth.

At Sodom, the men saw the glory of the angels. And they wanted to possess it, dominate and destroy it. They lusted for the glory. There are teachers today who say that we should celebrate our lusts, that God wants us to be happy above all else, and to seize the life we want at any cost. This is not only true in Churches that have lost all sense of sexual boundaries. It is also true in Churches that teach the prosperity Gospel—the idea that Jesus wants to be rich and that a sign and symbol of faithfulness is monetary wealth.