

Maintaining Discernment in the Church

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[0:00] Well, we are rapidly approaching the conclusion of our study of this short one chapter, twenty-five verse!

The warnings that Jude has for the church concerning apostates and false teachers, they were a problem in Jude's day.

That's why he wrote this, inspired by God to do so. But they're an even greater problem in our day. And of course, God knew that would happen. Jude didn't.

He probably couldn't even conceive of the church being on earth two thousand years from his time. But we're still here. In this day and age, there are apostates running megachurches.

They own television stations. They run multi-million dollar enterprises, taking in millions, if not more, dollars of God's people, belong to God's people.

[1:27] And as Jude predicted, they have been a plague and a blight on the true church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Satan is and always has been behind the apostates.

You see, you see, those exposed to the truth, seem to embrace the truth, then reject the truth, perhaps not even telling people they're not really believers.

And the real problem with apostates. And the real problem with apostates is a lot of them hang around. You know, if they would just go, it would be one thing, but they hang around and spread dissension in God's church.

And Jude has been very adept at warning us about such men. And there are some women apostates in our day, too. But we have one area yet to examine.

[2:35] And we're going to do so today and the next couple of meetings, which will then conclude our study of Jude. And you may recall that Jude began our study with the command in verse 3, the second part of verse 3, Here is a command to contend.

We're to contend for the faith and do so earnestly. The picture I get is that of a wrestler.

I wrestled in high school after football season. That was an adventure. I played football at 185. I wrestled 12 days later at 148. My mom hated that coach.

I didn't eat. I was so weak I lost. Anyway, that wasn't in my lesson. That's for free. The Greek word there for command means it is worth struggling for.

It is worth struggling for. That is the command. But after these lessons, the nine so far, we still haven't learned how we are to fulfill this command to contend.

[4:06] So we're going to cover part of that tonight and part of that next week. Our verses tonight that we'll be looking at are Jude verses 17 to 23.

But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ that they were saying to you in the last time there will be mockers following after their own ungodly lusts.

These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly minded, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.

And have mercy on some who are doubting. Save others, snatching them out of the fire. And on some, have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh.

So how do we respond to Jude's command? To contend against the ungodly forces arrayed against us and against God's true church.

[5:35] Jude understood something. It is one thing to be warned, but we must also have a plan of action.

Being in Oklahoma, we are often warned about an approaching storm, a severe storm, or perhaps even a tornado.

And it's interesting because the month of October is the fifth busiest month in Oklahoma for tornadoes. That's kind of interesting. But this is not the time when the tornado is bearing down. That's not the time to get out the lawn chairs and sit in the backyard or the front yard to catch a glimpse of the funnel cloud.

And personally, I've never tried to watch a funnel cloud from a lawn chair, but I have been known to go outside on the porch and watch it. And die and yell at me. Get back in here and take cover.

[6:38] However, we need a plan to protect our families and ourselves. And we've gone to the storm cellar a number of times, and we've also heard, had them hit and do damage to our house and barns.

But we need a plan to protect our family and ourselves, and that means taking the appropriate action. Well, when it comes to apostates, we have to take the appropriate action to guard ourselves, to guard our families, and to guard our church family, the members of the church.

They're our families too, right? And I would say we are even responsible for protecting the unsaved in the church and hoping that one day they will...

Well, first of all, we don't want them exposed to erroneous teachings. We don't want them to be led astray. We need the unsaved to come to the knowledge of the Lord, our Savior, Lord Jesus Christ. So for our protection, we need to always remember, and we ought to begin every day like this, to apply the spiritual armor Paul talked about in the closing chapter of Ephesians.

[8:08] And let me just quickly read that in Ephesians 6, 10-17. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God so that you'll be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness, against the heavenly places.

Therefore, take up the full armor of God so that you will be able to resist in the evil day. And having done everything to stand firm.

Stand firm, therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

In addition to all, taking up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the living one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

[9:23] This is our armor. We're to take it up every day. And not everyone takes up their armor, so we must be willing to come to the aid of others in the church.

And by the way, that takes courage. That takes courage. They might not know they need help. But it takes courage, and especially it takes discernment.

That means we must be able to distinguish between truth and error. And I'm going to stop right there. I'm going to inject something here.

I'm going to mark that because I'll lose my place. Diane wrote this on the board. She does that usually on Sunday mornings. I want everyone to read that. Because that's what we're talking about right here, right at this point.

If we don't know the Bible or doctrine or theology, how are we going to identify false prophets? We have to know what false prophets look like.

[10:26] Or we'll think, well, there's just another guy. We had one church in town, and this guy got up on Sunday morning and Sunday schooled and taught there's no such thing as a literal hell.

And we had some friends in that church. And they went to the senior pastor and complained. And he said, you know, that's the richness of our denomination.

It wasn't Baptist. That's the richness of our denomination. He can believe anything he wants to. You can believe anything you want to. And we're just going to love each other. And I thought, yeah, I'll love each other all the way to hell.

Unless we really understand what true faith is, we will not be able to contend for the true faith that has been handed down to us.

The people in Jude's day knew that there were counterfeits in the church. Jude certainly knew it. Peter knew it. Paul knew it. John knew it.

[11:29] They knew there were counterfeits. They also knew they needed spiritual discernment to deal with them. In our day, quite honestly, the church has largely ignored this and has paid a very high price for that ignorance.

This is one of the explanations why so many churches and denominations have gone by the wayside. Just literally gone away. Paul understood the desperate need for discernment. Let me read a passage that he wrote in 2 Corinthians 11. The first four verses. I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness.

But indeed, you are bearing with me. But indeed, you are bearing with me. For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. For I betrothed you to one husband so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.

But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

[12:36] For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you have received a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully.

He's speaking kind of metaphorically there. Paul knew that the church at Corinth lacked discernment. And I'm always amazed that there's a whole wing of the church that's built their theology on the church at Corinth.

That's the worst church you want to build doctrine on. God spent a bunch of time trying to correct their doctrine. God spent a bunch of time trying to correct their doctrine.

Baptist circles, I mean, when I started, we started here, it would be 40 years ago this January. Oh my gosh, if someone came forward that morning and said, I want to join, heck yeah.

All in favor say amen. All opposed say see you later. I mean, you know. And then, if they came three weeks in a row, we put them in charge of the bus ministry or had them teach a class. We knew anything about them.

[14:08] Had a lot of those folks stayed around four or five weeks and we never saw them again. They just left. So here we have the church at Corinth and they're bringing in apostates.

And we can level that indictment against a lot of churches in our days. And this is especially true in the West. Now when I say West, I'm not talking about West of Mississippi.

I'm talking about the Western world. That's Western Europe, North America, including Canada and the United States. There is a lot of weak churches, liberal churches and apostate churches in that area.

Europe, the lights have gone out. And I've been there. Even in Scotland, which was the hotbed for Reformation teaching.

Switzerland, another hotbed. You had Knox in Scotland, maybe related to Diane. You had Svingly in Switzerland. That's where Calvin had taught. And you go there today and the churches have all but disappeared.

[15:18] In Scotland, there are pubs and there are office buildings or they're for sale. These huge churches. But Europe has gone dark.

Canada has gone dark. Canada banned John Hagee. Said he was filled with hate speech. The East Coast, where Charles Finney was preached.

It's dark. The lights went out under Finney and they never came back on. And I lived up there seven years. I know. I know. I know. What are the reasons for the loss of discernment?

What is that? Because the contemporary church has lost its will, its desire to discern error. So why? First, I would suggest, is the abandonment of doctrine.

We abandon doctrine as the foundation of all church learning. I heard a former staff guy here who kind of left mad. This was 30 years ago. And formed his own church.

[16:29] And when Dr. Mike got here, he ran into him. I mean, he was friendly, you know. Remember how Mike used to hang out at the hospital because of Lucille. And he ran into him over there. And he said to him, he said, well, you got this church now.

What's your doctrine? He said, we have no doctrine. He said, doctrine is divisive. Well, Mike said, and I like this, doctrine is the glue that holds us all together.

That's what holds us together. What we believe. But we live in an age where doctrine is not just ignored, but ridiculed and condemned.

Condemned. The loss of discernment of true doctrine has ushered in some terrible things in the church. And one of those was easy believism.

What do I mean by that? It's no longer take up your cross and follow me. Most churches would never preach that message.

[17 : 29] I know a friend of mine who brought that up to a church in Norman one time, a liberal church. And they said, oh, you're part of that bloody religion that believes in things like the cross and stuff like that.

You're part of that bloody religion. It's no longer take up your cross. It's say these words, you'll go to heaven. Easy believism. Second is the church's willingness to substitute the absolute truths found in the word of God for a relativistic, whatever feels good at the moment approach to preaching and teaching.

The Bible has gone from black and white to mostly gray. Well, what does this mean to you? Okay, what does it mean to you?

Oh, that's good too. They conflict, but that's okay. What is it? You know, that's not even teaching. The Bible's gray to a lot of people.

In our day, this aberrant approach to Scripture has been manifested in the willingness of many churches, even more and more in the evangelical camp to be soft on issues like abortion, to be soft on homosexuality and claim, well, you know, the Bible really didn't have anything to say about that.

[19 : 00] Well, other than the fact that he will not inherit heaven, the homosexual, the practicing homosexualism will not go to heaven. And we're especially soft in the area of easy divorce and remarriage.

Easy divorce and remarriage with no questions asked. The divorce rate within the church equals and sometimes exceeds that of the surrounding culture.

There are other issues, but these are the ones that have captured the headlines. Third, the church has lost its discernment by failing to believe in the sufficiency of Scripture and the sufficiency of Christ.

The Lord Jesus has all the answers for all of life. All of life. The contemporary church has lost this and in its place adopted plans and programs that will see the church through all circumstances.

When I was reading over my lesson today, I said, I'm not going to do this, but I am going to do it. So I apologize. And I got this from R.C. Sproul years ago. He was teaching a class on decision making.

[20 : 19] So he said to his class, a Christian man, a Christian woman got arrested by the Nazis in Germany, World War II.

And they were put in a concentration camp and separated. The wife was quite beautiful. The camp commander brought her in and said, If you will submit to me and live with me, I will make sure your husband lives through this war, who's in the camp, and you and he will be reunited at the end.

And she said, Give me a day to think about this. I said, If you don't, then he'll be killed immediately. And then you'll submit to me anyway.

I'll force my way upon you. So she went in the next day and she agreed to submit. A few years later, the allies came in. The American troops captured that camp.

Rescued both of them. She got her husband aside and said, You need to know what I've done. And she explained to him what she had done because she didn't want him to be killed. But he immediately sued her for divorce on the grounds of adultery.

[21 : 36] Dr. Sproul asked the class what was right and what was wrong. And the whole class started debating. And some guy over here, he didn't like that.

And no one said, Yeah, that was right. And it was just... So the bell rings and Dr. Sproul said, Well, class is dismissed. And they said, Wait a minute, Dr. Sproul. What's the answer? And he said, I don't know.

But he said, That wasn't the purpose for the example. The purpose for the example is this. If we ask Jesus that, he would have the answer.

He would have discernment because he wrote the Bible. And he would know the answer. And he would also tell them, Have you not heard? Have you not read?

Has it not been spoken to you? Said to you? So he would have the answer immediately. That was the purpose for the class. It was amazing to really hear that.

[22 : 38] The fourth category is related to number three. And a product of it, the church's lack of discernment stems from her refusal to properly study, interpret, and apply the teachings of Scripture

to everyday life events.

It is easy to blame the pastors, but the laity has made little demand for the correct handling of God's Word. For years, years ago, those of us in Southern Baptist life assumed if a man was a graduate of a Southern Baptist seminary, he had to be solid.

And then we woke up one day and realized that some of our seminaries had abandoned truth for relativism. Now, the pendulum swung back because God raised up certain men to rescue us from unbelieving liberalism.

But we came very close to becoming an Episcopal denomination or some of those other, a liberal Presbyterian denomination. We should all be like the Bereans of Paul's day when he preached in Berea.

The people went home, opened their Scriptures, they would have been scrolls, to see if what Paul said was true. The development of a Berean attitude should be the desire of every preacher and teacher.

[23 : 56] I just get the class to go home and open their Bibles. A fifth reason for the lack of discernment in the church is the breakdown of biblically driven discipline in the church.

Wickedness arises in any church that turns a blind eye to sin within the church. Sin and heresy must be confronted, not ignored, and swept under the rug.

When the church ignores sin within its walls, it will also ignore the breakdown of holiness among its people. I always remember getting a call from Vince Smith.

Some of you remember that name. A few in here. And they were your neighbors, but they moved in when you all, you moved in when they were moving out. But they, a black couple that were here, our best friends, and we still go to North Carolina to see them from time to time.

And they joined a really great Baptist church there in Raleigh. And about the third Sunday they went, the pastor got up and he said, well, you need to know that Brother Jim Williams, I didn't, that's a made up name.

[25 : 09] That doesn't relate to anybody that was in here. He has moved out from his wife and that, our Jim Williams is dead. he moved out from his wife and is living with a woman, not his wife.

And we went to him and we canceled him and told him this was sin, but he said he wasn't going to change. So, we've put him out of the church. And unless he generally repents, he will not be allowed back in.

And then, and Vincent said, they'd never been exposed to that. Their mouths hung open. They're, oh my gosh, they had never been exposed at that level where there was a public declaration.

This is a church of about 9,000 that this had happened. A fifth reason for the lack of discernment in the church is the breakdown of biblically driven discipline in the church.

Wickedness arises when we turn a blind eye to sin. And I think I just did that one. A sixth reason is a loss of desire to pursue spiritual maturity.

[26 : 20] The church in the 20th and now the 21st century has become content with some vague expression of faith among its members. They are declared saved, but it stops there.

True salvation, which comes from God, is the first step in a new life. Once we are saved, we are reborn babies and we must and should desire the first, the milk of the word.

At some point in the future, hopefully we transition to meat. But, you know, we get saved, we don't start out with pork ribs, as much as that sounds good to me.

We start out with milk. Hebrews 5, For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need, again, for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature who, because of practice, have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

[27 : 38] See, that's what we're striving for. This takes practice in order to have our senses trained to discern between good and evil.

people. This is where the church today has failed. We should be engaged in a lifelong pursuit of spiritual growth. By the way, the Bible calls that sanctification.

Being recreated into the image of Christ. And if a person is not being sanctified, there's every reason to call into question their salvation experience.

If a person is not being sanctified, go back and review what happened to you at the start. We all need to heed the words of Paul in the second letter to Corinth to examine ourselves to see whether or not we are legitimate believers.

That's a command of God. It should be the goal of our church to honor Christ by worshiping the Father in spirit and truth. We are here to honor the God that has been revealed to us through the scriptures.

[28:46] And by the way, it is a trinity God, triune God, three persons, one true God. We're to honor that God to do what properly we must, to do that properly, we must adopt and exercise spiritual discernment.

We must know how to distinguish between truth and error. And let me tell you, that takes training. That takes time. That takes sitting, you know, in front of some man of God that's really teaching the true word of God.

But that should be our goal. We do that by knowing scripture. And may I say, that goes far beyond attending church a couple times a week.

That's more than a 30 minute Sunday school. We need to be people digging into the word of God on a daily basis.

And we must be serious about this. If we are not, we're failing to contend before we even enter into the battle. And we're commanded to contend.

[30:05] So the question is, how do we specifically contend for this faith that has been delivered to us? is a