

Jude 17-23 — How Do I Survive In Spiritually Tough Times?

October 10, 2021

If you have seen the news, you know that inflation is at a 30-year high. It takes the average family \$175 per month more to survive today than it did a year ago as inflation outpaces income. Inflation will not slow down for at least another year. It is clear that we live in financially tough times. If you have been with us for the last few weeks, you know that we also live in spiritually tough times. False teachers are everywhere. There are prosperity gospel preachers on the Internet. Their books fill bookstore shelves. It is easy to be deceived and find ourselves following a false teacher. What are we to do?

While I don't know how to help in financially tough times, the book of Jude can help us in spiritually tough times. That is what we will study this morning.

Before we begin our study, you need to know there is a lot happening at CrossWinds. We purchased the new property in Spencer which is the north side of the north mall. This week we sent home a budget for the renovation of that property. We are proposing a \$640,000 budget --- \$500,000 of that goes to Spencer renovations; the remaining \$140,000 will take care of outstanding items on the Spirit Lake campus. We will vote to approve that budget at our October 25 annual meeting.

In addition, last week we introduced a new church app. If you haven't downloaded it, make sure you scan the QR code in the bulletin and download it today. The old Realm church app will go away in a few weeks.

We also have some exciting things happening in our current teaching series. Next week, we will finish the book of Jude. After that Pastor Jordan and I

will teach a short four-week vision series on the elders' five-year vision for CrossWinds' future. We will share seven key areas the elders want us to focus on so we become more effective in achieving our mission of reaching people about Jesus.

Today, we are in Jude 17-23. I could easily make these verses into a three-week series, but I won't do that. To fit in the preaching schedule, we will cover all of these verses this morning, which means we will move a little faster than usual. Let's read the verses, then look at them together.

But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions." It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh. Jude 17–23 (ESV)

Verse 17 is a turning point in Jude's letter. Up to this point, Jude was talking about the apostates, the false teachers that slipped into the church. These people pretended to be Christians. They were actually in the church to pull people away from Jesus. In verse 4, Jude introduced us to them by saying, "Certain persons crept in unnoticed. They are ungodly people who have turned the grace of God into permission for sexually loose living while they deny Jesus." In verse 8, Jude continued talking about "these men." In verses 10 and 12, he continued to talk about, "these men."

In verse 17, which is where we find ourselves this morning, the subject changes. He starts with, "But you..." This part of the letter is not about the apostates. It is addressed to us. In these verses Jude was teaching us how to

survive in a world filled with apostates, false teachers who want to lead us astray. Jude was teaching us how to survive in spiritually tough times.

In these verses we find three things to survive in spiritually tough times. One is about the past, the second about the present, and the third about the future. First, if we are going to survive in spiritually tough times, we need to look to the past and remember the apostles told us it would be this way. We should expect many false teachers. Second, if we are going to survive in spiritually tough times, we need to remain in a healthy and growing relationship with God through Jesus. Third, if we are going to survive in spiritually tough times, there are people we need to go out of our way for to rescue before it is too late. So the three key phrases for us to surviving in spiritually tough times where there are so many false teachers: We must remember what the apostles told us about this in the past; we must remain in a strong relationship with God through Jesus; we must go out of our way to rescue those who are being led astray. Let's look at these verses together.

To survive in spiritually tough times, we must remember the words of the apostles.

But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions." Jude 17–18 (ESV)

The presence of false teachers is certain.

Jude reminded these Christians that the apostles warned us it would be this way. The presence of false teachers in the church and apostates who walk away from Jesus in the church is not something that should surprise us. We

should expect this. Spiritual terrorism is not a new thing. It has been going on for a long time. The apostles told us this would happen.

Jude hinted at this earlier in this letter in verse 5. In that verse Jude reminded us of the Exodus generation. The same generation that was miraculously saved by Jesus and brought through the Red Sea later denied Jesus and disobeyed Jesus 10 times in the wilderness. There was apostasy in the Old Testament in the Exodus generation. They were saved by Jesus but then false teachers among them persuaded them to turn their backs on Jesus and stop trusting Jesus. There were not just spiritual terrorists among God's people in the Exodus, there were also spiritual terrorists in heaven. Satan was the original false teacher in the throne room of heaven who led a third of the angels to rebel against Jesus.

Jude reminded us that since there were so many apostates in the Old Testament times, why does it surprise us when we see so many false teachers among us in the New Testament times? Nothing has changed. Nothing is new. When this happens around you, don't be surprised!

This is important to remember. If we don't know that false teachers among us who try to tear people away from Jesus is a normal thing, we will be shocked when this happens in the church.

This is why Jude told us that when it comes to us surviving in a world with so many false teachers trying to pass themselves off as Christians, we must remember the Bible tells us to expect this kind of thing. It will always be this way until Jesus returns.

Jesus talked about this.

For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Matthew 24:24 (ESV)

These people are obviously inside the church. They are false christs and false prophets inside the church trying to lead Christians astray. They are even trying to lead astray the elect. Election means chosen by God in eternity past and kept by God's own hand in the present. Even though these people know they cannot tear the elect out of God's own hand, they try anyway! Jesus told us to expect these evil and deceptive false teachers trying to lead astray people inside the church.

Paul also talked about this.

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds. 2 Corinthians 11:13–15 (ESV)

I love these verses. They are so true. Paul told the Corinthian church it should expect to have false teachers try to infiltrate their church. These people will even claim to be apostles of Christ, but that is all a sham, a smokescreen. On the outside they look like good guys but on the inside they are Satan's henchmen, trying to lead people astray. Paul said this makes sense. Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. He tries to look good when he comes to people, but in reality he is dark and evil on the inside. When we run across people that try and look spiritually good on the outside but are spiritually evil on the inside, we should expect these things.

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons... 1 Timothy 4:1 (ESV)

In this verse, Paul told young Timothy to expect people will leave the church. They will not just leave Jesus but they will devote themselves to the teachings of demons before they leave. That is freaky. The Holy Spirit tells us that when we see people that have seemed committed to Christ in the church turn their backs and walk away from Jesus in the church, don't be surprised. Expect these things.

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. 2 Peter 2:1 (ESV)

In this verse, Peter said the same thing. Just as there were false teachers among God's people in the past, there will always be apostates, false teachers, among God's people in the future. They will bring in destructive teaching, even going as far as denying Jesus himself. Once again, when we see these things happening, it shouldn't surprise us.

The portrait of a false teacher is clear.

They said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions." It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. Jude 18–19 (ESV)

As Jude continued, he reminded us that the way apostates worked in the past during the Old Testament times is the same way they will work today in the New Testament times. We saw this point before in previous weeks. Jude taught us the way false teachers work by showing us how apostates of the Exodus generation worked and how the angels that rebelled against Jesus in heaven

worked. He showed us how to recognize apostates by looking at Sodom and Gomorrah. He taught us about apostate tactics by studying Cain, the first apostate. We also looked at the way apostates have tried to bring down God's people by learning the way apostates Balaam and Korah worked in Old Testament times. This is why we want to remember the past. This is why we want to learn from the past so we don't repeat the mistakes of previous generations in our own generation.

In the next verses, in what is a short staccato-like format, Jude gives us a brief summary of the way these spiritual terrorists go about their destructive work so we can recognize them among us.

They are scoffers.

They said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers..." Jude 18 (ESV)

What does it mean to be a scoffer? This means to demean, mock, or ridicule someone. One of the ways you recognize these people is they laugh at other people in the church. They belittle other people in God's house. They think of themselves as better than other people, as superior to other people. When you see that kind of attitude in people around the church, chances are you have a spiritual terrorist in the church.

Incidentally, the word scoffer is only used one other time in the New Testament. It is found in 2 Peter 3:3-4.

...knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." 2 Peter 3:3-4 (ESV)

Peter told us the same things as Jude. One of the ways we recognize these workmen of Satan in the church is they make fun of people, especially people who believe in traditional biblical teaching, such as in the second-coming of Jesus.

These people laugh at the idea that Jesus will come back. They insult people who believe in that biblical claim. They say, "Isn't it obvious that nothing has ever changed since the beginning of creation? The sun rises and sets. It will go on that way forever." Yet the Bible tells us history will not continue forever. Jesus is coming back. He will ultimately resurrect and judge all people, burn the universe with fire and remake it into a new universe without sin.

When we see people in the church who refuse to hold to the traditional teachings of the church that are clearly stated in the Bible, chances are that we are dealing with spiritual terrorists. They love to mock Christians who claim Jesus is the only way to heaven, even though that is what the Bible claims. They love to mock people who believe that the Christian faith is the only true faith. They claim that is too small-minded, even though that is what the Bible teaches.

When we see mockers around the church who are making fun of people who hold to the traditional and clear teachings of the church, chances are you have apostates.

They are sensual.

...following their own ungodly passions... Jude 18 (ESV)

We covered this earlier, especially in verses 5 to 7. Apostates, false teachers, are not controlled by the Holy Spirit. They do not have the Holy Spirit in their lives. The guiding center of their world is a desire for money, sex, and

power. These people masquerade as super-religious people. They pretend to be getting special messages from God, but the problem is that none of it is true. Their hearts have never been touched or changed by God. They are not born again. They do not have the Holy Spirit guiding their lives.

Instead of living to please Jesus, they are living sensual lives, groping after sexual, money, and control. This is why these spiritual pretenders ignore God's moral law. When the book of Hebrews tells us the marriage bed must be kept pure, they ignore that and delight in sexual sin. When the Bible talks about giving to the poor and those in need, they ignore the poor while they heap up resources for themselves. They live by what feels good, not what is good. They pursue whatever pleases their selfish desires. They can't think beyond themselves. They can't think of anything but making themselves bigger and better. They are living for this world. Their motto is the one who dies with the most toys wins when the honest truth is the one who dies with the most toys dies and doesn't get to take any of it with them. The hearse does not pull a U-Haul.

When it comes to what they teach, you can recognize them because it is all about prosperity here and not about holiness. They will not preach about the importance of a holy life for a holy God. That involves sacrifice and self-denial. That involves living with eternity in mind, not just this life in mind. That is why they only preach about prosperity. The prosperity they preach about is about having your best life here and now. It is about financial success. It is about job success. All they preach about is about this life and making yourself bigger and better.

When we see that kind of sensual preaching, it is a dead giveaway that an apostate is speaking the message.

They create divisions.

It is these who cause divisions... Jude 19 (ESV)

These people love to claim they have the Holy Spirit. They usually claim that God speaks to them. They claim God talks with them. They claim to have a superior intimacy with God than others cannot experience. When someone doesn't agree with them, they accuse other people of causing a division in the church, when in reality, they are the ones causing the division in God's body. They are divisive people that tear apart the church.

When you see people in the church working to create opposing groups or gossiping about others beyond their backs, you most likely are watching spiritual terrorists at work.

The Greek word used here for division is the word *aphorizo*. It means to make a distinction. This is helpful to understand. It describes the way these people work. Not only do they create open divisions in the church, but they work to create subtle divisions. This Greek word means they actually believe they are better than other people. They believe they are above and beyond others in the church. When they show up in church, they only hang out with their friends. They don't mingle with common people. As we saw earlier in Jude, they love to hang out with the rich. They love to flatter them to gain their favor. As we saw earlier in Jude, they despise anyone in authority over them. They are arrogant and have an exaggerated sense of self-importance. Here is an example:

I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. 3 John 9 (ESV)

The apostle John wrote the Gospel of John in our Bible. He also wrote three letters in our Bible, 1, 2, and 3 John. He was known as the apostle Jesus loved. He was Jesus' favorite. He was at the transfiguration and saw Jesus in all his glory. He was at the crucifixion when the rest of the apostles ran in fear. You can't get many people more famous than John, more highly esteemed than John. When the apostle John spoke, it was like EF Hutton. People stopped and listened.

Yet, when John wrote a letter to a church, a boneheaded guy named Diotrephes refuses to listen to John and his letter. Diotrephes blew it off and told the rest of the church to ignore what the apostle John said to them when he wrote them. Somebody needed to seriously to take a 2-by-4 to Diotrephes' head and knock some sense into him for telling people to ignore a handwritten letter the apostle John wrote to them.

The reason Diotrephes didn't respect authority in the church and caused division in the church was because he was an apostate. He was a spiritual terrorist. When you see people who create open divisions or subtle divisions in the fabric of God's family, they are probably false teachers seeking to work harm among God's people.

I have pastored for a long time. I can tell you that what Jude said in this verse is very true. In the past, I have dealt with these people. They think they are God's gift to the world. They think they are better and smarter than everyone else. In the church they hang out in the foyer to win friends and undermine

leadership. They go after a church's pastors and elders. I have been there folks. Jude is dead right on these people.

They are without the Holy Spirit.

...worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. Jude 19 (ESV)

This sounds harsh but it is true. Jude called these people worldly. That is the Greek word *psuchikos*. It means merely flesh. Everything in them is about the body and satisfying the body. In Greek, all animals and plants are described this way. Animals live to satisfy the craving of the body. That is what drives them.

We have a little 8-pound dog at home. She lives to eat. She lives to satisfy her flesh. If you feed her, you are her favorite person. She hopes that one day she will beg enough food out of people to go from 8 to 9 pounds. Satisfying her fleshly urges is the summary of her life. Jude said, "These people are that way. They are no different than animals. All they do is live to satisfy their fleshly appetite for money, sex, and power. They don't go any deeper in their lives."

He said they are devoid of the spirit. That is the Greek word *pneuma*. This is what distinguishes a human spirit from animal spirit. Human beings have a spirit that grasps eternity. We have a spirit that senses right and wrong. We have a spirit that desires to know God and delights in worshipping God. Jude said these apostates don't have that basic spiritual capacity to know God. In reality, they are no different than animals. They are just living to satisfy their flesh.

These people will claim to know God. They will claim that God spoke to them. They will claim to have special insights from God and special knowledge about God that makes them better than the rest of us. They claim to have the authority to either write new Scripture or to correct old Scripture. Jude said the

truth of the matter is that God isn't doing anything with them. God isn't talking to them. They are complete liars. Instead of having a special relationship with God through the spirit, they are completely without the spirit. They are physically alive like an animal but are spiritually dead. You know this is true because they are living to satisfy their fleshly desires as they rebel against authority and create divisions.

Millions are duped by these people. Some of these people lead churches and denominations. They are complete frauds.

To survive in spiritually tough times, I must remain in a growing relationship with God.

Jude told us that to keep from being duped, to keep from being led astray by these spiritual charlatans, there are some basic disciplines in our lives that each of us must pursue. In the next verses, he gave us four of them.

We must build ourselves up in the faith.

But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith... Jude 20-21 (ESV)

To protect ourselves from these false teachers we have to become spiritually strong. We must become doctrinally mature. We must take the time and put in the work to build ourselves up in the faith. This is similar to going to the gym to exercise. Nobody can do that for you. Each of us needs to choose to take the time to exercise our bodies. If we don't, we will become weak and vulnerable.

In a way similar to the gym, each of us must put in the time to grow in our knowledge of God's Word. We must not just grow in knowing God's Word but in obeying God's Word when we read it. We do not want to be like someone who

looks in the mirror then walks away and forgets what he looks like. We want to know the truth then make changes in our lives once we have seen the truth. It is no different from looking at your messy hair in the mirror then walking away from the mirror and doing nothing about it. Once the mirror shows us what our hair looks like, we need to fix it. This is how we approach reading God's Word.

Jude told us that to protect ourselves from being led astray by false teachers we must take the time to study God's Word so we know the truth. We don't study the Word with the goal of knowledge. We study the Word with a view toward obedience. We are not just people who learn God's Word but we apply God's Word. The Bible is very clear that it is God's Word that the Holy Spirit uses in our lives to build us up and to make us mature.

And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. Acts 20:32 (ESV)

Paul commended the church to the Word of God, which is used by God to build it up and keep it strong.

So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation... 1 Peter 2:1-2 (ESV)

What is the pure spiritual milk that grows us strong? The Word of God. Spiritual maturity is available to all of us. It is a choice. It is found by feeding yourself the pure spiritual milk of God's Word so you grow healthy and strong.

But he answered, "It is written, " 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' " Matthew 4:4 (ESV)

Just as important as daily bread for physical life is daily time in the Word of God for spiritual life. Let me emphasize that when we read the Word of God, it is

not just to grow in information. We are not to read the Bible like we skim articles in the newspaper. When we read the Bible, before we read it we should ask God to help us understand and apply what we read. When we read the Word, we ask God to change us.

If we read God's words for merely information, not application, our hearts will grow hard. If we read the Word with an eye to obedience, our hearts will grow soft.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers... Ephesians 4:11 (ESV)

Just as important as studying the Bible on our own is being in church where we can hear the Word of God taught by pastors and teachers. God gifted people in the church with the ability to gain unusual insight into the Word of God. They are also given the ability preach and teach the Bible. The reason God gave the gift of pastors and teachers to the church is so we would be able to gain wisdom in the Word of God that we would not normally discover on our own.

This is one of the reasons all of us should be a regular part of a Bible teaching church so we can grow healthier and stronger in Jesus in ways we could not grow on our own.

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16–17 (ESV)

So the first thing to survive in times of apostasy is to build ourselves up in the faith. We must be in the Word of God on our own. The better we know the Bible, the quicker we will be to sniff out a false teacher of the Bible. Please don't deny yourself the Word.

Pray in the Holy Spirit.

...praying in the Holy Spirit... Jude 20 (ESV)

This means that while I am learning the Word of God, that does not replace my dependence upon God. There is a balance between walking in the Word but depending on God while in the Word. Some people think that praying in the Holy Spirit means we need to pray in tongues. That is not what this means. Praying in the Holy Spirit simply means praying consistent with the Holy Spirit's will for our lives. Ephesians also talks about praying in the Spirit this way.

...praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication... Ephesians 6:18 (ESV)

The first way we pray in the Holy Spirit is we pray in line with God's revealed will. For example, imagine you have a neighbor that annoys you. He lets his dogs poop on your lawn all the time. We should not pray that God will ruin our neighbor's life or that God will flatten his tires. God will not answer that prayer. God specifically told us we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. If that is God's will, we should not be praying for God to ruin our neighbor. We know God will not answer that kind of prayer.

While praying in the Spirit means we pray in line with God's revealed will in his Word, there are times when we don't know what God wants in a situation. In those cases, praying in the Spirit means that when we pray about a situation where we don't know God's will, we tell God that we submit our will to his will. Do we tell God what we want? Yes, we do. We also tell him we submit our wishes and desires to his will. We want God's will to be done in a choice more than our will to be done.

So praying in the Spirit means we only ask for things that are in line with God's revealed will in our lives. Second, it also means we submit our will to God's will. We submit our wisdom and wishes to God's wisdom and wishes.

There is a third way we pray in the Spirit. Sometimes we are so broken that we don't know how to pray. We are so broken, we don't even know what to ask for in prayer. In those times of brokenness, the Holy Spirit does an amazing thing for us. As our emotions are swirling around inside of us, and we don't know what to say or how to pray, the Holy Spirit who knows our hearts prays for us when we cannot pray for ourselves.

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. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. Romans 8:26–27 (ESV)

So praying in the Spirit means praying consistently with the revealed will of God. Praying in the Spirit means submitting our will to God's will in prayer. Praying in the Spirit means that when we are too broken to pray the Holy Spirit prays for us when we don't know what to say.

Keep ourselves in the love of God.

...keep yourselves in the love of God... Jude 21 (ESV)

What does this mean? It simply means we are to keep ourselves in the place where you experience the blessing that God's love brings. The easiest way to think about this is to remember what it is like to be a parent that loves his children. Parents always love their children. No matter what our children do, we can't help but always love them. When our children are obedient, when they take out the garbage without being asked, when they clean up their rooms and do

their chores, it is much easier to love them and we joyfully love to bless our children. There a great blessing to children when they live in obedience and honor their parents. When your children go the other direction and refuse to take out the trash, when they come home after curfew and don't tell you why they are late, the family home becomes a difficult place. When our children deliberately rebel against us, while we still love them, it is difficult to trust them and bless them because we are constantly trying to correct them.

This is what Jude is talking about with God. If we delight in walking with God, following God, and obeying God, we will enjoy the love of God being poured into our lives.

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. John 15:9–10 (ESV)

As long as we remain obedient to God and walk with God, we will experience the fullness of God's love for us. On the other hand, if we rebel against God, we will experience the chastening correcting side of God's love. That is never fun but it is always intended for our good.

For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. Hebrews 12:6 (ESV)

Wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus.

...waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. Jude 21 (ESV)

This simply means living in light of eternity. We are to live with our eyes on the future. We are to live in eager expectation of the Lord's return. The word waiting in the Greek means to wait with great expectation, like a child that can't wait for Christmas morning. The idea is we are not living with a focus on

obtaining happiness in this life. We are to make choices in this life that will lead to the greatest reward we will receive when we stand in front of Jesus in the next life.

False teachers only live for the here and now. They live for this life. They do not have the Spirit. They are merely fleshly, like an animal living to eat. We are different. We live with our focus on eternity. We make choices in this life that will lead to the greatest joy when we see Jesus in the next life. We know that this life is not all there is. This life is not the true life. Eternity with Jesus is true life. Eternity with Jesus is the real life. We make choices now that will lead to the greatest reward on that day. False teachers can't do that. It is diametrically opposed to their nature. This is why Joel Osteen's most famous sermon is titled, "Have Your Best Life Now." Our best life is not now. It is later when we are with Jesus.

To survive in spiritually tough times, we must rescue the lost.

Here we find the war we wage is not just defensive. It is also offensive. Not only are we to expose the terrorists and defend ourselves against the terrorists so we stop them before they infiltrate the church. We have the additional responsibility of winning over the enemy. Jesus ate lunch with the Pharisees. They were apostates of his day. Jesus exposed their condition in hopes that they would repent of their condition. Remember why Jesus came.

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. Luke 19:10 (ESV)

Jude told us there are three kinds of apostates in the church and how we are to rescue these three different types.

We are to show mercy on the spiritually confused.

And have mercy on those who doubt... Jude 22 (ESV)

To show mercy means to extend kindness. When we come across someone caught in the web of a false teacher, and it becomes clear the reason the person is dabbling in these false teachings is because he or she became confused by these teachings, we go out of our way to show mercy and love to him or her. Sometimes that is not our first instinct. Sometimes the first thought we have when we meet someone in the church confused by a false teaching is to throw those people out of the church. It is to cut all relationships off with these people. It is to treat them like they are the plague. After all, aren't they following false teachings?

Jude wrote that is the wrong approach. Apostates like to take advantage of weak, vulnerable, and spiritually immature people who don't know any better. Jude said, "Don't be combative with these people, show compassion on these people, especially when they are not rejecting the faith, but they are just struggling with doubts and questions about their faith."

Over the years, I have seen many people in this position. They went to a Christian bookstore and bought a book off the shelf. They read it and had no idea the book was written by a fruitcake. They trusted the book but now they are confused by the book. These people need a church full of loving, kind, patient and gentle people to show them the truth.

And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. 1 Thessalonians 5:14 (ESV)

Today, many American Christians fit into this camp. The biblical teaching of most American Christians is a hodgepodge of teachers with a variety of perspectives, some good, some apostate. They are all sown together into a modern Christian belief system. Many do not know the difference between truth and error. They need someone to point the truth out to them and set them in the right direction.

We are to try and rescue the convinced.

...save others by snatching them out of the fire... Jude 23 (ESV)

Now we come to a more committed group. They are not confused about the truth. They are convinced by the false teachers that they have the truth. At this point, these people are not asking questions and seeking truth. They have their feet in the wet cement of a lie that is quickly hardening around their lives. Jude told us these people are already in the fires of hell. They are just in there such a short time that they haven't yet begun to burn. At this point, we are not involved in a mercy operation. We are involved in a rescue operation.

We are to rescue these people as quickly and aggressively as snatching a stick out of the fire. The picture is rescuing a fresh piece of wood from the campfire before it has a chance to burn.

These people are convinced by liberal theology. They bought into the lie that Jesus isn't God. They don't believe the Bible. They have left the faith. We make a last-ditch effort to save them before it is too late.

This image comes from Amos.

"I overthrew some of you, as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were as a brand plucked out of the burning; yet you did not return to me," declares the LORD. Amos 4:11 (ESV)

Just as God plucked Israel out of the fire to save it from destruction, we are to try and pluck these people out of the fire to save them from imminent spiritual destruction.

We have a more gentle ministry to the spiritually confused; we have an aggressive ministry to those who are convinced by apostates.

We are to be careful around the committed.

...to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.
Jude 23 (ESV)

Jude told us there are some people out there following false teaching that are not confused or convinced, they are deeply committed to lies of the devil. These folks are hard core. Jude told us to be careful around them. We are to still show mercy to them, but we are to be careful to not get too close to them or to trust them. Ultimately, we have nothing in common with them and they are deeply deceived. These people are often very articulate. They have been trained. They are subtle. They are satanic.

While we still show mercy to them we are to fear being corrupted by them. In other words, you can't be close friends with them. They are hard-core enemies of the truth. We are people of the truth. The more we hang with them and spend time with them, the more likely it is for their values and false beliefs to begin rubbing off on us.

Jude gave us a very graphic illustration of how we are to treat them. He tells us to hate even the garments stained by the flesh. The word for garment is the word for tunic. It is referring to underwear. Underwear stained by the flesh is what we call a set of a poopy pants. How do you treat a dirty pair of underwear?

Do you pull it close to yourself? If you do, the poop gets all over you. The truth is we hold that underwear only by our fingertips. We keep it an arm's length away from us. We don't put it on the couch. We drop it in the washing machine. We handle dirty underwear carefully. We keep a distance when we pick it up.

Jude said that is the way we are to treat hardcore, committed false teachers. We show mercy to them, but we don't befriend them. We don't get close to them. We ultimately have nothing in common with them. We don't want the pollution of their lives to become part of our lives. We choose our friends carefully, and these people are not part of our inner friend group.

Conclusion

So how do we survive living in a world filled with apostates and spiritual terrorists? There are three things.

1. Remember that the apostles told us it would be this way. A world filled with false teachers attacking the church from inside the church is not a surprise. It should be expected.
2. Remain in a growing relationship with God. We do that by time in the Word of God, prayer, walking in a pleasing relationship with God and by keeping our eyes on the day we will see Jesus.
3. Rescue those who are perishing. Help the confused. Snatch the convinced out of the flames. Hold at arm's length those committed to apostasy so the filth of their lives doesn't defile our lives.



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