



Light from the Word

Jude: Marks of Ungodly Teachers

Editor's note: this month concludes a four-part series of teachings from some of the shortest books of the Bible; Philemon, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude.

“For there are certain men crept in unawares... denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹

We live in a world where the amount of information and knowledge is increasing at an almost unthinkable rate. It is estimated that the total amount of human information or knowledge is doubling every 2-3 years. While there are many benefits to be gained from this increased information, including our ability to stay more connected with individuals across the miles, and an increased degree of medical understanding, there are also areas of caution for the believer in our spiritual walk of life. Paul warned Timothy that there would be those who would try to affect the Church, with their approach of *“ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”*² While our day and time is different in many ways from that of Paul, we are still faced with the same evil adversary who desires to deceive all men. Jude's warning reminds us that this can happen to the Church.

Today, with easy access to nearly any teaching, man's legitimate thirst for knowledge is also a potential pitfall. It is easier than ever to gather to ourselves teachers, listening only to what pleases us. As believers, we need to be on guard, to prove all things and hold fast to that which is good.³ One key way to avoid deception is to know our teachers⁴, and to know the difference between godly and ungodly teachers. How do we discern (judge) those who teach the truth, from those who don't? First, we will focus on a few key marks of ungodly teachers that should be clearly visible to the spiritual eye.

Ungodly Teachers **Do Not:**

- Focus on the only true God, and our Lord Savior Jesus Christ.⁵
- Teach the concept of the narrow way and the way of self-denial.⁶
- Teach the concept of a converted life, based on faith in the shed blood of Jesus.⁷
- Have clear spiritual fruit in their lives.⁸

Ungodly Teachers **Do:**

- Use the liberty of Christianity to justify works of the flesh.⁹
- Pervert the grace of God to allow for fulfillment of their own personal desire.¹⁰
- Use the name of Christ to achieve personal gain.¹¹

Jude provides additional marks of ungodly teachers using the phrase, “these are” to denote key elements that the believers should use to discern godly from ungodly teachers. Disruptive and erroneous teaching is sometimes obvious and other times subtle. Jude describes the subtle approach clearly, writing, *“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.”*¹² A teacher who mixes truthful and hopeful teaching with a self-serving agenda that results in no true spiritual benefit can appear to be godly, but will be judged by God. Similar judgments were placed on the scribes and Pharisees by Jesus when He said, *“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.”*¹³ We are thankful for Christ's example, who spoke *“nothing of myself; but as my*

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*Father hath taught me, I speak these things.*¹⁴ Godly teachers: touch the soul by speaking truth, diminish themselves, live in a way that matches their preaching, and nurture the spiritual mind. False teachers speak to the itching of the ear, amplify themselves, and focus on the “*fables of this world.*”¹⁵

We read in verse 16 of a more insidious ungodly approach to teaching, “*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.*” Throughout scripture, there have always been warnings against the murmurer and the complainer – those who are not content with what God has provided for them.¹⁶ We may think, “What’s it to anyone if we complain? Isn’t that part of being human?” However, Moses reminded the people that, “*your murmurings are not against us, but against the LORD.*”¹⁷ Likewise, those teachers who focus on their own wants and not the needs of others,

are carnally minded, and “receive not the things of the Spirit of God: neither can know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”¹⁸ And just as the Pharisees often looked for the praise of man rather than the commendation of God, we are warned to be aware of those who would speak “great swelling words,” and do not have charity, without which there will be no profit.

We are thankful that with all these concerns, God provides to the believer the Holy Spirit, the entire Bible, and fellow believers to help us discern between truth and untruth. One remaining challenge to the believer is the tendency to react negatively to a teaching that may be godly – and exactly what we need to provoke us to good works and sanctification – yet the teaching is hard to swallow. The craftiness of Satan takes on another dimension with the temptation to label the teaching that is most needful, as deceptive or ungodly. Therefore by a diligent study of the Word, searching the scriptures daily as the Bereans did,¹⁹ and trusting in the safety of the multitude of counselors, we find ourselves enjoying lives filled with truth, joy, and peace.²⁰

May it be that each of us have the spiritual vision to see the marks of ungodly teachers and avoid them, appreciate and practice what we are taught by godly teachers, and examine our own motives if we have the responsibility of teaching and sharing the gospel. Through feeding on the Word of God, let us all press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.²¹

(Footnotes)

¹ Jude 4

² 2 Tim. 3:7

³ 1 Thess. 5:21

⁴ 1 Thess. 5:12-13

⁵ Jude 4

⁶ Matt. 7:14, Matt. 16:24

⁷ Eph. 2:8-10

⁸ Matt. 12:33

⁹ Gal. 5:13

¹⁰ Jude 4

¹¹ 1 Cor. 9:15

¹² Jude 12-13

¹³ Matt: 23:27-28

¹⁴ John 8:28

¹⁵ 2 Tim. 2:4

¹⁶ Phil. 4:11

¹⁷ Exod. 16:8

¹⁸ 1 Cor. 2:14

¹⁹ Acts 17:11

²⁰ Prov. 24:6.

²¹ Phil. 3:14