

Discernment

DISCERNMENT TO REMAIN STEADFAST IN FAITH

Focal Verses • JUDE 1:3-4, 8, 10, 12-13, 16-23

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson we will: IDENTIFY the characteristics of steadfastness; RECOGNIZE that our choices have eternal consequences; and COMMIT to living faithful lives for Jesus Christ.

In Focus

Trey is on the honor roll at the University of Pittsburgh, with a 3.5 grade point average. Upon graduation, he hopes to get a job as a marketing consultant at one of Wall Street's most prestigious brokerage houses.

Two months before graduation, Trey was excited to get an interview with a group of executives from a large brokerage firm. After a few minutes of informal chatter, the Vice-President asked Trey some tough questions. He seemed to handle himself quite well, and the CEO was impressed with Trey's level of maturity. Just before the interview ended, Trey had to answer one more very important question. The CEO lowered his voice so no one else could hear him. "Suppose you were asked to sign off on a deal that could net you and the firm several million dollars, even though there might be a chance that 'red flags' are raised by the Securities and Exchange Commission later on down the line. Would you be willing to take the chance?"

Trey examined the CEO's face. He could discern that the answer to this question would determine his future with the firm. Before he answered, he cleared his throat. "Well, sir, I wouldn't do it no matter what the net gain may be. You see, I'm a Christian, and my convictions would not allow me to cross any unethical line despite how it may benefit me."

Trey never heard back from the company, but he was convinced that he had given the executive the right answer.

Like Trey, we, too, may face the temptation to circumvent the truth for our personal gain. In Christ, we are reminded to do what's right at all times is the best.

In this lesson, we will see how the Apostle Jude affirms godly principles to believers struggling to maintain their commitment to God in a dark and sin-filled world. How do you discern what godly principles are essential to follow in today's cultural climate?

Keep in Mind

"Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And of some have compassion, making a difference"
(Jude 1:21-22, KJV).

SCAN FOR VIDEO



Focal Verses

KJV **Jude 1:3** Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

4 For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jude 1:8 Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities.

10 But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.

12 These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots;

13 Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.

Jude 1:16 These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage.

17 But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ;

18 How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.

19 These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.

20 But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost,

21 Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

22 And of some have compassion, making a difference:

23 And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

The People, Places, and Times

The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity and is referred to by Jesus as “another Comforter” (John 14:16). According to Scripture, the Holy Spirit is not a “force” or a “thing.” He has several attributes that prove He is real.

The Holy Spirit is intelligent (1 Corinthians 2:10–11); He has feelings (Ephesians 4:30) and a will (2 Corinthians 12:11). The Holy Spirit's work attests to His validity. He teaches people (John 14:26), He guides us (Romans 8:14), He commissions believers to work for God (Acts 13:4), He intercedes on our behalf (Romans 8:26),

and He speaks to us (John 15:26; 2 Peter 1:21). The Holy Spirit can be obeyed (Acts 10:19–21), He can be lied to (Acts 5:3), He can be resisted (Acts 7:51), He can be blasphemed against (Matthew 12:31), and He can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30).

The Holy Spirit's work in the life of Christ is also ample evidence of His nature. In Jesus' virgin birth, the Holy Spirit caused Christ's conception in Mary's womb (Luke 1:35). Jesus was anointed by the Spirit (Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38), He was filled with and led by the Spirit (Luke 4:1), and He was empowered by the Spirit (Matthew 12:28).

Finally, the Holy Spirit is actively at work in the life of a believer at the time of his or her

salvation. The Holy Spirit convicts people of their need for a Saviour (John 16:8–11); He regenerates (Titus 3:5); gives people a new nature (2 Corinthians 5:17), and indwells people (1 Corinthians 6:19), empowering them with the gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:11). Other ministries of the Holy Spirit include teaching (John 16:12–15); guiding (Romans 8:14); assuring (Romans 8:16); and praying for God’s children (Romans 8:26; Ephesians 6:18).

Background

Jude is considered by most scholars to be the brother of James and the half brother of Jesus Christ (see Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3). Although very little is known about him or about those to whom he was writing the epistle bearing his name, it is clear that Jude faced the same kinds of problems in writing to the churches as did the Apostles Paul and Peter.

Jude’s purpose for sharing his heart was to combat the false teachings that had made tremendous inroads into the first-century Church. Like Peter and Paul, Jude understood that Gnosticism was a dangerous heresy that had to be stamped out if the people were to grow in their faith in Jesus Christ.

At-A-Glance

1. Be on Guard Against False Teachers (Jude 1:3–4, 8, 10)
2. Recognize Their Shameless Deeds (vv. 12–13, 16–19)
3. Commit Yourself to Maintaining Godly Faith (vv. 20–23)

In Depth

1. Be on Guard Against False Teachers (Jude 1:3–4, 8, 10)

Jude begins his letter by sharing his purpose in writing to these believers. We are

not given their identity, but it is obvious that Jude is concerned about their spiritual health. The apostle is very aware that these believers were being influenced by people who taught a doctrine completely foreign to the truth. Therefore, it was necessary for him to share with them about the “common salvation” (v. 3).

The idea the apostle is conveying is that this salvation is open for all to see. Unlike Gnosticism, which taught that only the enlightened ones were privy to its pure revelation, God’s salvation is for everyone. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Jude declares that it was necessary for him to write to these believers and encourage them, in the midst of the heretical teaching that was infiltrating the church, to stand up and fight for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Jude affirms that the believer must resist, at all costs, any forms of heresy that may come into the church and cause people to turn away from the truth.

God gave the apostles the doctrine of grace and redemption found only in the blood of Jesus Christ and His efficacious work on the cross. This “faith” has stood the test of time. Therefore, we must be careful that we don’t allow any new “wave” of teaching that is not in line with the Word of God to creep into our churches. The Word that God gave the believers in the first century is the same Word we must contend for today.

The apostle tells us why it is necessary that we remain steadfast to God’s Word. Jude recognized that in the midst of the church, ungodly men had come in to turn God’s grace into a license to live any way that people pleased. The word that Jude used is “lasciviousness” (v. 4) which, in the Greek language, means a readiness for pleasure without any restraints; doing and thinking anything imaginable.

Jude describes these false teachers as ungodly persons who have no fear of or reverence

toward God. The apostle says that these people are “dreamers [who] defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries” (v. 8, NKJV). One of the main characteristics of false teachers is that their lives are marked by ungodliness. Because their spirits are “polluted,” false teachers usually have “dreams and visions” that are not from God. Yet, their goal is to convince the unlearned that they have a “word” from the Lord.

Second, the ungodly not only defile their own flesh, but they also pollute the body of Christ with their damnable heresy. Gnostics taught that it was all right to indulge in fleshly behavior as long as the spirit was developing in godlike fashion. How deceived can people be? Scripture affirms that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost. God is just as concerned with our having a clean “temple” as He is with our having an undefiled spirit.

Third, these false teachers encouraged rebellion against constituted authority. The Bible tells us that all authority comes from God whether we like it or not. It is not our responsibility to attempt to overthrow authority in the church, home, or society. True believers are called to pray for those in authority. Those who are false teachers are anarchists. They believe in overthrowing all authority and all constraints so that they can live any way they please.

Jude warns the believers how to spot these heretics. First, they speak evil only of what they don’t know. The Bible tells us that life and death are in the power of the tongue and that we will eat the fruit of whatever we speak. That’s why it is important to pray about those persons and things we are not clear on rather than to criticize with our mouths. In addition, we don’t want to become “gossip mongers” who tear down the church, the pastor, and other leaders.

Second, Jude says you can spot these people like “brute beasts”—they even corrupt themselves in things that they know. One leader

puts it this way: “We can be 100% right and yet 100% wrong by the way we talk about others.” Jude uses this term to describe how depraved these false teachers are and how far they have strayed away from the truth.

2. Recognize Their Shameless Deeds (vv. 12–13, 16–19)

Jude does not mince words when it comes to identifying the corrupt and ungodly. He knew he had a responsibility to make sure that the people he served did not get “hoodwinked” by their influence. Jude affirms that one way to recognize these men is by their coming into the fellowship meal and causing dissension among believers.

The love feast was a time when believers would come together to share a meal and the Lord’s Supper and fellowship with one another (see 1 Corinthians 11:17–34). For Jude, these corrupt men were nothing more than “spots in your [the] feasts of charity [love]” (v. 12). These men probably corrupted the celebration with their pride, arrogance, rebellion, and sin. Perhaps they shared some words with the people, confusing some and challenging others. Thus, it was necessary for Jude to characterize these heretics in the following ways:

“Clouds...without water, carried about of winds” (v. 12). These false teachers are a nuisance to the growth and development of God’s church because they don’t produce anything except disciples who are false like themselves.

“Trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots” (v. 12). On one occasion when Jesus was hungry, He noticed a fig tree that had no fruit. Jesus spoke a curse upon the tree so that it would never produce again. Like that fig tree, false teachers may look good, but upon close inspection they are no different than a tree that hasn’t produced any fruit except that which is rotten and tasteless. The only “fruit” a false teacher produces is that

which has no appeal for the true believer. Why? Like a tree whose root system is rotten, a false teacher must be plucked up before he destroys everyone he touches.

“Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame” (v. 13). Here, Jude compares the false teacher to the sea or ocean whose waves can be dangerous to the shoreline and to homes built nearby if it gets out of control. In like manner, when a false teacher gets out of control there is no telling what he or she may destroy. How many people’s lives have been destroyed by false teachers who espouse their damnable heresies? Like structures falling into the sea at the force of the ocean’s waves, so, too, do people fall under their destructive force.

“Wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever” (v. 13). Jude makes it clear that false teachers are no different than the angelic hosts that fell from God’s grace and became demons who gave their allegiance to Satan. Unless they repent, false teachers will forever be in darkness and away from our Lord.

For Jude, false teachers are not to be given any consideration whatsoever. They are dangerous, and their sole purpose is to enslave God’s people to their pernicious ways. Their characteristics include murmuring, complaining, and being lustful, arrogant, and prideful—all works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19–21). Jude affirms how important it is that we do not listen to these heretics.

3. Commit Yourself to Maintaining Godly Faith (vv. 20–23)

Jude would have ended his letter on a negative note if all he did was point out the ungodly. However, the apostle also wants to encourage the people to maintain steadfastness even in the midst of an ungodly society.

First, the believers are called to “build [themselves] up” in the faith that has been given to them by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Like body-builders who spend hours exercising and flexing their muscles so they can stay in shape, believers are called to spend hours in God’s Word, exercising their spiritual “muscles” and increasing their stamina for the truth so we won’t be tossed about by every wind of doctrine that comes our way.

Second, Jude tells us that we must pray in the Holy Ghost (v. 21). The Bible tells us that we don’t know how to pray as we should, but the Holy Spirit prays through (and for) us with words and sounds that cannot be discerned by the human spirit. There are times when we don’t know what to say, or when mere words are inadequate. That’s why we must be filled with the Holy Spirit and allow Him to bring our petitions before the Father. He knows our needs better than we do, and He is always willing to help us reach the throne of grace.

Third, we must “keep [ourselves] in the love of God.” Jude affirms that as believers, we have the responsibility to keep our bodies under subjection to the Father so that we don’t allow the flesh to dominate our lives. God has given us the commandment to walk in the Spirit and not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

Jude says a believer must diligently seek after the grace of the Lord God that leads us to salvation and eternal life and away from a life of sin. As we continually seek after the Lord and walk as He commands, we can discern the truth and help those who are caught up in the web of deception that is too prevalent even in the church today.

The love of God gives us compassion to minister to those who are bound in a life of sin so that we can “pull them out of the fire” of false doctrine. While we can never join them in their pernicious ways, we should be willing to do all we can to bring people to the knowledge of the truth, even if we have to expose their sins.

Jude understood that heresy was a dangerous cancer that must be rooted out of the church

of Jesus Christ if we are to maintain steadfast faith in Christ. Let us recognize this truth and do what we can to keep heresy out of our fellowships as well.

Search the Scriptures

1. How did Jude describe God's Word? (Jude 1:3)
2. Who had turned God's Word into a license to sin? (v. 4)
3. What are some of the characteristics Jude attributes to these false teachers? (vv. 8, 12–13, 16)
4. How does Jude tell us to combat false teachers? (v. 20)
5. What is our responsibility to those who may be affected by false teachers? (v. 23)

Discuss the Meaning

1. Why is it necessary that we build ourselves up on faith?
2. How do we pray in the Holy Ghost?
3. Is it our responsibility to help people who are caught in a web of deception? Why or why not?
4. How can we spot false teachers? Explain.

Liberating Lesson

The African American community is besieged by so many "voices" claiming to speak for us. Some of these "voices" may be deceiving since they are not all speaking the truth. How can we discern who is speaking on our behalf and who is not? What can we do to alert

others so that they won't fall under the spell of "charismatic" leaders who may not have our best interests at heart?

Application for Activation

This week, ask God to give you a discerning ear so that you will know how to hear the truth. Sometimes it is easy to get caught up in emotions and swayed from the foundations of biblical truth. Spend time in God's Word and in prayer so that you will be able to train your spirit to know when someone is speaking the truth.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Say It Correctly

Agapetoi. ah-gah-pay-TOY

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 351

Hebrews 5–6

Proverbs 29

DAY 352

Hebrews 7–8

Proverbs 30

DAY 353

Hebrews 9–10

Proverbs 31

DAY 354

Hebrews 11

Ecclesiastes 1

DAY 355

Hebrews 12–13

Ecclesiastes 2

DAY 356

James 1–5

Ecclesiastes 3

DAY 357

1 Peter 1–5

Ecclesiastes 4

Notes

Eternal Life

ETERNAL LIFE IN THE ALPHA AND OMEGA

Focal Verses • REVELATION 22:12-21

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will: SURVEY the biblical references to the Second Coming of Christ to see the importance of this hoped-for reality; REJOICE that the invitation from Jesus to join the new community continues through the end of all things; and EMBRACE the call to become part of God's kingdom.

In Focus

Throughout her life, Chanel has struggled in school. She faced developmental issues as a child, and early on, she was diagnosed with a learning disability. Now, however, her moment was finally here. Chanel remembered the day her parents dropped her off on campus. Almost four years had passed, but she vividly remembered how they reaffirmed her intelligence, encouraged her to be fearless in her pursuits, and cautioned her to make wise decisions.

Chanel distinctly remembered how her journey began—the first day of class, what her roommate, Breana, said when they first met, and even her feelings of anxiety. A lot had occurred between then and now. Chanel had faced financial aid issues, the stress of maintaining her sports scholarship while working, and academic struggles.

After her parents, Miriam and Craig, dropped her off at college four years ago, this was the day they had always waited for: Chanel was graduating with honors. In spite of all that Chanel faced as a child, her parents hoped and believed that she would excel. Over the last twenty-two years, sometimes setbacks made this day seem unlikely, but her parent's faith never faltered. They instilled in Chanel the same level of expectation, perseverance, and desire that they had for themselves, and finally, it paid off.

Walking in faith to inherit eternal life in Christ is much like Chanel's journey to graduating from college. How are you waiting in faith, expectation, perseverance, and desire for Christ's return?



Keep in Mind

"I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last"
(Revelation 22:13, KJV).