

The Reality of Doubt

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[0:00] Although the entire letter of Jude has been read once again this morning, our attention! is going to be directed to a portion of the letter. As we are working our way to a conclusion! we have come to verses 22 and 23.

And I believe it is fair to say that in these two verses we come to perhaps the most sobering part of Jude's letter. Although Jude's focus up to this point has been primarily on the false teachers and their sinful lifestyles. What Jude does in these two verses is he identifies three groups of people who were especially harmed by the false teachers. And in addition to calling the saints whom he was writing to contend for the faith, what Jude does in these verses is Jude calls them to what may rightly be called a ministry of spiritual rescue.

Jude calls them to contend for the faith by engaging these three groups of people who would come under the influence of these false teachers.

I think it is important to see that what Jude does in this letter is he makes a distinction between the false teachers and these three groups he identifies in verses 22 and 23.

It is very clear from this letter that Jude has no hope of salvation for these false teachers. He doesn't mince words as he talks about the judgment that awaits them.

[2:11] But what is equally clear is that Jude is tender. Jude is compassionate towards these individuals who have come under the influence of the false teachers. And what Jude says to the saints is, in your contending for the faith, you are to spiritually rescue these individuals who have been harmed by the false teachers.

And this morning I want us to consider this ministry of spiritual rescue that all of God's people are called to. First let me pray.

Father we pause in this moment and we ask that you would draw near to us and speak to our hearts. Lord, you know where each one of us is. You know what each one of us needs.

And we pray Lord that you would draw near in your sufficiency and minister that to us. Lord I ask once again that you would anoint me by your spirit.

You would use me as an instrument in your hand to bring your word to your people. Father cause us all to hear aright and to respond aright.

[3:39] We pray Lord that all that is said this morning will be for the honor and glory of your great name. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Last week in verses 17 to 21 we considered how Jude called his original audience to give attention to themselves.

He calls them to give attention to themselves by building themselves up in the most holy faith. To be engaging in spirit led and spirit directed prayer.

And to be waiting for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now in verses 22 and 23 Jude calls them to give attention to others.

First to themselves. And now he says, I want you to give attention to others. Give attention to these who have been affected by these false teachers.

[4:45] And he identifies three groups. And in our remaining time I want to consider each of these groups in turn. The first group is those who are doubting.

One of the harmful effects of coming under false teachers is that we can begin to question and doubt sound doctrine which we once formerly held to.

And doubt comes in a variety of ways. Sometimes the doubt is rooted in doubt in the word of God itself.

Is it trustworthy? Is it without error? Is it sufficient for all that we need for life and godliness? Sometimes the doubt is with major doctrines of scripture. Like the triune nature of God. Or the necessity of faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

[5:51] Some are tempted to confusion. They throw their hands up and say, well, I don't know what to believe. Because I hear all these confusing voices. They're opening the same Bible and they're saying different things about it.

And they say, I don't know who to believe. And sadly, some even who belong to Christ come to a place of doubting their own salvation.

And to all of these people who doubt, for whatever reason they doubt, Jude says, have mercy on them.

He says, don't relate to them the way you relate to the false teachers who are doomed for destruction. But you are to have mercy on them.

Consider the circumstances of their doubt and have mercy on them. And in truth, it speaks to coming to people who doubt with godly compassion and patience and engaging them.

[7:04] We're called to speak to them. We're called to engage them about their doubts. But we're to do it in a merciful way. Not in a harsh, judgmental way.

And in truth, we engage them. Seeking to mirror the mercy that we ourselves have received from the Lord.

The patience that we ourselves have received from the Lord. It is that mercy that we are to give to them. When Jude calls us to have mercy on those who doubt, there is no other mercy that we can have.

The only mercy that we can have on those who doubt is the mercy that we have received. The mercy that we have received from God himself. And again, how do we do this?

Well, we must do it, first of all, by giving attention to ourselves. As Jude has already said in verses 21 and 22.

[8:08] Keeping ourselves in the love of God. And as we shared last week, that is being faithful to live the Christian life. To give evidence that we belong to Christ, that we are God's people.

We are to be growing in the faith. Building ourselves up in the most holy faith. We are to be living lives that are marked by dependence on the Spirit in prayer.

Being led by the Spirit. Being guided by the Spirit. And we are to be people who, as we engage this life, we have our hopes set.

Not on this life, but on the life to come that will be ours when the Lord Jesus returns. For all those who belong to him. For all those who belong to him.

Brothers and sisters, we must live this way if we are going to be of any benefit. If we are going to be able to spiritually rescue those who are doubting. If we ourselves are doubting.

[9:11] And we're not going to be much use to those who are doubting. Now I think it's important to just offer a word of caution here.

The truth is that even believers doubt. We should never, ever conclude that a person who doubts is somehow not saved.

Again, people doubt for all kinds of reasons. Some people doubt because it's their constitution.

They have a constitution that is just given to doubt. There are some people who doubt because of experiences they've had. And those experiences affect them in particular ways.

I'm sure you've all heard people being referred to as a doubting Thomas. And it speaks to a person who generally seems to be given to doubt.

[10:30] And one of the things about those who are given to doubt, whether constitutionally or based in experience, is they tend to doubt the weightier things even more. They tend to doubt these things that we are called to stake our lives upon and to put our faith in.

And they wrestle. For the Lord calls us to come near to these individuals and to be merciful towards them.

And to show patience and to show kindness to them. As we contend for the faith, as we engage them around their doubts. We are to be mirroring the mercy of God to them.

And the foundation that we use as we engage in this ministry of spiritual rescue is God's word. But we don't use God's word as a baton to beat them.

Instead, we use God's word as a bridge to reach them and as a compass to guide them. And this is patient ministry, brothers and sisters.

[11:36] Indeed, this is ministry that we cannot do in our own strength. This is ministry that we must look to the Lord for and depend upon the Spirit for. That he would help us.

Because I would dare say that no two situations are exactly alike. And we can't conclude that because I've been successful here with this person, I will be similarly successful with the other person.

No, we have to depend on the Spirit to help us and to guide us in this work. But that's the first group that Jude identifies who are in need of spiritual rescue.

Those who are doubting. In verse 23, Jude identifies the second group who are in need of spiritual rescue.

And he describes them as those who are in the fire and need to be snatched out. And I believe succinctly we can describe these individuals as those who are drifting.

[12:44] And this is my second point. These are those who have gone beyond doubt. They have gone from doubt to drifting.

These are those who have embraced the false teaching of the false teachers. And they now are in danger. And the picture that Jude conveys about these individuals is like they are in a house that is on fire.

And they are either unaware of the danger or they are unable to get themselves out of it. And Jude says you need to go and rescue them. You need to go and snatch them out of it.

And we know that Jude is not saying that they are literally in the fire. Because if then the fire they are going to be consumed. If we go after them, then we likewise will be consumed. But the idea is that they are in the harm's way of this fire.

It's a picture of urgency. And Jude said these people need to be snatched out of this danger that they actually are faced with.

[13:55] Again, these are people who have gone from doubting to drifting. These are not people who are asking humble questions as they wrestle through doubt.

As many people do when they wrestle through doubt. Instead, these are people who are making bold assertions. Erroneous, but they are still making them.

And they are now challenging and not asking questions. And they have no idea of the spiritual danger in which they are in.

Jude helps us to see the danger that such people are in who drift from the faith. When he uses this word that conveys untold destruction.

He describes it as fire. That they are in the fire and they need to be snatched out of it. They are in grave spiritual danger.

[15:01] And what is very clear when we consider this aspect of spiritual rescue to those who have moved from doubt to drifting and have embraced that which is false.

And holding on to it is sometimes they don't appreciate the efforts made by the rescuer to rescue them.

Because they don't see what the rescuer actually sees. But the urgency is clear. Jude says, you must snatch them out.

And the idea is almost like this involves less conversation it would appear. Yes, there is patient engagement with the doubter.

Working through the doubts and having lengthy discussions. But Jude is saying that there is a greater urgency here in seeing the danger that such a person is in.

[16:06] And sometimes just the long conversations, meandering down different paths. We can lose the sense of urgency that is needed for some of these individuals.

And sometimes brothers and sisters, it can become hostile. Sometimes these who do not appreciate the attempts to bring spiritual rescue to them. They can be hostile. And they will not respond with humility. But by the grace of God, some do. Some do respond with openness and with humility.

Administering to these individuals requires that we are firmly holding on to the faith. We are firmly planted in God's word.

We are firmly ourselves living obedient lives and dependent on the spirit. And as we engage, again, we must remember that this is God's work.

[17:09] Only he can change the human heart. The most futile activity that we can engage in is to try to change a person's heart in our own strength.

Only God can do that. We can be instruments in his hands to do that. But he is the one who ultimately changes human hearts.

And it is quite interesting when we consider this particular group, this middle group. Jude does not say to have mercy on them.

To the other two, he says we are to have mercy. We are to show mercy.

But we should not think for a moment that this does not require mercy as well. This requires mercy. As a matter of fact, the act of going and seeking to rescue them in and of itself is an expression of mercy.

[18:22] but we must extend mercy to these ones as well, as difficult as they may be. And I would say that this is the most difficult group of the three that Jude addresses.

And we need to be patient towards them. And again, our primary tool is God's word. And we need the Spirit's help as we engage them to lead us and to guide us.

But we, brothers and sisters, must be firmly planted in God's word because this is the group that has drifted and holding on to our manner of things and that can so easily knock us off our feet if we are spiritually unaware.

That's the second group. The third and final group that Jude highlights who are in need of spiritual rescue you'll also find them in verse 23.

They are those who are defiled. And this is my third and final point. This group has gone beyond doubt.

[19:41] This group has gone beyond drifting. And this group has embraced and engaged in sinful conduct. That is the clear message that Jude is referring to concerning this third group.

Look again at what he says. He says in verse 23, In Jude's day, the normal dress was one where there was an inner garment that was worn just close to the skin and there was another garment, a cloak that covered all of that.

And so it was not normal to see the condition of that inner garment. That inner garment was a private garment.

It was worn to, it was worn almost like a kind of undergarment as we would have today. And Jude refers to this garment as being stained by the flesh.

The New King James Version uses the word defiled by the flesh. And Jude is using this word flesh in the general way that flesh is used in the New Testament.

[21:08] It refers to the sinful condition and deeds of sin, the works of the flesh or sin that flow from that sinful condition.

That's the context and the understanding of what Jude is communicating concerning this third group. And so clearly what Jude has in view here is those who are part of the church who have engaged in sinful conduct which is evident.

Notice he says, to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by flesh. So the idea here is that this private garment that is stained or soiled, the one seeking to bring spiritual rescue is aware that it is.

And that can only be by disclosure. That can only be by the sin being evident. It's not a private staining, a private soiling. This is something that is evident to the one who is seeking to minister spiritual rescue.

And Jude says to that one, you must hate even the garment that is stained by the flesh. Here Jude is cautioning us to be sober.

[22:43] He's cautioning us to be humble towards those who find themselves in such a condition. And he says that we are to have an attitude of hatred even towards the effect of sin.

And clearly, that means towards the sin itself. We are to have a sober respect towards sin and its harmful, corrupting effect.

And I think that's what Jude has in view more than a fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord is obvious. I mean, that is foundational. We need to fear the Lord. But in context, the fear that Jude is calling us to have is this sober respect towards sin and its harmful effects.

And I think that's why he's saying you're to show mercy with fear, hating even the garment that is stained by sin. Brothers and sisters, sometimes when we engage in this ministry of spiritual rescue, and we draw near to people in their sin, sometimes we learn details of their sins that could prove to be a temptation for ourselves.

And we need to be humble and we need to be clothed with godly fear concerning sin and its effect. And we need to be on guard against sin in our own lives, including the very sins that we seek to rescue others from.

[24:25] And this is what the Apostle Paul warns about in Galatians 6, verse 1, when he says, Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.

Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. One of the occupational hazards of bringing spiritual rescue to those who have fallen in sin is that we ourselves may be tempted.

We ourselves may be tempted to fall into the very sin that we are seeking to rescue others from.

And so we must keep watch over ourselves. That is what Paul says here.

That's what Judah's calling us to here. This attitude of mercy mixed with fear, hating even the garment stained by sin. This is an attitude we are called to have towards sin.

We must not be indifferent, brothers and sisters. We must not be casual about this. We're no match for sin in and of ourselves. And this is a call to cling to Christ and to cultivate a godly hatred of sin.

[25:46] sin. And it is not in any of us in and of ourselves to do this. It is not in any of us in and of ourselves to hate sin.

It is only as we cry out to the Lord and ask him to help us to love what he loves and to hate what he hates that we are able to cultivate this attitude towards sin.

Humility mixed with fear. By the grace of God, some who have fallen into sin, some who have been stained by sin, some who have seen the consequences of sin, are broken by their sin.

and repentant over their sin. And to such people, the mercy of God and the grace of God need to be held out with compassion again and again and again.

We need to remind them of what the word of God says, that if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[27:11] We need to remind them that the grace of God is greater than their worst sin. We need to remind them as we've been memorizing that even in their sin, they're not separated from the love of God.

That nothing in this life, nothing in the life to come will ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus and those who find themselves in this situation as we seek to minister spiritual rescue to them, we need to remind them of what they need to hear most of all.

And that is a reminder of the good news of the gospel, a reminder of the grace of God that is sufficient for every circumstance, including our worst sin.

But once again, some are unrepentant and some are unbroken by their sin. Indeed, some are emboldened in their sin.

And it is because they have given themselves over to doctrines of demons, doctrines of devils, and they are deceived.

[28:33] And sometimes they can be hostile and they can do so in unbecoming ways and we must be aware of this. And sadly, some of these situations where there is no repentance require the process of church discipline, which is a patient but certain process that must be engaged

and for the good of these individuals, hopefully, to bring them to repentance, but certainly for the good and the protection of the church.

But this is a last resort after a patient process. I was thinking about how in Jude's day, in order to bring spiritual harm to a church, false teachers had to go there personally or write a letter on scarce, expensive parchment and hope that it arrives.

That was what needed to happen for churches to come under the teaching and the influence of false teachers. But how different it is today.

How different it is today. Beginning with the printing press where printed documents could just be mass produced and all the other developments that we have had in communication technology and information technology and right now we have myriads and mounds of information available to us where false teachers can even be dead and still speaking.

Where there is false teaching and unsound doctrine that we are swimming in.

[30:39] Coming at us even sometimes and not even looking for it. And this is the context that we find ourselves in today, brothers and sisters. The false teaching is all around us.

I'm pretty sure that many of you have heard about prominent and even not so prominent individuals who once walked among God's people who now have engaged in what is called spiritual deconstruction where they no longer believe those things that they used to hold to.

They've walked away from it. They've abandoned it. And these are all candidates.

These are people who are in need of spiritual rescue. Some of them are our friends. Some of them are our family.

And the Lord calls all of us because if you are a saint, if you belong to the Lord, all of us to one degree or another can be and should be engaged in this ministry of spiritual rescue.

[32:01] And when we think of it, we shouldn't think for a moment that it means that we do it by ourselves. We can do this together with others. We can be engaged together with others.

This is not just something for the super saints or who we would think would be the more mature ones. We can all be engaged in this ministry.

And here's what I would say to us this morning. Sometimes we are fearful. We think, oh, I can't have a conversation with that person. I think they know more than me. They may confuse me. They may trip me up. You know what our main motivation needs to be?

More than thinking about our abilities, our main motivation needs to be to have a compassionate heart, to see that individual who is in some difficult situation, whether it's doubt or drifting or in defilement by sin, to have a heart of mercy and compassion towards that person.

That that is the primary motivating factor for us. And we will go and we will trust the Lord as we seek to engage them. Because at the end of the day, it's not our ability, it is the Lord's ability and it is the wisdom that he brings to us.

[33:19] But brothers and sisters, let us see this as part of the reason that we need to be established in the faith. We need to be dependent on the Spirit in prayer.

We need to be keeping ourselves in the love of God. We need to be waiting and watching for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because when he returns, there is no more room or opportunity to appeal to anyone.

And destinies are sealed. And so I pray this morning that the Lord would move on our hearts. I pray that the Lord would stir our hearts in compassion and mercy for those who find themselves in need of spiritual rescue.

God would be with God. And we would say, as Isaiah said, Lord, here I am, send me, use me to reach this individual.

And all of us, with the help of the Spirit, can be engaged in some way in reaching these people who need to be reached.

[34:37] Let's pray. Father, I pray that you would speak to all of our hearts.

I ask, Lord, that you would move by your Holy Spirit as we sang, Lord, when you move, our lives are changed. Lord, I pray that you would help us to give ourselves and to be engaged in this ministry of spiritual rescue to these who need it.

Would you do this, Lord, we pray in Christ's name. Amen. Let's send for our closing song. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.