

The Letter of Jude

Called the “most neglected book in the New Testament,” the Letter of Jude is also a “remarkable piece of literature.” It’s the next to the last book in the Bible. It’s only



25 verses. Its author is one of Jesus’ half-brothers. By identifying himself in v. 1 as the “brother of James”, scholars are very confident that Jude was one of the half-brothers of Christ. *Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? (Matthew 13:55 NIV; keep in mind that Judas and Jude are the same, like*

Bob/Robert, Bill/William, etc.) “Jude—one of the four brothers of Jesus; yet he calls himself a doulos; a servant; which meant that in the social ladder he was at rock bottom but in the Roman Empire . . . what gave you status as a slave was the identity of your Master. And so even slaves could exercise great authority.” (Bauckham)

What is the main point of Jude? (vv. 1-3)

Most likely, the Letter of Jude would have been read at the close of the worship service. Think about it: there in the house church, one of the elders says, "Now before we close, I have a special message to read from our brother in Christ, Jude." As the contents of the letter are heard, encouraged looks from the church turn aghast as Jude informs them that imposters have infiltrated their ranks. Some have come in the name of Jesus; claimed to possess the truth of Jesus, yet in reality look nothing like Jesus. These fakes are sitting there in the same room listening to Jude’s letter along with everyone else! Their masks melt when exposed to the blazing heat of God’s Word. These play-actors have no where to run; they must repent and recant or be removed!

The story of Jude is about how easy it is for false teachers to worm their way into loving Christian communities. If tolerated, they will wreak havoc. It’s a story about how important it is to discern truth from error; and how error can be packaged in such way as to look like truth. But mostly, Jude is the story about how God wants us to **ALWAYS BE “EN GARDE” FOR THE GOSPEL!**

Why does Jude want God’s people to be “EN GARDE” for the Gospel? (vv. 4-19)

For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord. (Jude 4 NIV)

Jude is trying to tell us that it only takes a few ungodly people to affect an otherwise godly community. These false teachers (1) twist God's grace into lust; and (2) deny the absolute sovereignty of Jesus Christ, who alone is King and Emperor. Notice the order in which Jude exposed their error. First, a life of unbridled sexual immorality; then a belief system which supports their lifestyle. Out of their false lifestyle flows false teaching. Thomas Cranmer wrote: "What the heart desires, the will chooses, and the mind justifies".

What's interesting about Jude is his disciplined rhetoric—there are at least 20 triplets in his letter (Jude/servant/brother; called/loved/kept, etc.). Also, Jude uses illustrations from Jewish literature outside the Old Testament to explain how arrogant these false teachers were (v. 9; vv. 14-15). His point? The Gospel always produces godliness. The Gospel is always about rescuing us from darkness and never promoting darkness. If we are to effectively guard the Gospel—we must live the Gospel! At present, the Elders are confident that no such intruders have slipped into our church family; we can't think of any small group leaders, leaders, or ministry leaders who are promoting the errors we read in Jude's letter. That said, Jude's letter reminds us of other areas in our lives—work, leisure, media—where these errors are attempting to worm their way into our hearts. Can you identify where they may be showing up in your life?

How does God want us to be “EN GARDE” for the Gospel? (vv. 20-25)

1. God wants us to stand together as a community; refrain from going it alone; and keep praying in a manner guided or controlled by the Holy Spirit. (v. 20)
2. God want us to keep ourselves in His love. Sometimes we are tempted to display exhibitionistic indignation at ungodliness. But God wants us to patiently and mercifully be the Good News we so vocally profess. (v. 21)

God saw Abraham's sacrifice and said, "Now I know that you love me, because you did not withhold your only son from me" [Gen. 22:12]. But how much more can we look at his sacrifice on the Cross, and say to God, "Now, we know that you love us. For you did not withhold your son, your only son, whom you love, from us." When the magnitude of what he did dawns on us, it makes it possible finally to rest our hearts in him rather than in anything else. (Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods* [New York, NY: Dutton, 2009], 18.)

3. God wants us to be merciful to those in error; be active in reaching out; and be vigilant so as not to get caught up in the very same sin we're trying to help others escape. (v. 22-23)
4. God wants us to remember that only Jesus will keep us from falling. (vv. 24-25) There is no one who wants you in heaven more than the Lord of heaven. He who brings judgment on His enemies will one day bring salvation to His people.