

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.
Sunday July 18, 2021. "The Little Three: Jude"

I Intro.

Welcome to the weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from the message this Sunday. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing and you can still use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. We're roughly halfway through 2021 and fully committed to gathering in person. A growing group of familiar and new faces join us each Sunday. Our children's and youth areas have been fully open also and are seeing a good response. We're so encouraged with your love and presence when you gather with us. If you're still joining us online, we love and so appreciate your presence also. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We still are your church family, and if there is ANYTHING you need, prayer, ideas or suggestions, please pass them our way. We know the future is still uncertain, but we are committed to making our virtual congregation as central to NCC as our in person group.

II Sunday.

If you're reading this you've survived our first stab at mining something of value out of some of the shortest letters in the New Testament. And for some reason you decided to give it another try. Good for you. Philemon was a look into an issue that was tough, (slavery), and challenged us to a more mature way to interpret scripture. It can feel scary to take a less rigid approach to scripture using more than a surface literal reading, and look for deeper life truths. But it is the key to finding that deeper, more meaningful interpretation to help us grow in our spiritual maturity.

Sunday, we got to hear from our old friend Kristen again, as she covered the letter from Jude. She beautifully hit the issue of people within the church that are stirring up discord and division. We've talked about this before, but it's always helpful to read teachings warning us about it from a different view.

Let's wrestle with this issue of division first.

Where have you experienced division and discord in the past?

What caused and fed it?

Was it ever resolved, and what did it take to do it?

Read the letter to Jude and we'll ask the usual questions.

What jumped out to you from this letter?

What did it say to you about the nature and issues surrounding division?

Kristen's primary point is; what do we let influence us, what voices do we listen to that we drag into the church and use it to create division. And to be honest with you, this has been an issue within EVERY church for the past many years. People within the church are holding others to personal political standards. So, Kristen builds what she calls a framework to help evaluate people who influence us.

1. Virtue. There is a lot of inner work in this process. Do these outside voices values align with those expected of a Christ follower? And do their behaviors align with Christian values? Our constant admonition here is the danger and normalness of drift, and the continual work of realignment. This requires a courageous open heart to know everything we hold onto could be leading us away from the teachings of Jesus.

2. Practical wisdom. Do these outside voices know what they're talking about? When they use scripture to support ideas, is it in context and aligned with the teachings of Jesus, OR is it taken out of context? This is a tough but important test to put those we let influence us to. Confirmation bias, (the desire to have what we already believe proven true), will always lead us to work backwards in evaluating other's influence. We tend to like and follow people who say what we already believe, rather than seeking truth. What do we use to help us determine if what others are telling us is actually true or we want it to be true?

3. Disinterest. What are these people who are sowing division interests, and are they aligned with Christ? What do they have to gain from what they are teaching/arguing for? Most of the time you can easily see these outside voices are leveraging their interests to gain money, power, attention control, or even just being right. This is such an important test because it causes us to look at the motives of people we let influence us. One of my guiding practices for years in the ministry is to see who the people I follow are following. If I really admire and respect certain people, I want to know who they admire and respect. And this works in the other direction also. It helps me to evaluate the motives of the people I let influence me if I can do the real work of seeing what they might be actually gaining from what they say.

4. Evaluate our own interests. This requires asking some personal self-examination questions. What is motivating me to heed this person's teachings? Do they flatter me, make me feel like part of the "in" group, or I'm part of the select group with secret knowledge. Is there something I FEEL like I'm gaining that is causing me to miss what is really happening? Jeremiah warns us that the heart is deceitful beyond understanding, and we always have to be aware of our own ability to lead ourselves astray. This is where the work of the Holy Spirit must penetrate every part of who we are to check our motives, desires, and drives to see why we allow those who aren't aligned with Christ to influence us.

III Challenge.

All of this is really hard work...REALLY hard work. And this letter is a timeless warning to make sure before we allow ourselves to be influenced by any voice or group, to do the work of making sure those people are aligned with what we hold as the teachings of Jesus, and they add to the health and growth of where we belong rather than bringing in division and discord. The power is in our hands. We HAVE to learn not to give it away to people who really don't care about us.

Where could you do some serious work in reexamining who you let influence you?

