

Responsibility For Yourselves And Others

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Preacher: Campbell Brown

[0 : 00] Now, I did say good evening at the start, but welcome everybody. And particularly if you're a visitor or you just started coming along, it's great to see everybody.

And we want everybody here to be blessed and uplifted by the word, God's word that we have. So if you do have a Bible, please keep it open, predominantly in the book of Jude.

If you don't have a Bible, put your hand up now and somebody who's on the door will get you one. Because I think with lockdown, we need to get back into this habit of carrying our Bibles wherever we go and not relying on the screen behind us.

But I do want to look particularly at verses 20 to 23 of this letter of Jude. But I think when you just pick a book almost at random and go right to the end of the chapter, what you do have to do is put some context to what you have to say.

So first of all, Jude, who was he? Well, the first verse tells us that he was the brother of James. We don't know much about him, but we do know that he was the brother of James.

[1 : 17] And most people believe as a result that he was the half brother of Jesus, the son of Joseph. So if that's true, we know that his home life was good because we know that Joseph was, in my eyes, one of the great unsung heroes of the Bible.

He was a good man and a devout man and Jude would have grown up in that home. We also know that certainly in his early days, if you look back to Matthew, we find that Jesus' mothers and brothers came to him when he first started preaching.

Because they were concerned about the commotion that he was creating. And they were worried about him and trying to guide him away from that, I think. And we assume that Jude would have been amongst that group.

So certainly there was doubt or there was unbelief at that time. But clearly by this time, there is a man whose life has been changed and transformed. And somebody with a strong and very vibrant faith at this time.

The content of the letter, the earlier part of the letter, is also important. And if you're just new to the faith or don't know your Bible very well, it's not the easiest of books.

[2 : 33] I have to be honest. Verses 5 to 15, they are hard going. But even if you do know your Bible, it's still quite hard to follow. It's the only way that you can fully understand all the things that are covered in the book of Jude is to go back to the Old Testament and to read the original account that is there.

But in summary, the high level of concern and the issue that Jude is addressing here is the great danger the church and its people were in. And the danger was coming from false teachers, spreading false teaching.

And just to pull out a few, it's not a comprehensive list. Verse 7, for example, it talks about lust. Very similar to what was happening in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Second half of verse 5, there's rebellious behavior. There were people in that church who didn't accept the authority of God, didn't accept the authority of the apostles or the legitimate leaders of the church.

And it compares them with the sons of Korah back in Moses' days. In verse 6, it talks about fallen angels, for example. And that's people who just overstep their authority and their position to push their own agenda.

[3 : 54] And finally, in a quite, I don't know whether it's brutal or humorous, but it's a combination of both. There's the arrogant, or apologies to my American friends who have a much different meaning for this, but dreamers, people who are so proud that they say what they want about whatever subject they want.

But the problem is that they don't have a clue what they're saying or what they're talking about or the consequences of that either. Andrew tells us they just crept in silently, almost unannounced. They looked genuine. They fitted in. They were probably seen as a great asset to the church, and everybody was pleased to see them. But before long, what they did was they were causing destruction wherever they went.

They were driving away the blessing of God, and they were being divisive, and they were leading people to a lost eternity. And why were they doing it? Well, the reference to Balaam, I think, is trying to capture that they were doing it for their own personal gain.

They were exploiting people to try and get something out of it for themselves. And Jude also tells the people, well, you knew this was coming.

[5 : 12] In verse 17, for example, it says that the apostles had warned them it would happen. And if you look at the lessons of history that Jude points out in the earlier part of the letter, then it's inevitable that these things do happen.

And what happens in these situations is that when people ignore the Bible, or they adapt it in some way, or misrepresent it in some way for their own purpose, then it ends badly for the church and all that are in it.

And I could give you many more modern examples because it still happens. It still happens each and every day, and it's still happening today, and will continue to happen for the rest of time.

And we look at churches, some great churches. They have departed from biblical standards. And what happens is it's almost like a pattern. You could almost write the script.

There's debate within the church about a particular issue, often a moral one, but they stand firm at first. But the debate doesn't go away.

[6 : 19] It's not killed or dealt with properly. And then comes a situation where there's almost an acceptance of the wrong, but it doesn't reflect the formal position of the church.

And the next phase is that, yes, the church changes its mind, and now it permits these things which are wrong, and they agree with them.

And then there's a final section where not only is something which is wrong, it's permitted, but it's agreed with, and it's thoroughly celebrated. And I'm sure we know many churches like that.

The church that I grew up in, for example, came about as a result of this type of situation. And I'm sure many others as well.

And churches that are in this position, they often get to a stage, there's a desire to reach out to other people. There's a desire to be truly and properly inclusive. There's a great desire to be nice, and they don't want to offend anybody by bringing attention to a godly view which is different from the norm or different from societal standards.

[7 : 27] And I think it not only affects the church, but it affects people in it. As Jude says, it drives people away. It takes the blessing from people, and it leads them astray.

And for some, it will lead to an eternal life that is horrible. So we have to do something about this. And we're not immune in this church.

I do view this church as a safe space, and it needs to be kept that way. But it's so hard, because the influences we face from all around us, the norms of society are bombarded with us from every way. It's what we see, what we watch on the television or the computer. It's the music and thing that we listen to. And what happens is it becomes so easy just to accept these things as normal and okay. And before you know it, it comes into our lives, and it's introduced into the church. And then only trouble can result from that. There is no good outcome if that happens.

[8 : 30] So what Jude tells us to do is we are told to stand up and be counted both in what we do for ourselves and what we do for others. And that is what verse 20 to 23 is all about, is what we do to resist these situations ourselves and protect others from them too.

But before I want to get into that, I want you just to notice this word beloved. Beloved, Bill kind of has already dealt with this morning much better than me and much thoroughly than me.

But look, verse 3, beloved. Verse 17, but you remember, beloved. And verse 20, but you, beloved. So you, if you're a believer, if you're in God's family, you are loved. You are loved by God. And it's a most special and wonderful love.

It's comprehensive. It never dies. It never falls away. And it's eternal. And there are many, many sermons that could be preached in that topic and nothing else. But we know that that will not diminish or die.

[9 : 43] It's also a love from God that came with a very high price. Our Lord Jesus died on the cross and took the punishment for our sins. But it's also a love with a great promise.

And you don't have to turn with me. But Jeremiah, chapter 31 and verse 34. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they shall all know me.

For the least of them to the greatest declares the Lord, for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more. And so it's a wonderful promise that the sin that you have, it will be like it doesn't exist because of this wonderful love.

And it's wonderful. It's special. And what that does is focus the mind that if God has done all these things for us, what Jude is telling us is that it creates a responsibility on us as individuals as well. We should be doers. We should be people who are active. We should be people that should be up and about strengthening our own and our others' faith to withstand anything that can come against it, that can harm them as individuals or harm the church that we are in.

[11 : 02] And then what Jude does is he goes back to the things that we can do. And the first thing he deals with in verse 20 and 21 is what you should do for yourself first.

And the first thing he says in verse 20, But you, beloved, building yourselves up in the most holy faith. And it's a true faith in God.

And it's different. Remember what Jude was facing in this world was a world of man-made faith. And this chapter refers to them in different ways. None of them are good.

He refers to them as people who dream. They're grumblers. They're loud-mouthed boasters. It doesn't say this, but this is what it means. They're dead trees. They're wild waves.

They're wandering stars or shooting stars. And so on. But a real faith is very different from that. It's exactly the opposite. It's come from God.

[12 : 04] It's a personal thing as well between you and God. And it can't be taken away. It's a faith that has no errors, no caveats or gaps. So don't neglect your faith.

Do everything you can to protect it and build it up. And then we ask the question, well, how do we do that? And this is so obvious. I'm almost embarrassed saying it.

Well, you've got to read and study your Bible. And I could have spent the rest of the night reading out verses with what the Bible says about itself. But it's full of verses that explains why we should do that.

The benefit it brings. It's usefulness for teaching. It's usefulness for correcting us when we are wrong. And for equipping us for the everyday and big decisions that we make in our lives.

And in this context, and the context that we live in, how on earth do we think that we can withstand these temptations to go down the wrong path if we don't know what the Bible has to say about them in the first place?

[13 : 07] And right at the start, we sang Psalm 1 quite deliberately because it contrasts that difference. Remember in Psalm 1, it says that the person who follows his words and knows it is blessed.

This chapter talks about people who don't follow God as being dead trees. Whereas in Psalm 1, it refers to them as people who are a tree beside the river with great leaves and fruit and delivery.

So reading is good. Know your Bible. Make it a priority of your day. But sometimes, in fact, a lot of the time, we all need help to understand our Bible.

So take steps to do that. Come to church. Don't miss out on that. Listen actively when you're here. Go to your Bible studies. Read books to help you understand. And in my own experience, surround yourself with people who can help you.

I know, particularly when I moved to the south of the city, we joined a city group, as they're now called, with people who were older than us, who were more experienced than us, who had faced more things in their lives, who had been through more than I'll ever be through in their lives in some cases.

[14 : 25] And what you did in those situations, you stopped talking and listened and watched. Because that is how you learn. So read your Bible, learn it, and surround yourselves with people who can help you.

And there's so much I could go on and on. But take steps to read, study, and understand your Bible. It should be one of your daily priorities around which everything should revolve.

Everything should be moved about to do that. And I know it is really obvious. And you're saying, why are you telling me that?

I know that already. But Jude felt the need to remind his people of this particular point. And even in a church like this, how much of us do this well or couldn't do it better?

And just as an aside, I was looking up some facts and figures about Bible reading. And it's very hard to get accurate figures. But Bible Society did a survey in 2019.

[15:26] And it asked the question of how many active Christians read their Bible every day. And the answer was 9%. Now, I'm sure it's higher in this church.

But I'm sure it's not 100% either. So read your Bible. It's so important. The second thing he says, and it's another priority of your day, is it says, where is it?

I'm praying in the Holy Spirit. And a Christian who doesn't pray, well then, we have to question their faith. A church that doesn't pray is clearly dead.

And we are no match individually or as a church for the things that we face. So get on your knees and pray to your heavenly Father for the help you need, both individually, as families, and as a church together.

It's central. And if you need some examples of the centrality of prayer, well, Jesus, just a few random runs that came into my head. Jesus in the garden, before his crucifixion, praying and sweating drops of blood.

[16:36] Since it's Jude that we're reading, we read about Jude and Acts praying, or we read about believers praying, and he would have been part of that. In Acts chapter 12, for example, where Peter was stuck in prison, and the angel let him out, he went back to be with the believers.

And what did we find them doing? They were praying. Do not neglect your prayer life, either in its frequency, or the way that you pray.

And I'll not go into this in detail, because it gets very complicated, and beyond my understanding, but it says pray in the Spirit. And there's lots and lots of talk about that. Theologians do tend to get quite excited about what that means.

But let's take it back to basics. And all that means is when you pray, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you. And look quickly with me in Romans chapter 8, and verse, I think it's verse 26.

Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us, with groanings too deep for words.

[17:44] So that's praying in the Holy Spirit. So build your faith up, pray, but keep yourself in the love of God. And there is some care needed in this, because if you go back to verse 1 in Jude, it says, to those who are called beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ.

And what that does is it, for some it leads to a temptation, that if God is doing all of this, and God is keeping us, why do I need to do anything at all? And Jude answers that question quite forcefully, and helpfully, because he emphasizes that you have a responsibility too.

God loves us in this perfect and eternal way. And what Jude is talking about here, is our responsibility to love him back.

God's love will never falter, as Bill told us this morning. But sadly, human love is just not like that. Friendships, for example, they falter.

They fade away. Sometimes they break down over particular issues. We can all look back to people in our youth, who we were the best of friends with.

[18:54] We spend every free minute with them, and now we don't even know where they are, or what they're doing. Sadly, in marriages, love over time can decline.

It can die, or sometimes there's an issue that just causes it to break. And often these things happen, because there is effort and needed to keep our love alive, be it in our personal relationship, or our relationship with God.

And if we don't do that, it goes. And Jude is telling us that one way to protect ourselves is to work to keep that family love for God alive. And remember what Jude was facing again.

He was teaching false teachers, teaching false things, that what that was doing was looking to push people quite deliberately away from the love of God, to something that was wrong, to something that was suited to another ungodly law.

And it's no different for us. So what we're told to do is work hard to keep our love for God alive.

Remind yourself of the God you have. Remind himself of the position you were in before you became one of his family.

[20 : 09] Remind yourself of all the things that he has done in your life, how he's taken you through the tough times, how he's taken you through the good times, and look back and see what he has done for you.

And even the youngest of us can see what he has done over the last year or two. And for those of you like me who are a bit older, who have been around a bit longer, we have much less excuse because there's so much more that we can look back on and be thankful on.

So do not let your love for God die. Keep that communication open through your prayer life. Allow God to have his way in your life because it will be better and he will not let you down.

And this takes us to the last thing that he says in verse 21. Waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

And I've talked about this a lot over the summer. I didn't set out to do that but it's a common theme. As I've said, we have ups and downs in life. And like Habakkuk that we talked earlier in the summer, we find it hard to understand why bad things are allowed to happen in our lives, in our church, or in the world around us.

[21 : 29] And sometimes we just don't understand the answer to that, this side of eternity. And we can be tempted and there are examples in the Bible like Jacob and his birthright and Abraham and his succession where they couldn't wait any longer and they took matters into their own hands and it all went horribly wrong.

Jude says, don't do that. Wait on the Lord. He won't make a mistake in your life. He won't lead you down the wrong path. He'll be with you every step of the way even if you don't realise it.

God will be there so wait on him. And you know what? It says that leads you to eternal life because the ultimate end of that path in waiting for God is that you'll spend eternity with him in heaven where all these concerns will be gone and done and away.

So don't allow anything else. Don't allow anything to stop you waiting on God if that is what God is asking you to do. Sometimes you get immediate answers. Often you don't.

So don't be taken in by anything else that takes you away from God even if it promises you an immediate or easier answer. So that's our responsibility to ourselves.

[22 : 44] We're in a very similar position to the people that Jude was writing to was in and where that happens what Jude just tells us that the first thing we have to do is take decisive action to be active to defend ourselves and our church family from the harm that can come from that and what does he say?

Build yourself up. Pray. Keep the love alive and wait on God. But the second thing that Jude does is he talks about our responsibility to others and remember what God has done for you and if you're part of his family he wants you to show that same love and concern and compassion for others.

Now if I look back when I was younger maybe this is what happens when you get older but the world seemed to be an easier place. There was very very defined standards of what was right and wrong and everything was clearer.

But again when I do look back sometimes I think there was lots of right and wrong and lots of condemnation but maybe what was missing was the love and mercy that we are called to have here.

And I think I still see that from time to time particularly when we have a concern over a moral issue. We often seem to be very quick to condemn the wrong and rightly so and we should do that but offering little or nothing in terms of love or support or help for those that are caught up in these things.

[24 : 21] We're quick to condemn but much slower to love and to help. And Jude says that's not the way. He says we are to be different. We are to be kind.

We are to be a people and a church who love who have an environment where people can come and talk to us where people can ask questions where people can feel safe sharing their troubles and a place where we can truly help them or at least get the right help that they need if we don't have that skill ourselves.

And remember like Jude so much in this world this society that we live in is designed to push people from God so let's have the kindness and mercy to help them out.

And Jude calls out certain categories of Christians here and the first one he calls out is doubters. And he tells us to be kind in how we deal with them. And we take Jesus' example in how he dealt with people.

He gave his time. He answered questions. He taught people about the Bible where there was particular barriers that caused people to doubt. He dealt with those barriers.

[25 : 32] Remember how he dealt with the Pharisees where people were saying how can I be a Christian and not keep one of their 5,000 laws? Jesus dealt with that quite severely. But look at how he dealt with Thomas in particular.

Thomas who doubted. And how did Jesus deal with them? Did he condemn him, rebuke him, push him off to the side, tell him he couldn't be involved in church life? No, he was very different. He allowed Thomas to see him in person. He allowed Thomas to hear his voice and to touch his wounds. And we must do the same thing.

But we are also to recognise that the danger that people are in and we've got to have a sense of urgency about our love and our support. And as I said right at the start, there is an eternity for us all. And if that is not in heaven, we have to be doing something to help that people. And what Jude says is we've got to snatch them out of the fire. We don't stand in our churches and say, hey, we're over here.

[26 : 33] Come in. We can help you. No, the command is to go. We are to go and to pull them out of the fire. We're going to take them out of their danger and try to do that.

And there's many ways. We can befriend. We live authentic lives ourselves. We are honest with them. We care. We confront. We support. We do all these things and there's many ways.

But their position is dangerous and we must be merciful in snatching them away from all of that. But Jude also implies or not implies, he's quite clear here that there's a right and a wrong way of doing that.

And he calls it in this translation, he says, show mercy with fear. And let's take the mercy first. People are different. Everyone's unique. And it's an amazing world we have because of that. It would be a very dull world if we were all the same. It would be a horrible world if we were all the same. But the things that we face in life and the temptations that we face and the trials that we bear are quite often very different.

[27 : 42] And Jesus' example is that he dealt with people in different ways. And as I said earlier, some he taught, some he reasoned with and debated with, some he rebuked, some he was very brutal with.

And I often look at his dealings with Peter where he took him aside. He dealt with him one on one and he hit him with the question that hit right at the core that hurt the most.

And he says, do you love me? And he repeated that. Others he healed. So there's a sensitivity and there's a personal way that we have to deal with all these things.

But one thing that Jesus never did was he said that something was okay when it wasn't. And that's a very current thing. That's what I was talking about with other churches who have done exactly that.

Yes, we have to care. We have to love. We have to reach out. But we must never flinch or be scared from being clear on what the Bible has to say, what is right and what is wrong and what the realities of following God are.

[28 : 51] And that's not easy. I think it's in 2 Corinthians. Paul talks about being crafty and cunning in the way that he got his message across.

So doing this at times it can take great wisdom. At times it can take skill. Maybe at times it takes a wisdom and a skill and a craftiness that you don't have and you're going to have to get help from somebody else.

Maybe it can take more than one person. But we're told that we have to share that mercy with fear. And finally, I think that doing this can also be quite dangerous.

We are to go into the fire and we try and snatch others away from that. But there's a material danger for us in doing that that we might slip and that we might get caught in the fire ourselves.

And what does Jude say? He says, hating even the garden stained by flesh. Stay away from it. Rid yourself of it. Have no contact with the things that are wrong.

[29 : 54] And again, that takes us back to the first. How do we do that? We build ourselves up. We pray. We keep the love alive. And we wait on God. And that's, I've never looked at the book of Jude before.

And like I seem to say all the time, unlike the rest of the Bible, it's as current and as relevant today as the day it was written. I think it could have been written yesterday and we would almost, and we

wouldn't have known.

Because the issues that we face in our churches and in our society are really not a lot different from this. And wonderfully, the answer and the solution is no different either.

It emphasizes our reliance on God, but also our personal responsibility for ourselves and also our personal responsibility for others.

And the last few times I've spoken, I've given the last word to somebody else because it's usually better than mine. And I wish I had thought of this earlier in the week because we could have sung it now, but it's too late for that.

[31 : 03] It's an old children's hymn by a Christian poet and hymn writer called Ruth Johnson. And we look down on children's hymns. We don't often sing them as adults except when children are around.

And other hymns, they may be lyrically more complete and complex, they may be musically more pleasing, but it'll be some hymn if it can combine a profound message with a simplicity that is better than this hymn.

Let me read some of it out. First verse, Jesus bids us shine with a clear, pure light, like a little candle burning in the night.

In this world of darkness, we must shine. Second verse, who do we shine for? Jesus bids us shine, first of all for him, because he knows if our light grows dim, he looks down from heaven and he wants to see us shine.

Third verse, who else do we shine for? Jesus bids us shine, and then for all around, many kinds of darkness in the world abound, sin and want and sorrow, so we must shine.

[32 : 16] Last verse. Again, this is what Job is saying. Jesus bids us shine as we work for him, bringing those out wonder from the paths of sin. He will ever help us shine.

And there's two lines at the end of all those verses. You in your small corner, that's your responsibility, all those things, and I in mine. Amen.