

Contend for the Faith

Illustrations of False Teachers

Jude 12-13

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Illustrations of False Teachers

Scripture

The Letter of Jude deals with the subject of false teaching, which is the greatest danger to the Church of Jesus Christ today.

As we study Jude 12-13 today, we will see how Jude compared false teachers to five natural phenomena in a message I have titled, “Illustrations of False Teachers.” Let’s read Jude 12-13:

¹² These are hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, shepherds feeding themselves; waterless clouds, swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; ¹³ wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever. (Jude 12-13)

Introduction

In April I attended the annual Twin Lakes Fellowship meeting in Florence, MS. One of the speakers was Martin Downes, pastor of Christ Church Deeside in North Wales and author of *Risking the Truth*.¹

Downes defines *heresy* as “any teaching that directly contradicts the clear and direct witness of the Scriptures on a point of salvific importance.”² In other words, heresy is the kind of doctrinal error that it completely redefines the gospel.

For the past two months I have been preaching through the short but vitally important Letter of Jude. Jude’s entire letter deals with the matter of false teaching and heresy, which I believe is the greatest danger to the Church of Jesus Christ today. False teaching

¹ Martin Downes, *Risking the Truth: Handling Error in the Church* (Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2009).

² Martin Downes, *Risking the Truth: Handling Error in the Church* (Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2009), 21.

usually comes into the church from within the church. This is in fact the point that Jude made in his letter. He said in Jude 4, “For certain people [i.e., false teachers] have crept in unnoticed” into the church.

It is for this reason that pastors are called to watch over the flock. The Apostle Paul said to the Ephesian elders, “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20:28-30). So, pastors are called to tenderhearted watchfulness. I love what John Calvin said in this regard, “A pastor sounds two alarms: one is comfort for the sheep, and the other is for the wolves.”

There are different types of error, just as there are different types of people who embrace error. *First, some people are sincerely ignorant.* For example, Apollos was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures, and even taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. So, Priscilla and Aquila took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately (Acts 18:24-26).

Second, other people have sincerely misunderstood the truth. The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians to correct several areas of misunderstanding.

Third, sometimes a teacher is temporarily inconsistent. That was the case with the Apostle Peter in Antioch. The Apostle Paul confronted Peter about his inconsistency (Galatians 2:11-14).

Fourth, sometimes people are simply deceived. The Apostle Paul’s letter to the Galatians is a stern warning to them not to believe any other false gospel.

And fifth, there are false teachers. These are the people Jude wrote about when he warned that there were false teachers who were creeping into the church (Jude 4). False teachers are really dangerous because they will not submit to correction.

One fascinating aspect of error is that certain errors repeatedly reoccur throughout history. One wonders, “Why do old errors come back? Why do old errors find fresh, living advocates?” And the answer is that heresy is often seen as “better than the truth.”

Downes suggest that there are four reasons why error always comes back. *First, Satan still deceives people into believing heresies.* He uses human instruments to promote attractive and plausible teaching. And he will continue to do this until Jesus returns.

Second, we have to reckon with evangelical amnesia. We don’t know our church history. There is nothing new under the sun. And so when heresy returns, we don’t recognize it as something that has previously plagued the church.

Third, we neglect sound doctrine. We are prone to error. Error often offers the easier road.

And finally, sometimes people are simply running away from the truth. There may be all kinds of reasons why they do so, but they don’t want to deal with the truth.

Review

Well, let me briefly review the Letter of Jude so far.

Jude began to write this marvelous letter to believers to encourage them with the wonderful truths “about our common salvation” (v. 3a). However, he “found it necessary to write appealing to [the believers] to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (v. 3b).

Why? Because word had reached Jude that false teachers had “crept in unnoticed.” They perverted the grace of God into sensuality and denied the deity of Jesus by their character, their conduct, and their creed (v. 4).

Jude said that God’s attitude toward false teachers was displayed in implacable judgment. He pointed to God’s attitude in his judgment of unbelieving individuals, rebellious angels, and sinful communities (vv. 5-7).

Jude then gave a description of false teachers. He said that

false teachers were immoral (they “defile the flesh”), insubordinate (they “reject authority”), and irreverent (they “blaspheme the glorious ones”) (vv. 8-10).

Further, Jude said that false teachers disobeyed God (v. 11a), they influenced others to disobey God (v. 11b), and they led a full rebellion against God (11c).

Lesson

In our lesson today, Jude compared false teachers to five natural phenomena.

In this regard, Jude followed the example of Jesus, who often used natural phenomena as object lessons to illustrate spiritual truth (cf. the parable of the soils in Matthew 13:3-23; the parable of the tares and the wheat in Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43; the kingdom parables in Matthew 13:31-33, 44-50, etc.). The Psalms also contain many allusions to natural phenomena (Psalms 1, 8, 18, 23, 29, 33, etc.).

So, let us now see how Jude compared false teachers to hidden reefs, waterless clouds, fruitless autumn trees, wild sea waves, and wandering stars.³

I. False Teachers are Like Hidden Reefs (12a)

First, false teachers are like hidden reefs.

Jude said in verse 12a, **“These are hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, shepherds feeding themselves. . . .”**

Jude began verse 12 with the word **“These.”** He was referring, of course, to **“these”** false teachers. In fact, five times in his letter Jude referred to the false teachers as “these people” or simply as **“these”** (vv. 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 19).

So, Jude said that **these** false teachers **are hidden reefs**. A

³ John MacArthur, *2 Peter and Jude* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2005), 179.

reef is “a ridge of jagged rock, coral, or sand just above or below the surface of the sea.”⁴ Of course, a reef that is just above the surface of the sea can be spotted. That is why Jude referred to them as **hidden reefs**, because they were just below the surface of the sea and could not be spotted. **Hidden reefs** are dangerous because they are not seen and they can rip open the hull of a ship.

Jude said that **these** false teachers are **hidden reefs at your love feasts**. In the Early Christian Church **love feasts** were like our covered dish dinners and connected with the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. The provisions were contributed by the more wealthy families and were made available to all Christians, whether rich or poor, who chose to partake. Portions were also sent to the sick and absent members. These love feasts were a celebration of that mutual love which is characteristic of the Christian faith.⁵ Instruction also took place at these **love feasts**.

Jude had become aware that false teachers were not only participating but were also teaching at these **love feasts**. They were so brazen in their hypocrisy that the false teachers would **feast with the believers without fear**. As Paul wrote to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:2, these false teachers were “liars whose consciences are seared.”

Instead of caring for others, which was one of the hallmarks of the **love feasts**, Jude noted that these false teachers were **shepherds feeding themselves**. As John MacArthur said, “Their only interest was self-interest and self-gratification—at the expense of anyone else.”⁶

We see that with some of the TV preachers today who are false teachers, don’t we? They have outrageously expensive homes and lifestyles—far beyond what is appropriate for a minister of the gospel. Why? Because they are **shepherds feeding themselves**.

So, false teachers are like hidden reefs.

⁴ Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁵ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary : New Testament*, electronic ed. (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

⁶ John MacArthur, *2 Peter and Jude* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2005), 179-80.

II. False Teachers are Like Waterless Clouds (12b)

Second, false teachers are like waterless clouds.

Jude said that “these” false teachers in verse 12b are “. . . **waterless clouds, swept along by winds. . .**”

Do you know what a cloud is? I know that you have all seen a cloud. It is that white, puffy thing in the sky. The *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* defines a *cloud* as “a visible mass of condensed watery vapor floating in the atmosphere, typically high above the general level of the ground.”⁷ In other words, a cloud is a collection of water. And it brings the hope of rain.

So, when Jude said that false teachers were like **waterless clouds**, he was saying that they were a contradiction in terms. You cannot have a “waterless cloud,” you see. A *cloud* by definition is full of water. So, a false teacher is a contradiction in terms.

Just as **clouds** bring the promise of refreshment to dry and parched ground, so teachers are to bring the promise of God’s refreshment to dry and parched souls. But, false teachers—just like **waterless clouds**—do just the opposite. They simply don’t deliver.

Shortly before I came to the United States in 1983 I attended a “healing” meeting in Cape Town, South Africa. It was winter and the meeting was held outside in a very large tent. We all wore winter coats. The preacher, who had a large following in South Africa, preached a message that even I, as a yet-untrained theologian, found problematic. At some point during the meeting he started calling people up to get healed. I will never forget a young girl, about eleven-years old, sitting in front of me. She had the worst case of skin eczema I have ever seen. I could only see her hands and face but they oozing with pus. At one point she turned to her mother and said, “Miskien vanaand, Mammie. Miskien vanaand,” which means, “Maybe tonight, Mommy. Maybe tonight.” That poor girl never got healed—at least, not that night. She had the misfortune of listening to a false teacher who was like **waterless**

⁷ Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

clouds—promising much, but delivering nothing.

Maybe you are saying to yourself that I am being a little harsh on that preacher. A year or two after I was in the United States I heard that a medical physician challenged the preacher to produce tangible evidence that people were getting healed. Apparently, the preacher saw an opportunity to gain more attention. So, he agreed to have the doctor examine people who were healed when they attended a meeting. Well, the meeting came with great anticipation and apparently a great deal of national attention. The meeting began at 7:00 p.m. and by midnight no-one had been healed. The preacher had been shown to be a false teacher.

So, false teachers are like waterless clouds.

III. False Teachers are Like Fruitless Autumn Trees (12c)

Third, false teachers are like fruitless autumn trees.

Jude said that “these” false teachers in verse 12c are “. . . **fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted. . .**”

Normally, spring is when seeds are sown and blossoms begin to sprout. The crops and fruit grow throughout the summer. And then, when the autumn arrives, the crops and fruit are harvested. And so, if there are still **fruitless trees in late autumn**, the farmer has experienced a failed harvest for that year. And he has to wait all year before another harvest may be gathered.

Jude compared false teachers to **fruitless trees in late autumn**. He meant that they were utterly unproductive. There was no spiritual fruit of any kind. When he said that they were **twice dead**, he meant that, first, they were not producing any spiritual fruit. And so, second, they might as well be **uprooted**.

Jesus said of the Pharisees, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up” (Matthew 15:13).

John MacArthur said, “Such people produce no life-changing fruit, neither in themselves nor in others.”⁸

⁸ John MacArthur, *2 Peter and Jude* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2005), 181.

It is important to note that large crowds do not necessarily mean that a teacher has a fruitful ministry. He may have a “successful” ministry, in the sense that the world measures success: by buildings, budgets, and bodies. But a “successful” ministry is not necessarily a spiritually fruitful ministry.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the great Welsh preacher, who preached in London in the middle of the twentieth century, said on one occasion, “It is not difficult to gather a crowd to hear a preacher preach. Just tell them that next Sunday I will be preaching in my underwear, and a great crowd will gather!” His point was simply that great crowds are no accurate measure of fruitfulness. Spiritual success is measured by the spiritual fruitfulness of the ministry.

I was talking to a pastor in our presbytery this week. Over the 20 years or so that he has been pastor of his church, the church has declined in attendance for a variety of reasons. In fact, the attendance is so small at this point that the Session is selling the building and arranging for the remaining members to worship elsewhere. I asked the pastor if he was discouraged. He said, “Oh no. Over the years God has blessed the ministry. We have seen many people grow and mature in their faith. They serve as pastors, elders, deacons, missionaries, and faithful congregation members all over the world.” That is a pastor who has produced spiritual fruit.

False teachers, on the other hand, are like fruitless autumn trees who produce no spiritual fruit, either in themselves or in others.

IV. False Teachers are Like Wild Sea Waves (13a)

Fourth, false teachers are like wild sea waves.

Jude said that “these” false teachers in verse 13a are “. . . **wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame. . .**”

The Bible often uses **the sea** as a symbol for those who do not know God. For example, the Prophet Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 57:20-21, “But the wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot be

quiet, and its waters toss up mire and dirt. There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked.’”

After a storm a beach is littered with all kinds of debris that gets thrown onto the shore. None of it useful or beneficial. That is a graphic picture of what false teachers produce by their false teaching. With all their empty talk and self-serving activity, they are like **wild waves of the sea**. In the end they are **casting up the foam of their own shame**.

John MacArthur said, “Their disgraceful attitudes and actions froth up to display all forms of heresy, deception, immorality, irreverence, and insubordination.”⁹

Do you remember the tsunami on December 26, 2004 off the west coast of Indonesia? About 230,000 people were killed by that tsunami. Do you remember the pictures of the surge of water and the waves pounding the coastline? Well, a tsunami is an exaggerated picture of what Jude said, but the point is that you should get out of the way of false teachers because they leave a mass of destruction once they strike—just like **wild waves of the sea**.

So, false teachers are like wild sea waves.

V. False Teachers are Like Wandering Stars (13b)

And fifth, false teachers are like wandering stars.

Jude said that “these” false teachers in verse 13b are “. . . **wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.**”

Wandering stars does not refer to heavenly bodies that continuously shine and have fixed orbits. Most likely the expression signifies a meteor or “shooting star” that flashes across the sky in an uncontrolled moment of brilliance and then disappears forever into **the utter darkness** (cf. v. 6). False teachers often appear for a short time on the stage of Christianity. They promise enduring spiritual light and direction but deliver nothing but an erratic, aimless,

⁹ John MacArthur, *2 Peter and Jude* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2005), 181.

worthless flash. The **utter darkness** of hell **has been reserved forever** for them (cf. 2 Peter 2:4, 9, 17).¹⁰

John MacArthur tells about a man who signed his ordination certificate who was a very popular pastor of a local Bible church. However, at some point he turned his back on Christianity and denied the deity of Jesus Christ. He then became a professor at the University of Southern California, and did everything he could to turn young people away from Christ and Christianity.¹¹

So, false teachers are like wandering stars.

Conclusion

Jude's illustrations of false teachers show in graphic detail the problems with false teachers.

False teachers pervert the grace of God into sensuality and deny the deity of Jesus by their character, conduct, and creed. They are immoral, insubordinate, and irreverent. And they disobey God, influence others to disobey God, and lead a full rebellion against God.

True teachers, on the other hand, understand and proclaim the grace of God correctly. They affirm the deity of Jesus. They are moral, subordinate, and reverent. And they obey God, influence others to obey God, and lead the flock into full submission to God.

I hope by now you see the vast difference between false teachers and true teachers. May God help us all to spot error and follow hard after truth and those who teach us truth. Amen.

¹⁰ John MacArthur, *2 Peter and Jude* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2005), 181-82.

¹¹ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Beware the Pretenders* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1984), 51.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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PRAAYER:

O Lord our God, once again we thank you for your Word. We thank you for your servant Jude, who wrote with such clarity on an issue that has plagued the church for centuries. Throughout the centuries the church has constantly had to deal with heresy and false teaching.

Help each one of us here today to recognize false teachers so that we are not duped by their heretical teaching. And help us also to commit ourselves to the truth.

And all of this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

To you who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ:

May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. Amen.