

<sup>18</sup>that they were saying to you, " In the last time there will be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts."

<sup>19</sup>These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit."

So Jude was telling them that they had *heard* the truth and that they should *remember* what it was. They had been told that there would be certain people "...following after their own ungodly lusts" who would be the "...ones who cause divisions..." in the church. He was telling the readers to *discern* truth from false teaching and earnestly contend for that truth (or faith) that had been handed down to them. So how can *we* be able to discern truth from false teaching? — by *knowing* the Word.

Now this doesn't mean that we go around suspecting everybody. But it does mean that we must always listen with a discerning ear so that when (or if) a teaching is presented that doesn't match up to what we have studied, something inside of us says; "oh, oh, that's just not right!" Now, what is that "something" inside of us? It's the Spirit warning us that we're in danger of being taken in by something that is not from God. God expects us to have a discerning spirit. And we can only get a discerning spirit by filling our mind and heart with God's Word so that when something comes along that's not according to His Word, we quickly spot it.

The entire book of Jude is an appeal for his readers (including us today) to not sit by and let false teaching go unnoticed. We are to be knowledgeable in the Word, strong in our beliefs and defend them with boldness, courage and conviction. It is our responsibility to know the truth, defend the truth and share the truth. God's Word is everlasting and He has entrusted it to those who believe in Him. When we fail to take that responsibility seriously, *that* dear friends, is when we begin to put our souls in danger of being lost eternally. We become prime candidates for falling victim to deadly doctrines that creep unnoticed into our lives.

And in conclusion, a few Scriptures to ponder concerning the Word of God:

"The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever." (Isaiah 40:8 NIV)

"Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently." (Psalm 119:4 KJV)

"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." (John 17:17 NIV)



# DILIGENCE

"We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure." — Hebrews 6:11

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## The Word — Not *Someone's* Word

In the previous issue of *Diligence* we concluded with the statement that "it is the God given *responsibility of every one of us* to study *the Bible...*" Otherwise, we are in serious danger of accepting *someone's* word instead of *The Word.*"

Accepting *someone else's* word for what the Scriptures teach *is now*, and always *has* been much easier than "figuring it out for ourselves." There's no time commitment involved on *our* part if we simply rely on what *someone else* has concluded. And even if we *have* studied to "figure it out for ourselves," it's still *much* easier to not *challenge* someone whom we believe may not be teaching what the Bible says. After all, if we take a stand that disagrees with *someone else's* word — even though we believe it differs from *The Word* — we may either learn that we were wrong *or* be thought of as unloving, divisive, argumentative or just plain not very nice! None of us likes, enjoys, or takes any delight in risking our status in the worldly scheme of things to take a stand for what we believe to be right according to the Word of God, but yet that is exactly what His Word calls us to do.

Go get your Bible and open it to the book of Jude. This is a very short book, but it certainly has a valuable message for us today. Let's read the first four verses.

<sup>1</sup>Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, To those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ:

<sup>2</sup>May mercy and peace and love be multiplied to you.

<sup>3</sup>Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.

<sup>4</sup>For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." (NAS)

Notice that in the first part of verse 3, Jude says he was *trying* to write to his readers about the salvation they had in common but he "...felt the necessity..." to write to them about something else. So he's saying "I was going to write about *this* but I changed my mind because I felt *this* was more important."

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Now, it's rather obvious that there must have been something that seemed quite urgent to him about this subject. Otherwise, he would not have completely changed his mind about the subject matter of the letter he was writing to those whom he referred to as "...kept for Jesus Christ" (verse 1). So let's read verse 4 again.

*"For certain persons have crept in unnoticed...ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ."*

Now we see that the reason he changed his mind was that false teachers had infiltrated their fellowship. They were "...distort(ing) the message about the grace of our God..." (TEV) into licentiousness. Webster's New World Dictionary defines "licentious" as: "disregarding accepted rules and standards, unrestrained, libertine, immoral." So they were simply saying "because God's grace is so great, we don't have to worry about keeping any rules or being legalistic in any way at all. We need not worry about anything that pertains to the flesh." So they were allowing all kinds of disobedience to God under the name of "grace."

Notice also that these false teachers had "crept in unnoticed." We might say they sneaked in a little bit at a time. They pretended to be one thing to gain acceptance in the group but were in fact something far different! Also in that same verse Jude says that these people who had crept in unnoticed were "...long beforehand marked out for this condemnation." The believers there should have recognized such false teachers since there had been numerous prophecies long beforehand that there would be people who would come in and divide and upset the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. But yet these false teachers had been allowed to simply creep in unnoticed. We must assume from Jude's words that there were two reasons this had happened. The first reason was that the believers there didn't know that there had been prophecies warning of such people (or perhaps they chose to pay no attention to those warnings). The second reason was that they knew of the prophecies but were simply unwilling to speak up against the false teachings. Perhaps they were placing more value on the unity of their fellowship than on the truth being taught. Either way, Jude felt it necessary to appeal to them that they should "...contend earnestly for the faith..."

Let's look more closely now at that phrase "...contend earnestly..." What does Jude mean by those words "...contend earnestly...?" The Greek word used for "contend earnestly" is "epagonizomai." It's in the present tense (indicating a continuing or on-going action). Vine's Expository Dictionary states the following about this word:

*"...signifies to contend about a thing, as a combatant. The word 'earnestly' is added to convey the intensive force of the preposition."*

While it is not the exact same Greek word, it is indeed the same root Greek word that is translated "fight" (agonizomai) in various other places in the

Scriptures and indicates an intense struggle. (John 18:36; I Tim 6:12). Our English word "agonize" is from this word. It is also often translated "strive" (Luke 13:24). Regarding this translation Vine's Expository Dictionary states:

*"...to strive as in a contest for a prize, straining every nerve to attain to the object(ive)."*

So we see that Jude's admonition to his readers telling them that they should "contend earnestly" means that they should fight, that they should stand up, engage in battle, strain every nerve to defend, agonize, don't compromise under any circumstance. So Jude makes it very clear that we cannot allow ourselves to be mesmerized by anyone who is teaching erroneous doctrine. We must contend "...for the faith..."

So what is "...the faith..." to which he is referring? Well, apparently he's referring to much more than just their belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Because he further defines it as that faith "...which was once for all handed down to the saints." This indicates that he's talking about the whole body of "doctrine" that they believed. For example; our whole "body of doctrine" would include such things as what we believe about salvation, God, baptism, the church, the Lord's Supper, the Holy Spirit, sin, grace, prayer, etc., etc.. Jude was reminding them that Jesus Christ shared that faith with His apostles who shared it with the Body (or the church) and was eventually handed down to those who were reading his words.

So when we tie all of this together, and read that these false teachers "...crept in unnoticed..." we began to understand why it is so very important that every Christian study the Word so that s/he is able to discern an accurate teaching from a false teaching. God expects us to be able to identify error when it presents itself. Hearing something that is not in accordance with what we have read in the Word should immediately send up red flags. Why? Well, remember how the false teachers got in? They crept in! But how can a false teacher creep in unnoticed? By saying and doing all of the right things while all the time teaching a completely false doctrine. As Christians, we cannot allow ourselves to be taken in by personality, fame, eloquent speech, fear of ridicule or any other trait that is likely to hamper our ability to discern according to the Word what is being taught.

Let's skip down to verse 16 now, and see what Jude says we should expect these people to be like.

*"These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage."*

Let's continue reading verses 17 through 19.

*<sup>17</sup>But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ,*