

Text: Jude 22-23
Title: A third way to contend for the faith.
Truth: Evangelizing the lost is another way to contend for the Christian faith.
Date/Location: March 1, 2015 at FBC

Introduction and Technical Note About the Text

- A. Each and every individual starts out life crippled by sin—disabled in mind and spirit from making the right kinds of choices in life. Added on top of this is the devastating result of false teaching, whether in schools, in popular culture and media, by lost parents, and by religious charlatans and ungodly people. All of this leaves people in various states of spiritual damage. All people are affected somehow, and so much so that all deserve condemnation. But God is merciful and provided a way of rescue from sin’s ill effects through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As a result, one who trusts Christ overcomes sin and becomes free from sin. So, there are basically two groups of people in the world: those who are Christians and those who are not.
- B. Jude breaks down that two-fold distinction into finer categories.
1. In verses 17 through 19, he reminds the readers of the apostles’ teaching that ungodly mockers would come in the last days, following their selfish lusts, exhibiting sensuality, promoting division in the church, and demonstrating a lack of the Holy Spirit. That is group #1 (part of the non-Christian group).
 2. Then, in verses 20-21, Jude turns his attention to group #2, his readers (and us). He reminds us to take spiritual care of ourselves. Ungodly people are not “handled” by only condemnation and reminder. We also have to keep ourselves in the love of God by abiding in His commandments, by growing in the faith, by praying consistently, and looking forward to the coming of Christ Who will bring us the final installment of His mercy. By this means, we will keep ourselves from becoming victims of the ungodly.
 3. Group #3 consists of those who have already been victimized by the ungodly apostates. These are the subjects of verses 22-23. Our involvement with them is that we are to rescue them from their deadly condition.
- C. Technical note: some translations portray group #3 in three sub-groups while others divide group #3 into two sub-groups, as shown in the table below:

| NIV Jude 22-23 | NKJV Jude 22-23 |
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| 22 Be merciful to those who doubt | And on some have compassion, making a distinction |
| 23a Save others by snatching them from the fire | but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh. |
| 23b To others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh. | |

The reason for this is that in some Greek manuscripts, there are more words, including a duplicated verb “show mercy.” I have chosen to follow the three-way translation in the following notes, seeing as Jude was fond of groups of three elsewhere in his letter.

I. Show compassion to those who are doubters, 22

- A. Verse 22 uses a verb that can be translated as *to doubt*. It sometimes is translated as *to dispute* (Acts 11:20, Jude 9), but it can also denote hesitation or doubting (Acts 10:20, Rom. 14:23, James 1:6). There is a group of doubters influenced by the ungodly and their teachers. They may be associated with the church but caught between two systems of doctrine, the false and the true. They may be saved people who are thrown into doubt because of the influence of false doctrine that they have encountered in the course of their life.
- B. From this statement we also learn compassion for those who are lost. Far from being high-minded, arrogant, or condescending, we humbly understand that we were lost just as much as them before our conversion.
1. We must not have glee at their fate, but sorrow and pity, like our Lord Who looked at the crowds (Matthew 14:14, 15:32; Mark 6:34) as well as on individuals (Matt. 20:34, Mark 1:41). God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 18:32, 33:11) and neither should we. This kind of compassion drives us to not give up on someone who is lost.
 2. Instead, we show mercy to them by patiently showing them the truth. Our approach should be like the shepherd’s (pastor’s) approach. In 2 Tim 2:25 we are told to be gentle as we teach and correct those who need repentance and the knowledge of the truth.
- D. From this statement we also learn that we need to be able to discern the difference between (1) the apostate ungodly people who are the object of Jude’s warning, (2) people who are perhaps ‘innocent’ victims of the ungodly false teachers, and (3) those who are further down the broad way of destruction. Jude’s letter does not suggest the possibility of redemption for all of the “worst” ungodly: they seem to be fully invested in their error and many will forever be in that state. There are some of the worst errorists who can and will be saved (like the apostle Paul). God and the blood of Jesus are powerful enough to do that. But it is also true that God has given some over to their wickedness and there will be no recovery for them (Romans 1:24, 26, 28).

II. Save those on the road to destruction, 23a

- A. The people in this second group are more convinced of the error-filled way of false teachers and are worse off than the previous group. They are not doubters but are quite committed to their wrong way. They are more into the ungodly teaching and mindset and more into the practice of sensuality. Saving them will take more work. They may never have been taught the true faith that was delivered by the Lord through the apostles to the church. They need to be

rescued by learning about the true God, the true Jesus Christ, and the true way of salvation. These folks might say things like: “I’m not in a burning building. *You* are!” Maybe showing them the smoke and fire that they are going to experience will convince them (?). These people were never genuinely saved people because they are on the road to the fire of Hell. Notice that Jude is not saying they are *in* the fire right now, but they are headed straight for it, as if walking *into* the front door of a burning home rather than *out* of it.

- B. We are like firefighters pulling people out of a burning building. This is important but dangerous work. But it is work we are called to do as Christians. The verb used in this sentence is to *snatch*, *seize*, or *pull them out*. It is the word *harpadzō*. We save people by kidnapping them (modern use of the word) from the flames. They have to be “yanked” out, just like Christians will be yanked out of the world at the rapture.
- C. The verb is a command, *to save*. If you are on track with the Bible’s doctrine of salvation, you will ask, “How can I save someone? Isn’t God the only one who can do that?” True, but this imperative signals to us the very important role that God has given to us in the salvation of souls. Yes, God does the saving...and He very often does it through YOU. Not that we can take credit: “I saved so-and-so.” Rather: “I’m thankful God used me to share the saving message of Christ with so-and-so and he is now saved!” See James 5:19-20. If you are not the channel through whom the gospel flows, then who will be?
- D. How exactly then do you “save” someone? Good question! It is part-and-parcel with “contending earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (v. 3).
 - 1. It means directly promoting the true faith; avoiding error but not avoiding confrontation of sin; growing in grace; and telling others by word and deed who Jesus is and what He did. And don’t apologize for it!
 - 2. A key part of Jude’s message is that God judges the ungodly. Therefore, if you are ungodly, God will judge you—and that is part of what you can tell the unbeliever. This is not exactly the kind of evangelism that says, “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life,” but it is true nonetheless. It is totally appropriate for Christians to call people out of sin and into holiness and to warn of coming judgment. Of course, never tell someone about their sin and its penalty unless you also tell them about the solution to their sin!

III. Show mercy very carefully to those who are totally corrupted, 23b

- A. This group of people is “farther gone” than the previous, deeper into the corrupt doctrine and lifestyle of the ungodly. It may seem impossible to save them.
- B. I chose the word *carefully* for the heading of this section because the text says *with fear*. Saving the very ungodly is not pleasant or easy or care-free. It is dangerous work because of the subjects who need rescued.

1. If the previous case is like a firefighter, this situation is like a firefighter pulling people out of a burning building who are *also* soaked to the skin in poisonous toxic liquid—and they don't want to be rescued!
 2. Connect this thought with Haggai 2:11-14 and Zechariah 3:1-5. Uncleanness travels, and uncleanness sends people to punishment.
 3. The uncleanness on the ungodly is like vomit or excrement on an undergarment. Imagine handling a garment dirtied that way: how you transport it by holding a clean corner of it; how the expression on your face looks; how you hold your nose or breath as you carry the smelly thing; and how you wash it with hot water and soap in the washing machine.
- C. The fear here can be interpreted as fear of God, which we know we ought to have. But more to the point in this context, it refers to the healthy fear of being polluted by the sins of others. Galatians 6:1 mentions the idea, as well as 1 Cor. 15:33. Association at any level with sinners brings dangers that we must constantly guard against. In work of the church, in your workplace, in your school, etc. you need to have your so-called antennas up and paying attention.
- There are two counter-balancing ideas: one is saving the lost; the other is maintaining your purity. You have to do *both*.

Conclusion

Depending on the person you are witnessing to, there are different approaches: merciful compassion is one; snatching people from the flames is another; and fearful mercy is the third.

Charles R. Erdman wrote of verses 20-23 that Jude has told his readers “how to meet impiety and apostasy; not with surprise, for these have been predicted; not with inactivity, for spiritual zeal and effort form the best protection against temptation; not with indifference, for many souls will be in peril and some may be rescued from death.”¹

We have to be doing our part—energetically contending for the faith!

MAP

¹ Charles R. Erdman, *The General Epistles*, 1918, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, p. 184, accessed from openlibrary.org, also known as archive.org.