

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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<b>Series:</b>	<b>Special Messages</b>		Pastor/Teacher
<b>Text</b>	<b>Jude 17-25</b>		Mason Depew
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### LIVING IN THE CHURCH MILITANT

This will be my final message on the Epistle of Jude, focusing on his conclusion in the last nine verses. To wrap up his letter, Jude summarizes his main critique of the enemies of the faith whom he has been writing against, gives some practical counsel on how the church should respond, and closes with his famous doxology.

#### 1. Reviewing the Main Point - Verses 17-19

- a. The Old and the New Testaments agree in predicting that there will always be false, stone-hearted members of the people of God in this world. Jude showed that in great detail throughout the main body of his letter, with examples ranging from Cain, through Korah and Balaam, to the fallen angels. Now in verses 18-19 Jude reminds them that the Apostles predicted more of the same in this regard. Until Christ returns, there will always be those who ridicule our faith because they are ruled by their flesh.
  - i. Remember from last time that this does not *only* refer to sexual immorality. Many false teachers actually teach strict abstinence from obvious forms of sensuality, but are still following their gut when it comes to the higher mysteries of the faith. Those who reject the doctrines of the Trinity or Christ's two natures, or the Gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone, generally have not really taken them seriously. They appeal to dreams, ecstatic experiences, or common sense ("God can't be three and one! That doesn't add up!") when they should recognize that God transcends both our experience and the limitations of our natural reason.<sup>1</sup>
  - ii. If there were no false converts and false teachers, there would be no division in the church, as verse 19 says. Many people take and twist this point, redefining all disagreement as division and assuming that if a smaller group leaves a larger group, the smaller group is the one being schismatic. So if Protestants broke away from the Roman Church, some say, it must be that Protestants were false teachers. This neglects the fact that Luther and many other Protestant leaders did not leave willingly; they were excommunicated for teaching the truth.<sup>2</sup> Once a church is actively punishing and suppressing the teaching of the Gospel, it can no longer be said to be a true church, and believers have an obligation to separate themselves from idolatry. We ought to judge who is being divisive on the basis of the truth of

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<sup>1</sup> This was Jude's point when he said, "But these people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively." - Jude 10

<sup>2</sup> J. Gresham Machen is another figure of church history who is often unjustly accused of schism from the Presbyterian Church. Like with Luther, however, people miss the fact that Machen did not go willingly; he was defrocked after a trial where he was not allowed to use any theological arguments whatsoever. He was punished merely for being "divisive," without any consideration of his truth claims.

their words, not the other way around. The one who perverts the Gospel is the one who is separating himself from the truth and therefore also from the universal Church.

## 2. The Church's Response - Verses 20-23

- a. Just as Jude had warned against in his critique of the false teachers,<sup>3</sup> we should not follow our natural instincts in responding to them. If we do, we will very likely become either cynical or paranoid, suspecting most of our brothers and sisters are false converts and/or giving up on the visible church entirely.
- b. Jude's teaching in verses 20-23 clearly does not permit us to indulge either of these instincts. God allows false teachers and false converts in the church, paradoxically, to *strengthen* our faith as we are forced to ultimately rely on him alone. Rather than leading us away from each other, however, we are to remain engaged with fellow believers in the church *for the sake of this faith*. No Christian is an island. We all need to strengthen and be strengthened by each other. Jude's commands here demonstrate that.
- c. Rather than stoke division as the false teachers do, true Christians seek to draw each other together in the unity of God's truth.<sup>4</sup>
  - i. Notice also how Christians are supposed to await Jesus's second coming: not with terror, but expecting *mercy* according to verse 21. It is much easier to doubt your salvation if you are isolated and alone with yourself and your sin, rather than regularly receiving the public means of grace (the preaching of the Word, the sacraments, and prayer).
  - ii. Verses 22-23 exhort us to exercise discernment when dealing with professing Christians who express doubts or errors. Those who are sincerely doubting or confused about the truth need to be corrected gently, with great mercy rather than harshness. If someone is sincerely troubled and asks difficult questions, we must not wave them away with scorn, but listen patiently and answer with understanding. On the other hand, if someone is persisting much more stubbornly in a serious error, and particularly if that person may lead others astray, a more direct and forceful response is called for. This, I believe, is what Jude means by telling us to "save others by snatching them out of the fire." If someone really looks to be leaving the Gospel of Jesus Christ behind, they need a much more urgent correction. Whether or not they respond to a loving rebuke in that situation will be the test of whether their faith is genuine.<sup>5</sup>
  - iii. The meaning of the phrase, "hating even the garment stained by the flesh" in verse 23 is controversial. John Calvin believed that it referred to avoiding temptation as

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<sup>3</sup> "But these people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively." - Jude 10

<sup>4</sup> Compare Jude's words here with Paul's exhortation in Ephesians 4:1-6: "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

<sup>5</sup> Think of how our Lord designed the process of church discipline in Matthew 18:15-20. There are repeated rebukes and opportunities to repent, because these are tests of whether this person's heart is actually sensitive to the Law of God or hardened like a stone.

well as sin itself,<sup>6</sup> and I think he was most likely right. The Greek word for “garment” here refers to “a garment worn next to the skin, and by both sexes.”<sup>7</sup> The idea is not that Christians should hate all garments of this kind, but those that you associate with sexual immorality, and therefore remind you of sin. This principle applies to anything that reminds you of the kind of sexual immorality that the false teachers practice. Living with reminders of your temptation is asking for more trouble, like a boy who is playing with fire.

### 3. God Gets All the Glory - Verses 24-25

- a. The Conclusion of Jude is his famous doxology, which simply means a poetic statement of acclaim for God’s glory. This allows Jude to end his epistle on a high and hopeful note, after the dark and disturbing tone of much of the letter’s content. It is absolutely essential for believers to remember and hold fast to this sure hope: the devil and all false teachers who follow him, *will not win in the end*. Not one of God’s true sheep will be stolen away from the herd of the Good Shepherd.<sup>8</sup> Only those who were never really his, and never heard his voice, will leave.
- b. This is undoubtedly the Gospel message Jude wished he could have written more about, as he said in verse 3. But even though he doesn’t have much space here, he makes the best of it with this beautifully written section. This is especially significant in a time and culture where most Christians could not read or write for themselves, so what they left church with was what they had to carry them through the week. Jude most likely designed this to be the most memorable part of the letter so that Christians would leave Sunday worship encouraged, rather than fearfully looking for false converts under every leaf.
- c. Another reason Jude’s doxology is so important is that it casts the exhortations he had just given us in a different light. He had just commanded us to keep ourselves in the love of God by praying and caring for one another, and if that is all he had said we might have thought our own efforts will preserve our salvation. But now, with his conclusion, Jude reminds us that although our efforts to persevere *appear* to maintain our salvation, it is really God’s power behind it all.<sup>9</sup> There is only one “who is able to keep you from

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<sup>6</sup> “He would have the faithful not only to beware of contact with vices, but that no contagion might reach them, he reminds them that everything that borders on vices and is near to them ought to be avoided: as, when we speak of lasciviousness, we say that all excitements to lusts ought to be removed. The passage will also become clearer, when the whole sentence is filled up, that is, that we should hate not only the flesh, but also the garment, which, by a contact with it, is infected. ... He, then, does not allow evil be cherished by indulgence, so that he bids all preparations and all accessories, as they say, to be cut off.” - Calvin’s Commentary on Jude 23.

<sup>7</sup> William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1085.

<sup>8</sup> Jesus’s words in John 10 address the same problems as Jude: “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers. ... I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ... My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.” - John 10:1-5, 14-16, 27-30

<sup>9</sup> The Fifth Head of Doctrine in the Canons of Dort is well worth reading on this subject, but especially Article VIII, which says, “Thus, it is not in consequence of [believers’] own merits or strength, but of God’s free mercy, that they do not totally fall from faith and grace, nor continue and perish finally in their backslidings; which, with respect to themselves is not only possible, but would undoubtedly happen; but with respect to God, it is utterly impossible, since his counsel can not be changed, nor his promise fail, neither can the call

stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy,” and he is the one who deserves all “glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever.”

- d. As the Apostle Paul said time and time again, God does all the real work of our salvation himself, “so that no one may boast.”<sup>10</sup> If you hear a version of the Gospel that leaves room for any of us to take some credit for any part of our salvation, it is not the Gospel at all. Although we must give up our pride to fully accept this, God freely gives his glory back to us as our portion in the inheritance of Jesus Christ.<sup>11</sup>

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according to his purpose be revoked, nor the merit, intercession, and preservation of Christ be rendered ineffectual, nor the sealing of the Holy Spirit be frustrated or obliterated.”

<sup>10</sup> For example, compare Jude’s doxology with Ephesians 2:8-9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Or 1 Corinthians 1:29: “God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.”

<sup>11</sup> The conclusion of John’s great visions in Revelation is that those who remain in the faith until the end will overcome the world and reign together with Christ forever. “No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.” - Revelation 22:3-5