

What is discernment?

- The word shows up in 1 Cor. 11:28, 2 Cor. 13:5, Gal. 6:4 where believers are to test themselves.
- We are also to test, or discern, what pleases God—Eph. 5:10, Phil. 1:10.
- By testing, we should be able to reach a conclusion on whether to accept or reject. That is discernment.
- Paul speaks of sending representatives that he has tested and approved—2 Cor. 8:22.
- And notice Matt. 16:1-3—Jesus warns the Pharisees that they have some discernment...but they have missed what really matters.

What is discernment?

Proverbs 17:24 – “The discerning sets his face toward wisdom, but the eyes of a fool are on the ends of the earth.”

So—what are the characteristics of “the discerning” here, as opposed to the characteristics of “a fool”?

“Discernment is not knowing the difference between right and wrong. It is knowing the difference between right and almost right.” – Charles Spurgeon

The word “carries the idea of a critical examination of something to determine its genuineness.” –

Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words

What is discernment?

- It is making careful distinctions—simply, it is this: thinking biblically.
- In 1 Thess. 5:21-22 and 1 John 4:1, both Paul and John expect all believers to exercise careful discernment across the spectrum of life.

“Unfortunately, discernment is an area where most Christians stumble. They exhibit little ability to measure the things they are taught against the infallible standard of God's Word, and they unwittingly engage in all kinds of unbiblical decision-making and behavior. In short, they are not armed to take a decidedly biblical stand against the onslaught of unbiblical thinking and attitudes that face them throughout their day.” ~ John MacArthur

What is *discernment*?



Climbing across the hedges to get up on the tower.



Well—we'll come back to this in a bit. First, this:

Here's the outline of Jude's short letter we're using:

v. 1-4—Jude's introduction and purpose: Contend for the faith

v. 5-16—Jude's sober warning and encouragement: The ungodly will be judged

v. 17-25—Jude's exhortation and exaltation: Keep yourselves in the love of God—He will keep you

This is how I put the main theme of Jude's letter:

- Contend for the faith with confidence—God will judge those who are distorting it.
- And v. 3 is our key verse.

Where we've been and where we're going ~

We took a look a few weeks ago at the big picture overview of Jude's letter, then a couple of weeks ago at his purpose for writing (i.e., v. 3).

- So we've seen his purpose and his charge to his readers to "contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints."
- We talked about the urgency and immediacy of that charge, and about how the language in the original indicates that this need is ongoing: there will continue to be distortions of the truth and pressure to compromise the gospel throughout the church age, until the end.

Where we've been and where we're going ~

This week we start to get a glimpse of the danger Jude was seeing—the danger that prompted him to set aside the letter he intended to write, and instead write the letter we have in our Bibles.

So basically we've been through v. 1-3, and we want to focus today on v. 4. Here's where we're going:

- First, a description of the false teachers
- And second, the results of their influence—
 - Result #1: a perversion of grace
 - Result #2: a denial of the authority of Christ

A description of the false teachers ~ Jude v. 4

Notice how Jude starts off v. 4: “...*certain people* have crept in...” It is these *certain people* who are the theme of the bulk of his letter ~

- v. 8—*these people*...defile...reject...blaspheme
- v. 10—*these people* blaspheme
- v. 12—*these* are hidden reefs
- v. 14—it was also about *these*
- v. 16—*these* are grumblers, malcontents
- v. 19—it is *these* who cause divisions

And then there's the massive contrast in v. 20: “But *you, beloved*...” So Jude introduced us to *certain people* in v. 4. Let's meet them.

A description of the false teachers ~ Jude v. 4

We said back in lesson 1, the overview, that Jude likes lists. Indeed he does. What do you notice about these *certain people* in v. 4?

Jude describes them as:

- Designated for condemnation
- Ungodly people
- They pervert grace into sensuality
- And they deny Jesus Christ

We could say it like this: He describes their destiny (designated for condemnation), their character (ungodly people), their influence (pervert grace into sensuality), & their hypocrisy (deny Jesus Christ).

A description of the false teachers ~ Jude v. 4

But wouldn't you think if they just all of a sudden showed up and started spewing this stuff that *someone* in that gathering of believers would have reacted strongly? Apparently no one did. Why not?

Jude says they "crept in unnoticed." How?

Take a look back at Matt. 13:24-30.

This is a parable of the *kingdom*—Jesus is indicating that within the realm of God's rule both believers and unbelievers are going to live side by side in the world until the judgement. God, in His mercy, delays final judgment, but in the end the kingdom will be pure. Evil in every form will be eradicated.

A description of the false teachers ~ Jude v. 4

Is it safe to assume that, if believers and unbelievers continue in the world until the judgement, some unbelievers may also be present within the church?

Clearly, the answer is *yes*. Notice 1 John 2:19.

We can say this about the *certain people* in v. 4 ~

- They were not genuine believers.
- They must have appeared to be genuine believers, at least for a time.
- The text implies that their infiltration was slow and deliberate.

A description of the false teachers ~ Jude v. 4

These *certain people* “crept in unnoticed...”

One commentator describes this as “a sinister and secretive word.”

- Like secretly slipping back in to a country.
- Like “the insidious decline of good laws and the stealthy substitution of inferior ones.”

This may have taken the 1st century church by surprise, but we should be far more discerning...

- ...the OT warns of it: Deut. 13:2-11; Ezek. 13:1-16
- ...Jesus warns of it: Matt. 7:15-20; Mark 13:22
- ...and the apostles warn of it: Acts 20:29-30; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:1-9.

A description of the false teachers ~ Jude v. 4

These *certain people* “crept in unnoticed...”

The last line of defense...

- This puts a lot of pressure on the elders of the church—take a look again at Acts 20:28-30.
- The elders are indeed the last line of defense, but God calls them to bear this pressure.
- The point: pray for the elders of the church. Pray for their discernment, their spiritual health, their humility, their teachability; pray that they will be enabled to see, recognize, and deal with any distortions of sound doctrine before it gains a foothold in the church.

The destiny of the false teachers ~ Jude v. 4

What do you make of this phrase: they “long ago were designated for this condemnation”?

God was not surprised by this incursion into His church...it's like the weeds growing among the wheat in Matt. 13:24-30. All false teachers are “designated for condemnation” just like the weeds are designated to be burned.

- If someone started teaching a false gospel here, this would be a strong and (hopefully) sobering warning for the elders to deliver: unless there is repentance, there is a terrifying and certain judgment coming.

The character of the false teachers ~ Jude v. 4

Jude describes them as “ungodly people”

- The word shows up another 5 times in quotes he uses in v. 15, 18.
- Mounce: “*asebes*—The term is derived from *a*, which denotes ‘non’ or ‘un’ in English, and *sebo*, a verb meaning ‘to worship, be devout.’”
- It is disregard for, and defiance of, the Person of God. It’s a lot like Psalm 14:1.
- There is no reverence for God in this person, no fear of God. It’s a lot like Psalm 36:1-4.
- But don’t ever forget the beautiful and blessed truth of Psalm 36:5-12!

The influence of the false teachers ~ Jude v. 4

They “pervert the grace of our God into sensuality”

Grace was perverted into sensuality ~

- It was twisted, changed, distorted; made to say something it did not say.

What should happen when true grace is present?

- Titus 2:11-12 should happen.

The gospel has been distorted from the beginning:

- Romans 6:1-2, 15
- Galatians 5:1, 13
- 2 Peter 3:15-16

The influence of the false teachers ~ Jude v. 4

Interesting secular perspective from Aldous Huxley on why he advocated a meaningless world:

“I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning; and consequently assumed that it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption. The philosopher who finds no meaning in the world is not concerned exclusively with a problem in pure metaphysics. He is also concerned to prove that there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to do...”

The influence of the false teachers ~ Jude v. 4

...For myself, as no doubt for most of my friends, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom. The supporters of this system claimed that it embodied the meaning - the Christian meaning, they insisted - of the world. There was one admirably simple method of confuting these people and justifying ourselves in our erotic revolt: we would deny that the world had any meaning whatever.”

The influence of the false teachers ~ Jude v. 4

So in Jude's day...and it certainly wasn't confined to that time alone...grace became a *reason* to sin.

- Peter apparently saw that he needed to deal with the same thing: 1 Peter 2:16.

John Calvin saw the same sad distortion in his day:
“Let us, then, know that nothing is more pestilential than men of this kind, who from the grace of Christ take a cloak to indulge in lasciviousness.”

The hypocrisy of the false teachers ~ Jude v. 4

This is the last thing Jude lists about them: they “deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.”

In what way do you think they denied Him?

- Outwardly, verbally? That’s unlikely—they were professing to know and follow Christ; if they had outwardly denied Him, they would have had little or no influence in the church.
- It was their lifestyle that denied Him, that showed the true state of their hearts. It was Titus 1:16.
- Notice also 1 John 2:22-23; 2 Peter 2:1-2.

Here's what Jude saw arising in the church—people who had much influence, but who were:

- Designated for condemnation
- Ungodly people
- Perverting the grace of God into sensuality
- Denying Jesus Christ as Lord and Master

No wonder he was alarmed.

'Mid toil and tribulation, and tumult of her war,
She waits the consummation of peace for evermore;
Till, with the vision glorious,
her longing eyes are blest,
And the great Church victorious
shall be the Church at rest.