



Session 12

ON GUARD

God's Word is the only standard of truth in our world.

2 PETER 2:1-3; JUDE 16-25

² Peter 2:1 **But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, and will bring swift destruction on themselves. ² Many will follow their unrestrained ways, and the way of truth will be blasphemed because of them. ³ They will exploit you in their greed with deceptive words. Their condemnation, pronounced long ago, is not idle, and their destruction does not sleep.**

Jude ¹⁶ **These people are discontented grumblers, walking according to their desires; their mouths utter arrogant words, flattering**



people for their own advantage.¹⁷ But you, dear friends, remember what was predicted by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ;¹⁸ they told you, “In the end time there will be scoffers walking according to their own ungodly desires.”¹⁹ These people create divisions and are unbelievers, not having the Spirit.²⁰ But you, dear friends, as you build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit,²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, expecting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life.²² Have mercy on those who doubt;²³ save others by snatching them from the fire; have mercy on others but with fear, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.²⁴ Now to Him who is able to protect you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of His glory, blameless and with great joy,²⁵ to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority before all time, now and forever. Amen.

Underline words or phrases that point to the threat posed by false teachers and their teachings. Circle words or phrases that identify potential motives behind the false teachers. How do those motives compare to the motives of the teachers of truth?

FIRST THOUGHTS

Jesus warned His followers to beware of false prophets and teachers (Matt. 7:15). His warning about wolves in sheep’s clothing was essential—Christians have always had to be vigilant. One of the earliest Christian accounts of a false teacher was a man named Cerinthus, a leader of a sect in Ephesus during the time the apostle John lived there. Polycarp (one of John’s disciples) later reported that once, when John was going to a public bathhouse in Ephesus, he saw Cerinthus inside. John rushed out with these words: “Let us fly, lest even the bathhouse fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within.”

Our century has already produced its fair share of false teachers as well. We live in an era with an emphasis on subjective truth, tolerance, and being non-judgmental. This can leave us bewildered about how to recognize and respond to false teachings.

What is your reaction to John's words as he fled the bathhouse? How should we respond to false teachers and their teachings today?

Both Peter and Jude took great pains to help their readers understand the false teachers that threatened their respective readers. The false teachers' motives were suspect, and they could be identified by the dangerous content of their teaching. They needed to be exposed. At the same time, the readers were challenged to counter the false teachers by growing in their faith. They were responsible, further, for reaching out to those who might be susceptible to false teachings.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

2 PETER 2:1-22; JUDE 1-25

The lesson today comes from two different books of the Bible with similar contexts. Both Peter and Jude faced false teaching. What made the false teaching dangerous was the church had begun to experience persecution. It would have been easy to adopt the false teaching because it did not contrast so starkly with the world.

Peter's first letter emphasized suffering and how a Christian should approach it. Peter started his second letter with an encouragement for Christians to grow in their faith. He told them God had given them everything necessary for them to grow (2 Pet. 1:3-11). Then he encouraged them to search the Scriptures and see that the message of the false teachers was not accurate. The true gospel was based on eyewitness accounts and Old Testament prophecies (2 Pet. 1:12-21). After setting this foundation, he was ready to counter the false teachers (2 Peter 2) and teach the truth about the second coming of Christ (2 Peter 3).

Jude is a brief letter (25 verses) written by the brother of James (Jude 1), presumably the brother of Jesus. Jude addressed his letter



to those who were called, loved by God, and kept by Jesus Christ (Jude 1). To these true believers, Jude sought to expose those who taught false doctrine. Despite the teaching of the false teachers, Jude wanted believers to know God would sustain them.

KEY DOCTRINE: *The Scriptures*

The Scriptures are the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

EXPOSED (2 PET. 2:1-3; JUDE 16)

2 PETER 2:1

¹ But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, and will bring swift destruction on themselves.

Peter exposed the false prophets in his day. He said they *secretly* brought *destructive heresies* to the people. They didn't announce loudly that they were bringing in false teaching. They brought their teaching in under the guise of being orthodox, but really it was heresy.

The subject of their heresies was Jesus. Peter explained that they denied *the Master who bought them*. Peter was probably indicating the false prophets considered themselves part of the church. Whether they were or not is a subject that Peter did not debate. They considered themselves as members of the church, so Peter approached the situation from that vantage point. Only God knew if they had genuine faith but misdirected theology.

Peter's statement that the false prophets would end in *swift destruction* is ironic. The false prophets had apparently questioned the return of Christ, the very event that would bring this destruction to them if they did not repent.

VERSE 2

² Many will follow their unrestrained ways, and the way of truth will be blasphemed because of them.

Why was the teaching of the false prophets so dangerous? Peter declared that many would *follow their unrestrained ways*. The word for *unrestrained* is most often used of reckless and hardened immorality. It usually referred to some type of sexual deviancy (1 Pet. 4:3; 2 Pet. 2:7). What may have attracted people to the false prophets was that their denial of the possibility of Christ's return encouraged Christians to forget accountability and live immoral lifestyles.

Because people embraced the teachings of the false prophets, *the way of truth* would *be blasphemed* (see p. 6). As others saw Christians engaging in immoral behavior, it would profane the gospel of Jesus Christ as if it had no power to cleanse and purify them. People would malign the gospel because it was hypocritical to claim to be a follower of Jesus and yet live in open immorality.

VERSE 3

³ They will exploit you in their greed with deceptive words. Their condemnation, pronounced long ago, is not idle, and their destruction does not sleep.

Peter exposed the motive of the false prophets. They led people astray because they were greedy. Christian teachers had a right to financial support (1 Cor. 9:1-14; Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17-18). But the false prophets preached only because they wanted their followers to give them money. They twisted their message to build greater support. Their tactics were to use *deceptive words*. They made up their own doctrine rather than taking the word of eyewitnesses (2 Pet. 1:16) and prophetic Scripture (1:20). However, the prosperity and popularity of the false prophets could not abate the judgment already against them.

JUDE 16

¹⁶ These people are discontented grumblers, walking according to their desires; their mouths utter arrogant words, flattering people for their own advantage.

Jude suggested some other false motives he observed in the false teachers. He said the teachers were not happy in themselves, so they sought to take others down with them. They were



discontented grumblers. They erred because of two primary reasons—evil actions and errant words. First, they walked **according to their desires.** They did not live by God’s standards but made up their own. Second, they had loose tongues. They uttered **arrogant words** and said only what others wanted to hear.

Is it easier to spot false prophets by their actions or their words? Explain.

BIBLE SKILL: *Create a compare/contrast chart to study a passage.*

On one side of a vertical line, identify words and phrases Jude used to describe false teachers and their teachings. On the other side, note words and phrases that describe genuine Christian teachers and teachings. Use Jude 16-25 as the basis for your study.

FALSE TEACHERS AND TEACHINGS

GENUINE TEACHERS AND TEACHINGS

PREDICTED (JUDE 17-19)

VERSES 17-18

17 But you, dear friends, remember what was predicted by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; 18 they told you, “In the end time there will be scoffers walking according to their own ungodly desires.”

Jude said to **remember** the teachings of apostles which **predicted** people would come mocking Christianity and living by **their own ungodly desires.** To what teaching of **the apostles** was Jude referring? Warnings were mentioned in early Christian preaching (Acts 20:29-30) and in the letters of Paul (1 Tim. 4:1-5; 2 Tim. 3:1-5). The imperfect tense of the word **told** at the beginning of verse 18 would suggest that the apostles repeated this message over and over again.

VERSE 19

¹⁹ These people create divisions and are unbelievers, not having the Spirit.

Jude unveiled the destructive tendencies of the false prophets. He wrote three accusations against them. First, the false prophets created *divisions* within the church. People were lining up to side either with the apostles or the false prophets. Jesus had prayed for unity in His church (John 17:20-26), but the false teachers were splitting people into groups. Second, Jude accused the false prophets of being *unbelievers*. The Greek word could be translated “natural ones.” They operated not out of the power of the Holy Spirit but from the power of the flesh. Third, and related to the second accusation, Jude said that they did not have the Holy *Spirit*. Paul had made a similar statement when he said those who did not welcome the things of the Spirit did so because they lacked the Holy Spirit in their own lives (1 Cor. 2:14).

The false prophets divided the church because they taught from their own wisdom, since as unbelievers they did not have access to the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps they were sincere in what they taught, but they were sincerely wrong. They needed access to the Holy Spirit so that they could teach the truth.

Why did Jude appeal to the teaching of the apostles to show the rise of false teachers? What is so appealing about false teachers, especially in light of the apostles' predictions?

COUNTERED (JUDE 20-25)

VERSE 20

²⁰ But you, dear friends, as you build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit,

Jude suggested two actions to combat false teaching. First, he suggested that believers *build* themselves *up* in their faith. In order to counter false teachings, we need spiritual maturity to combat the immaturity of those who embrace the message of false teachers.



Second, Jude encouraged Christians to *pray in the Holy Spirit*. Since we have access to the Spirit, we can pray in His power. (See Rom. 8:26-27; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 6:18.) The Spirit guides powerful prayer that combats the work of the enemy through the false teachers.

VERSE 21

²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, expecting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life.

A third strategy to counter false teaching was for genuine believers to *keep* themselves *in the love of God*. The teaching of the false prophets threatened the gospel, and in this verse Jude encouraged true believers to focus on the gospel so that they would not be led astray. Paul said nothing can separate us from the love of God, not even false teaching (Rom. 8:35-39).

VERSE 22

²² Have mercy on those who doubt;

Another strategy for combating false teaching was to *have mercy on those who doubt*. When people embrace false teaching, causing them to doubt the truth of the gospel, they need the mercy of genuine believers. We have an obligation not to react with fear, hatred, or ridicule. Through their doubt we can help those who waffle back and forth between the truth and the false teaching.

Which of these preventative actions do you think would be the most effective? Explain.

VERSE 23

²³ save others by snatching them from the fire; have mercy on others but with fear, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.

Concerning unbelievers already captured by false teaching, Jude encouraged true believers to *save others by snatching them from the fire*. Obviously we have no power to save people on our own, but we have the gospel which has the power to save (Rom. 1:16-17).

The fact that these unbelievers were in the fire meant they were already under God's judgment as unbelievers (John 3:18).

Christians are to approach those who are in error with caution, because they may attempt to lead us astray as well. Showing *mercy* to them does not mean turning a blind eye to their ways. In fact, we are encouraged to hate *the garment defiled by the flesh*. This means we are to hate the sin and all that is connected with it, while at the same time showing mercy to the person trapped in sin.

VERSES 24-25

²⁴ Now to Him who is able to protect you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of His glory, blameless and with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority before all time, now and forever. Amen.

Jude ended with a shout of praise, remembering God was greater than any enemy they faced. How would they be able to stand against such false teaching? Jude reminded them God was *able* to keep them *from stumbling* and would deliver them safely to His *presence*. As influential as the false prophets were, Jude's confidence was in the power of God. God is committed to keeping us from falling into the kind of immorality or error that would cut us off from Him (2 Pet. 1:10).

Parallel to this is God's greatness, because He will *make you stand in the presence of His glory*. Our future glorification is assured, and by His great grace we will be able to stand before Him. All of this comes to us *through Jesus Christ our Lord*.

Jude ascribed to *God our Savior* several wonderful attributes—*glory, majesty, power, and authority*, along the way noting that God exists beyond the limits of time. He was before all time, He is *now*, and He will be *forever*. In the words of Revelation 1:8, God is “the Alpha and the Omega ... the One who is, who was, and who is coming, the Almighty.”

What is our role and God's role in countering false prophets? How do the two roles complement each other?



IN MY CONTEXT

Believers must expose false teachers and their motives. Believers must be on guard against teachers who promote lifestyles contrary to the Scriptures. Believers can overcome false teachers by maintaining their spiritual growth and reaching out to those who may be susceptible to false teachings.

Based on these passages and your group's discussion, create a checklist for discerning the validity of a teaching or teacher. Discuss ways of using the checklist when confronted by questionable teaching.

Review the preventative actions identified by Peter and Jude. Outline a plan of action based on the identified actions. What are you doing to guard yourself?

How can your group reach out to those who may have embraced theological error? Discuss the difference, if any, in confronting professing Christians versus confronting unbelievers.

MEMORY VERSE

Keep yourselves in the love of God, expecting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life. —Jude 21