

²²Be merciful to those who doubt; Jude 22; *NIV*

January 10, 2010

Text: Jude 17-25

Defeating Doubt

Jude 1

- 1 Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James,
To those who have been called, who are loved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ:
2 Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.

The Sin and Doom of Ungodly People

3 Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that the Lord has once for all entrusted to us, his people. 4 For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

5 Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord at one time delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. 6 And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. 7 In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

8 In the very same way, on the strength of their dreams these ungodly people pollute their own bodies, reject authority and heap abuse on celestial beings. 9 But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not himself dare to condemn him for slander but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" 10 Yet these people speak abusively against whatever they do not understand; and what things they do understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals—these are the very things that destroy them.

11 Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion.

12 These people are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm—shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted—twice dead. 13 They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.

14 Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about them: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones 15 to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against him." 16 These people are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.

A Call to Persevere

17 But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. 18 They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." 19 These are the people who

divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.

20 But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit,
21 keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

22 Be merciful to those who doubt; 23 save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

Alternate translations of vss 22-23 . . .

[22-23Go easy on those who hesitate in the faith. Go after those who take the wrong way. Be tender with sinners, but not soft on sin. The sin itself stinks to high heaven. - MSG;

22 And you must show mercy to those whose faith is wavering. 23 Rescue others by snatching them from the flames of judgment. Show mercy to still others, but do so with great caution, hating the sins that contaminate their lives. - NLT

22Some people are not sure what they believe. Be kind to them by sharing in their troubles.

23Pull them out of the fire and save them. There are other people to whom you must be kind, but be careful about it. But you must hate even the clothes that bad people have worn. - WE]

Doxology

24 To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— 25 to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. *NIV*

Introduction:

There is good doubt. Understanding does not come from superficially swallowing everything we are told to believe.

Luke tells us that in Acts 17 that Paul's habit was to reason with people from the Bible. He showed them that the promised Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. Jesus fulfilled those promises. Jesus is the Messiah. The focus of his message was Jesus. It reminds us that "faith comes from hearing the message of Christ." Some were persuaded. Others jealously slandered Paul.

The Jews of Berea were of better character than those of Thessalonica. The Berean Jews were eager to hear Paul and test what he was saying in light of the Scriptures. Many believed. Their faith was strong because it was rooted in what they had previously heard and believed from the OT Scriptures.

But there is also an unhealthy doubt—a skepticism that is debilitating for faith,

hope, and love. This is a kind of doubt that ridicules, slanders, and divides. It is born of corrupt human instinct, not the Spirit of God. Unhealthy doubt grows like weeds where healthy skepticism has not been resolved. Doubt that goes unresolved breeds despair.

In the context of the early church being infiltrated by false teachers, Jude gives us counsel as to how our faith can be protected against all types and levels of doubt.

First, Jude counsels us as to how to avoid doubt that disturbs or even destroys faith. This is his negative instruction of what to avoid and why.

Brace the body against doubt-invasion (17-19).

17 But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. 18 They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." 19 These are the people who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.

Doubt defiles and divides.

"who will follow their own ungodly desires." - vs 18

Earlier in Jude . . .

[Enoch, 7th from Adam prophesied] "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones 15 to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against him." 16 These people are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.

"These are the people who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit." - vs 19

Be alert to, not alarmed by, the presence of scoffers who would be teachers. The apostles had forewarned the church (Acts 20:29; 1 Tim 4; 2 Tim 3:1-5, 13; 4:3; 2 Peter 2:1-3; 2 Peter 3:3). From the very beginning the early Christians were warned that the enemy would attack our faith by planting deceptive seeds of doubt. The presence of

doubt/doubters should actually strengthen our faith!

Acts 20:29-30

29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.

1 Tim 4:1-3

4 The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. 2 Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.

2 Tim 3:1-5

3 But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. 2 People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, 4 treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.

2 Tim 3:12-14

12 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, 13 while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

2 Tim 4:3

3 For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

2 Peter 2:1-3

2 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them — bringing swift destruction on themselves. 2 Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. 3 In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

2 Peter 3:3-4

3 First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires.

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The implication: our defense is the teachings of the apostles.

My stateside daughter gave me a *Garman* for Christmas. I love it. Now when I'm lost, I know I'm lost! Recently I was traveling to a new address. After inputting the information, I left the church building. My cell phone rang. I would have to make another stop before reaching my initial destination. Since I had not read all of the directions, I did not know how to input another stop on the way. So I just drove.

I don't know which is worse, hearing my wife say, "Why don't you just stop and ask for directions" or hearing the voice of my little GPS lady. "Recalculating . . . turn right on _____, turn right 400ft. . . . 100 ft. . . . turn right . . . recalculating." That happened so many times I expected to hear her say, "pull off to the side of the road, stop the vehicle, and step away from the car!" No matter how many wrong turns I took, the GPS knew where I was and how to reach my ultimate destination.

We need a spiritual GPS—a God-positioning Spirit! And thankfully, we have such guidance. As the Spirit speaks through the Word, he tells us immediately when we are off the right road and how to get back on track. It doesn't matter how many wrong turns we've made, he knows how to get us from where we are to where he is. The difference is that God never has to recalculate. He always knows how to get his people to his place from whatever location sin has taken us.

So we have a strong defense against doubt and skepticism. We must keep alert to the constant threat of doubt-invasion.

But Jude also provides positive instruction.

Build the *community* of faith (20-23).

20 But you, dear friends, **by building yourselves up in your most holy faith** and praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

22 Be merciful to those who doubt; 23 save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

Surround your doubt with faith. Skepticism doesn't stand a chance in a fellowship of believers.

While doubt defiles and divides . . .

Faith **saves** and **unites**. Jude provides three practical directions for avoiding destructive doubt and build a strong community of faith.

➔ **Align your prayers with the desires of the Holy Spirit.**

"praying in the Holy Spirit"

Praying in the Spirit refers to prayer offered under the control of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit guides and shapes our prayers. It is prayer offered according to the Spirit's plan and purpose, not the least of which is a confident and resilient faith.

Prayer helps us deal with our doubts.

In his book *Stories for the Journey*, William R. White shares the story of Hans, a European seminary professor devastated by the death of his wife, Enid. Hans was so overcome with sorrow that he lost his appetite and didn't want to leave the house. Out of concern, the seminary president, along with three other professors, paid Hans a visit. The grieving professor confessed that he was struggling with doubt. "I am no longer able to pray to God," he admitted to his colleagues. "In fact, I am not certain I believe in God any more." After a moment of silence, the seminary president said, "Then we will believe for you. We will pray for you." The four men continued to meet daily for prayer, asking God to restore the gift of faith to their friend. Some months later, as the four friends gathered for prayer with Hans, Hans smiled and said, "It is no longer necessary for you to pray for me. Today I would like you to pray *with* me."

John Koessler, in the sermon "Blessed Are Those Who Mourn," PreachingToday.com

Prayer is one of God's extraordinary gifts. And the Holy Spirit promises, in fact guarantees, that God will hear the cries of our hearts. He will pray for us, when we don't even know what to ask or say.

Did you know . . . during the service people are praying, after the service a small group meets each week to pray, and on Sunday evening a group of women meet to pray (this month they are focusing on families in our church), and each day our office sends out prayer needs through e-mail, several times a day, if necessary? We are a church that prays. We believe in prayer. We believe praying helps us engage our doubts.

There is a second step we take to assure we are a fellowship of faith.

➔ **Bind [imprison] yourselves to God's love.**

"keep yourselves in God's love"

Live within the boundaries of God's love! We gather to remind ourselves that God

loves us!

Satan attempts to undermine our belief in God's love. He will stop at nothing in his desire to cause us to doubt God's love. Seeds of doubt can lead to a harvest of despair.

1) my sin is too awful

2) my faith too weak

3) my life beyond repair

Of all the things we can and should do for each other in our gathering, reassuring each other of God's love is at the top of the list!

Henri Nouwen put it this way . . .

Self-rejection is the greatest enemy of the spiritual life because it contradicts the sacred voice that calls us the "Beloved." Being the Beloved expresses the core truth of our existence.

And remember, just because you may on occasion doubt that you are among the beloved, does not make it so.

And then Jude anchors our faith to the future by instructing us to . . .

→ Look forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life"

We gather in hope that Jesus will return soon!

In the meantime, what can we do to help people who are in the clutches of doubt and confusion?

1) Be **kind** [loving kindness in a covenant relationship] to those who are unsure of what they believe (22).

²²Be merciful to those who doubt;

"Some people are not sure what they believe. Be kind to them by sharing in their troubles."

- Jude 22; Worldwide English NT

Being kind means having the courage to speak for Christ out of love for those troubled by sin in all its forms.

[Watch this incredible interchange between Bill O'Reilly and Brett Hume -

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gteKuPgLy8I>]

Brett Hume's statement regarding Christ and the Christian faith was a genuine and clear demonstration of kindness towards someone he cares about. The spastic reaction of many critics does not detract from either the truth of the Christian faith or the kindness he has expressed toward Tiger Woods. This is the kind of genuine mercy we must offer to those whose faith is wavering, in dispute, or even under judgment.

Though there is only one reference to those who "doubt," it is clear from the context that Jude knows there are levels of intensity with regard to skepticism. It is seen in the several connotations of the word (doubt, waver, dispute, even antagonistically argue against) as well as the context.

To those who are wavering we show mercy (a covenant kindness to each other). If doubt is not dealt with appropriately it can easily lead to a spirit of disputing everything Scripture teaches. In these situations, Jude advises the community of faith to "snatch from the fire." In today's language, we would say, "do an intervention." Because we are in a covenant relationship with God and each other, we care enough to confront . . . to save. But then there is a third level of doubt that leads to a life of immorality—teachers who use grace as a cover for leading a sinful and corrupt life. Jude, surprisingly, counsels us to show mercy to them as well, but with reservation.

2) Be cautiously kind to those whose faith is under judgment (23).

“to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.”

If you read the whole of this short letter you will see why Jude asks us to be careful as we show mercy to those whose lives are contaminated. We still show mercy, because they are not beyond redemption and forgiveness. Yet, they are in serious danger. He doesn't want the body to be infected with diseased thinking or living.

The word here is more graphic here than we might think appropriate. But God's word often is. Jude wants us to know how corrosive such “doubting” can be. Mercy with fear toward those embroiled in virulent sinful rebellion - hating even the clothing stained by corruption (it refers to undergarments stained by excrement and other bodily fluids). It is a repulsive picture. We should be so repulsed by the vulgar, crude, behavior of militant skepticism today.

At the same time, we persist in showing mercy.

Remember God is able to keep you (24-25).

24 To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— 25 to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

During my first year of Bible College, I went through a period of doubt. I was troubled by what I was learning concerning the how we got the Bible and its nature, reliability, and accuracy. It wasn't that I had been taught wrong. It had more to do with the fact that my previous understanding was incomplete.

I went to see a professor. He did not seem overly alarmed by my questions. He did not try to answer all my questions. What he did do was share from his own life. He said he

too had gone through a period of doubting. In fact, he commended me for pursuing my doubts.

He had not done so, at least initially. He kept dismissing his doubts and putting them on the shelf so to speak. Eventually, the shelf broke. It was then that he went for help. His trusted counselor asked if he still believed that God had sent his son, and Jesus died for his sin, and then conquered death. He said, "Well, yes I guess I do." His guide then said, bring your doubts to that faith. Do they matter? Are they insurmountable? If you still believe that God has loved you that much, then confront your doubts from that foundation.

I went home and started reading the gospel accounts. It wasn't long before the weight of concern plaguing my heart dissipated. It was like a heavy burden had been lifted. Many of my questions would not be answered for several years. But I could live with that in light of God's amazing love. I had learned to trust even or especially in the midst of questions.

Defeating doubt in the end is about living in God's incredible love. What he did for me, he will do for you.

If doubt stands in the way of you beginning a relationship with him by faith, remember he knows the way between your place and his. If you are missing the support of a faith-community in which to address your doubts, we stand ready to be that community. We are not perfect. We don't know all the answers. But we do know the One who does!

Why don't you join us on the journey?