

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
May 30, 2010

At Risk in the Community

Jude 3-7, 19-21, 24-25

Key verses: “Have mercy on some who are wavering; save others by snatching them out of the fire; and have mercy on still others with fear” (Jude 22-23).

D.A. Carson, a seminary professor, tells about his conversation with a young man from French-speaking West Africa. Carson met regularly with the young man in order to practice German together: “Once a week or so, we had had enough, so we went out for a meal together and retreated to speaking French, a language we both knew well. In the course of those meals, we got to know each other. I learned that his wife was in London, training to be a medical doctor. He was an engineer who needed fluency in German in order to pursue doctoral studies in engineering in Germany.

“I soon discovered that once a week he disappeared into the red-light district of town. Obviously he went to pay his money and have his woman. Eventually I got to know him well enough that I asked him what he would do if he discovered that his wife was doing something similar in London.

“‘Oh,’ he said, ‘I’d kill her.’

“‘That’s a bit of a double standard, isn’t it?’ I asked.

“‘You don’t understand. Where I come from, the husband has the right to sleep with many women, but if a wife is unfaithful to her husband she must be killed.’

“‘But you told me you were raised in a mission school. You know that the God of the Bible does not have double standards like that.’

“He gave me a bright smile and replied, ‘Ah, le bon Dieu, il doit nous pardonner; c’est son métier,’ which means ‘Ah, God is good. He’s bound to forgive us; that’s his job.’” (“God’s love and God’s Wrath,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Oct. 1999)

Jude was written to counteract false teachers who were saying that believers could ignore God’s moral and ethical commandments with impunity. These false teachers, Jude explained, “pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ” (v. 4). While such a teaching is rarely given openly in today’s church, many in the church today—like the young man quoted above—live as though this distortion of the doctrine of *grace* were true.

In New Testament times, false teaching was a constant threat to the Christian movement. So, Jude was written to urge believers to be vigilant in holding to and defending “the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (v. 3).

The threat is no less real in our day. As Ellsworth Kalas writes: “False teaching is perhaps a greater peril in our day than in any other because we are bombarded by the most dangerous teaching of all: *Nothing is really false; it is just different.* This is wrong at its very base. By this definition, even the theory it offers is of no value. Ideas matter. They matter in this world and in the world to come. They matter in the issues of this moment and in the issues of eternity.” (Cokesbury’s “Adult Bible Studies,” Spring 2010, p. 91)

In the parts of Jude that we are studying this week, Jude offers *four responses that believers are to have in order to counteract false teaching: (1) Be vigilant to recognize false teaching. (2) Stay strong in the Lord. (3) Help rescue others who are falling away from the faith or who have never come to faith in Christ. (4) Rely on God to keep you from falling.*

1. Be vigilant to recognize false teaching. As always in the things of God, balance is important at this point. One can be so concerned about doctrinal correctness that he or she becomes hyper-critical, dogmatic, and divisive.

My job is not to insure that everyone understands the Bible and Christian faith exactly as I do. However, Jude speaks of a set of core truths without which Christianity is not Christianity. Jude calls this set of core doctrines “the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (v. 3). And these core Christian doctrines are to be defended.

I suspect that “The Apostles’ Creed,” which most United Methodists recite regularly in our worship services, is as good a summation as any of the core truths “once for all entrusted to the saints.”

2. Stay strong in the Lord. It is interesting that, in Jude, doctrinal truth and moral behavior are closely linked. So, an important way of responding to the threat of false teaching is to maintain and strengthen our own relationship with Christ. Or, as Jude puts it, “build yourselves up on your most holy faith” (v. 20).

Jude challenges believers to do their part to stay close to God and built up in the faith. How? “*Pray in the Holy Spirit*” (v. 20). We stay built up in the faith as we pray in the power and strength of the Holy Spirit. “*Keep yourselves in the love of God*” (v. 21). We stay strong in the faith when we stay connected to God and to other believers. “*Look forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life*” (v. 21). Our faith is strengthened when we look at life with an eternal perspective.

3. Help rescue others who are falling away from the faith or who have never come to faith in Christ. “Have mercy on some who are wavering; save others by snatching them out of the fire; and have mercy on still others with fear” (vv. 22-23).

We are called to witness to those who are lost and in need of salvation. We are also called to help restore those who, perhaps through the influence of false teaching, have fallen away from Christ.

4. Rely on God to keep you from falling (vv. 24-25). Jude's admonitions end with a beautiful and encouraging word of assurance. He reminds us that, yes, false teaching is a threat, and the temptation to sin is ever-present. But God's power is greater! And not only can God keep us faithful, God can bring us safely and *joyfully* into His eternal presence!

This last word, with which the Book of Jude ends, is so important, I want to quote it for our encouragement:

"Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen"

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