

Godly Wisdom For A Healthy Christian

Jude 17-23

Introduction:

- 1) False teaching and heresy can be painful, but it can also be helpful. It may be a nuisance, but it is also necessary. In the NT false teaching helped clarify in particular the doctrines of Christology and pneumatology, soteriology and eschatology. In the early history of the Church heresy caused the Church to think more clearly about Christ and to identify the canon of Scripture.
- 2) Today heresy continues to orbit about us, shooting forth from every conceivable direction its meteors of deception and error. Maybe, it is the fiction and myth of Dan Brown and *The Da Vinci Code*, a book and movie about a non-existent code which reveals a non-existent marriage (Jesus and Mary Magdalene) concerning a Jesus who never existed as Brown imagines. Maybe it is the media frenzy and misinformation concerning *The Gospel of Judas*, a book that is not a gospel and one that was not written by Judas, but rather by a Gnostic sect called the Cainites, 150 years after Christ, committed to rehabilitating the “bad boys” of the Bible. Or maybe it is the wild imagination of a UNC Charlotte professor, who in *The Jesus Dynasty* argues that Paul is really responsible for Christianity not Jesus, and that Jesus intended to form only a Jewish dynasty but his plan was short-circuited by his untimely death. And as an aside, Jesus was not virgin born as Mary had at least 3 sex partners including a Roman soldier named Pantera who is Jesus’ real father, and Jesus of course did not rise from the dead but was removed from his original tomb and reburied in the family graveyard.
- 3) Sometimes the heresy may emerge within our own ranks. From the theologically liberal it may be a Kirby Godsey, former president of Mercer University who in *Centering Our Souls* writes, “Jesus death was not some cosmic drama by which Jesus was trying to appease God’s wrath. Jesus did not have to die for God’s grace to be released upon a torn and cripple world,” (p 12) and “We do not have to repent, or to confess. We don’t have to do anything to win God’s forgiveness...When the light breaks, we begin to see people, friends and enemies, as children of God’s grace” (p. 46-47). Or consider the bizarre event that recently occurred in Austin, Texas when avowed atheist Robert Jensen, a journalism professor at U.T. Austin, joined St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church. Jensen said of himself, “So, I am a Christian, sort of. A secular Christian. A Christian atheist perhaps. But, in a deep sense, I would argue, a real Christian.” Now it is strange that an atheist would want to join any church. However, it is tragic that any church would allow an atheist to join. Commenting on all of this pastor Jim Rigby stated, “Neither the church nor Jensen views his membership as surrendering anything... If God wanted us to simply recite creeds, Jesus would have come as a parrot.” (Mohler Commentary, 5-1-06). However, heresy is not limited to the theological liberal. From the conservative wing a secular news magazine recently said of the mega church movement, “They tend to emphasize the upside of faith...while downplaying such unpleasant notions as burning in hell

for all eternity (*The Week*, 5-5-06, p.11) and from the theologically bizarre listen as Kenneth Copeland says, “Every believer is as much an incarnation as was Jesus of Nazareth,” or Paul Crouch of TBN who says, “I am a little god. I have His name. I am one with Him. I am in covenant relation. I am a little god. Critics be gone!” Or Earl Paulk of Atlanta who writes, “Just as dogs have puppies and cats have kittens, so God has little gods...Until we comprehend that we are little gods and we begin to act like little gods, we cannot manifest the Kingdom of God.” And one last tragic example that perhaps outstrips all others. Casey Treat, pastor of Seattle’s Christian Faith Center, says in his series “Believing in Yourself” that we have to come to the point where we feel comfortable claiming our godhood:

The Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost has a conference and they said, ‘Let us make man an exact duplicate of us.’ Oh, I don’t know about you, but that does turn my crank! An exact duplicate of God! Say it out loud- ‘I’m an exact duplicate of God!’ [The audience repeats it a bit tentatively and uncertainly.]

Come on, say it! [He leads them in unison.] ‘I’m an exact duplicate of God!’ Say it again, ‘I’m an exact duplicate of God!’ [The congregation is getting into it, louder and bolder, with more enthusiasm each time.] Say it like you mean it! [He’s yelling now.] ‘I’m an exact duplicate of God!’ Yell it out loud! Shout it! [They follow as he leads.] ‘I’m an exact duplicate of God!’ ‘I’m an exact duplicate of God!’ [Repeatedly]...

When God looks in the mirror, He see me! When I look in the mirror, I see God! Oh hallelujah!...

You know, sometimes people say to me, when they’re mad and want to put me down... ‘You just think you’re a little god!’ Thank you! Hallelujah! You got that right! ‘Who d’you think you are, Jesus?’ Yep!

Are you listening to me? Are you kids running around here acting like gods? Why not? God told me to!... Since I’m an exact duplicate of God, I’m going to act like God! (*Agony of Deceit*, 90ff).

Transition:

You might say all of this one way or another is spiritually sick and theologically wrongheaded, and you would be right. So, what do you do? What is the answer? Jude would respond, “we need Godly wisdom for a healthy Christian,” and that is exactly what he gives us in vs. 17-23. His prescription for what spiritually ails us will revolve around 3 ideas: remember, remain and rescue.

I. Remember the words of our Lord. vs. 17-19

Jude’s letter shifts gears in v.17, signaled by the word “beloved” (v 3, 17, 20). Jude moves from the “these” of the false teachers (v.16) to the “you” of the believing community. The “you” is emphatic, and what follows is the first imperative in the letter, though 4 more will follow in rapid-fire succession.

Jude says “remember!” Remember what? Two important truths.

1) The presence of false teachers is certain. vs. 17-18

By means of His apostles, our Lord (deity) Jesus (humanity) Christ (God’s Messiah, anointed one) had warned that false teachers would come. Indeed they warned us that mockers (*ESV*, scoffer) would appear in the last times (*eschatou*).

- Jesus warns us in Matthew 7:15-23; 24:11, 14
- Paul warns us in Acts 20:29-30; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:1-9
- Peter warns us in 2 Peter 2:1-3; 12-22
- John warns us in 1 John 2:18-23; 4:1-3
- and Jude warns us thru his whole letter.

Their presence is a confirmation of Scripture’s truth.

Their presence is a certainty predicted by our Savior and His apostles.

2) The portrait of false teachers is clear. vs. 18-19

Jude provides a 4-fold picture of these wolves in sheep’s clothing, these diabolical masqueraders who manipulate and worm their way into our community of faith.

The portrait is not pretty.

a. They are scoffers. v. 18

Jude calls them mockers or scoffers. The *NEB* says they are “men who pour scorn on religion.” Peter says they scoffed at the reality of Jesus’ return (2 Pet. 3:4). Jude says they laugh at, sneer, make light of God’s holiness and moral perfection. They joke about God’s righteous character and have no reverence for His purity.

b. They are sensual. vs. 18-19

Mocking God’s law and moral precepts, these men walk according to their own ungodly (6 times in Jude) lust. Echoing vs. 16, Jude adds that following after and being controlled by their lust, they pursue what is ungodly. They live on the earthly plane, not the heavenly.

- They are not spiritual but sensual.
- They are not spiritual but carnal.
- Lust is Lord. Selfish desire their sovereign dictator.

c. They are schismatic. v. 19

Satan loves to divide, rip and tear apart. These evil emissaries follow their master and cause divisions. Like Diotrephes in III John they promote and foster strife not unity. Lacking respect for spiritual leaders, making sport of moral conviction, lampooning the theological distinctives, they can demolish in a day what took a decade to build.

Application: When you see such persons coming don't let them in!
When you see such persons within, get them out!

d. They are Spiritless. v. 19

The last characteristic is the most telling and tragic. These persons are lost, unregenerate, they “do not have the Spirit” (*NIV*). Romans 8:9 says, “if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His”. They claim Christ but do not know Him. They boast of the Spirit but their lives betray their confession. They are spiritual frauds, religious shams. As Titus 1:16 says, “they profess to know God, but they deny him by their works.”

Transition: The presence of false teachers is certain.
The portrait of false teachers is clear.
Remember and never forget.

II. Remain in the watchcare of God's Love. vs. 20-21

- Jude now shifts gears as he lays down a game plan, a spiritual strategy for the nurturing of a healthy Christian. His formula is basic, but it is certain to work and never fail if carefully followed and put into practice.
- The grammar of these verses is fascinating as Jude anchors his instruction with the imperative “keep,” and then sets in place 3 participles that explain how we keep ourselves in the love of God. Schreiner is most certainly correct in spotting an implicit Trinitarianism in the text (p. 481).

Transition: How do we keep ourselves in God's love, our love for Him rooted and grounded in His love for us?

1. Grow in the Scriptures. v. 20

- Linked to the imperative “keep,” the participles “building,” “praying,” and “looking” have an imperatival force. They function like commands.
- Jude admonishes us to build ourselves up on or in your most holy faith. The faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (v.3) is the foundation, the bedrock upon which to build. Ephesians 2:20 affirms that our foundation “is the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.” Christ and His gospel is our foundation. God and His Word our sure place to stand. From here we grow and mature as God's Word permeates our mind and fills our heart. As we learn the Scriptures and understand its truth, we are strengthened, we grow, we mature, we are built up. No Bible no growth. No Word no maturity. No gospel, nothing of eternal good will we receive.
- As the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we eat, so must we daily ingest and digest God's Word and its truth.

2. Pray in the Spirit. v. 20

- Praying in the Spirit is the 2nd plank of our spiritual strategy for spiritual health. This is not speaking of our praying in tongues, something I cannot find in Scripture (including 1 Corinthians 14). A better connection is found in Ephesians 6:18 where the Bible says, “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and request.”
- Jude contrast false teachers who do not have the Spirit with those who can pray in the Spirit. As the temple of the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor. 6:19-20), the very presence of God resides and lives in us, guiding us, convicting us, even praying for us (Romans 8:26).
- Praying in the Spirit means we will pray for God’s will to be done not our will be done. It will keep us close to God, yes, it will keep us in the sphere and presence of His love.

Transition: Building up is our edification and praying in the Spirit is our communion. Now comes our looking for the Savior, our anticipation.

3. Watch for the Savior. v. 21

- “Looking” has the idea of “waiting”, waiting expectantly and with certainty. I do not wonder if Jesus is coming, I know He is coming. As 1 Thessalonians 4:16 says, “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven, with a shout, and the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God.” Titus 2:13 calls this “the blessed hope.” Jude says it is a coming of mercy unto eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ (cf v. 4, 17). The mercy Jude prayed would be multiplied in v.2 is now realized as the eastern sky is split wide open and the King of glory comes in, the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle (Psalm 24:7-8).
- Dear brothers and sisters, my heart and eyes are fixed heavenward for a rider on a white horse whose name is Faithful and True, whose eyes are like a flame of fire and on His head are many crowns. I’m looking for one whose robe is dipped in blood and on His thigh He has a name written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords. I will grow in His Word, pray by His Spirit, and watch for His coming. However... until that day when I see Him face to face, bow my knee, and kiss His nail scarred feet, I will be passionate to carry out a crucial and essential assignment.

III. Rescue the wandering who are lost. vs. 22-23

- According to NAMB, 95% of Southern Baptists never share a verbal witness. Never! They never tell someone how to be saved, they never share the gospel even once in their lifetime. In 1950 it took 19 members to baptize one person, in 2004 it took 42 (*Facts and Trends*, May/June 2006, 44).

- In a recent poll George Barna said American Christians have “commitment issues” (April 18, 2006). He sees a “lowering the bar on Church commitment” and the emergence of a “soft Christianity.” He writes,

“Americans are willing to expend some energy in religious activities such as attending church and reading the Bible, and they are willing to throw some money in the offering basket. Because of such activities, they convince themselves that they are people of genuine faith. But when it comes time to truly establishing their priorities and making a tangible commitment to knowing and loving God, and to allowing Him to change their character and lifestyle, most people stop short. We want to be ‘spiritual’ and we want to have God’s favor, but we’re not sure we want Him taking control of our lives and messing with the image and outcomes we’ve worked so hard to product.”
- Did you notice no mention of soul winning, sharing the gospel, doing the work of an evangelist. Might I remind all of us, myself included that the Son of Man came to seek and save that which is lost (Luke 19:10), that the Son of God came on a rescue mission for lost, dying, wandering souls.
- A warning: if you do not care if people are saved you might consider if you are saved. A love for Christ will compel you to have a love for the lost, those who come in all kinds of shapes, sizes and make-ups. Jude notes in particular 3 we must seek to rescue and the strategy by which we carry out our mission.

1. Deal gently with those who doubt. v. 22

- Verses 22-23 are a landmine of textual issues. The basic meaning is clear, but the details are a challenge. Both the *ESV* and *HCSB* see 3 groups in view (whereas some translations identify 2), and they also capture best, in my judgment, the sense of the autograph.
- Jude calls us to have mercy (pre. imp., *NKJV*, “compassion”) on those who doubt. Those who have mercy multiplied in Christ (v. 2) and receive that mercy in its fullness at His coming (v. 21) are to extend that same mercy to those who doubt, who waver, who struggle with the truth of the gospel and Holy Scripture because of the influence of false teaching. Such persons should not be rejected or ignored, ridiculed or harassed. With compassion and conviction, kindness and firmness, mercy and concern, we encourage them in the truth, patiently pointing them to Jesus and His all sufficiency.

2. Deal quickly with those who are in danger. v. 23

- A second group face an even more serious and precarious situation, so close are they to the fires of hell and eternal judgment. Jude quickly interjects, “save (pre. imp.) others by snatching them out of the fire.” Sounding the alarm, Jude calls for quick and decisive action. It is almost too late, they are almost too far gone. However, there is still time to

rescue them, but we must act now. There is urgency in Jude's voice. There is a heightened concern in his heart. I suspect there is a tear in his eye.

- Hell is not a popular subject. People don't want to talk or even think about it. Even many in the church act as if it is not real or if we ignore it, it will just go away. However, never forget this as long as you live: Given enough time, every person who has ever lived will one day believe in hell. Sometimes confrontational evangelism is necessary. Sometimes it is our only hope!

3. Deal carefully with those who are defiled. v. 23

- This 3rd group is in the most desperate condition of all. Having bought into the lies of false teaching, their lives are now corrupted as well. Both in how they think and live, they are corrupt, defiled and depraved. They are a danger to themselves, but they are also a danger to others as well. Jude, therefore, sounds a wise word of warning: "to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh." The word picture is vivid and striking. Sin has stained and contaminated these persons. Love them, show mercy, but don't get too close for even their clothes can defile you if you are not careful. Carriers of spiritual HIV, the disease of sin has broken out all over them. We may still be able to reach them and rescue them, but we cannot get too close nor can we become like them.
- It is a lie of Satan that says we have to live like the lost to reach the lost. I have to drink like them, curse like them, party like them, be like them. Illustration: My friends opened up to my witness when I changed at the age of 19. They saw the difference Jesus made in my life, and it was then and only then, that they were willing to let me tell them about the Christ who changed me and could change them. A number of areas in my life came to a screeching halt, never to appear again. This did not terminate our friendship. It did cause them to wonder, "what happened to him?!" In mercy and love, maintaining a distance of wisdom, I told them about my Jesus.

Transition:

So we deal with some gently, with some quickly, and with some carefully. But dear brother and sisters, we must deal with all we can in one way or another before it is too late.

Conclusion:

- William Booth was the founder of the Salvation Army. Booth said, "if I had my way I would not send my workers to 4 years of college. If I had my way, I would not put them thru 3 years of seminary. If I had my way, I would put all of my

workers in hell for 5 minutes! That would be the best theological training they would ever receive.”

- Lost people matter to God. Lost people must matter to us. Healthy Christians remember the words of our Lord and they remain in His love. And, they rescue the perishing and care for the dying. They understand life is short, time is limited, and heaven and hell are real.
- The church in America is losing the battle. May God by His grace and for His glory use Southeastern College and Seminary to help turn the tide, to make a difference now and for eternity. The eternal destiny of human souls are hanging in the balance.