

Jude 1:1-7 (WCF 25:4-5) “More Or Less Pure”

For the Children: Did you know that the foods we buy in the supermarkets are not 100% pure? They have a very tiny amount of rubbish in them. Usually it is not enough to harm you – though some foods have more impurity, and some less. Churches also have some impurities in them – things, even people against God’s will. Some congregations are more faithful, some less. The Lord will one day remove everyone who does not truly love Him, and put an end to all sin in the church. In the meantime, we must fight against sin and error. Sometimes sin and error cause the Lord to turn away from a congregation. But He still preserves His church, overall. **Questions:** How do we know that no church on earth is perfect? What does it mean to “contend earnestly for the faith”? Should we look at our own church as the best, and all the others as not so good?

Introduction:

First Point: How We Know There is No Perfect Church on Earth

- **The Need for Multiplication:** Jude prays that mercy, peace and love would be “multiplied” to the readers (v. 2). This implies that they are not yet filled with these things. The need for mercy especially indicates that there is still sin and weakness in God’s people and therefore in the church as a whole
- **To What We Are Called:** V. 1 reminds us that the members of the church (individually and collectively) are “called” - to holiness and perseverance. See v. 21. This implies that we are not yet as holy as we should be, and that we need to struggle against sin. See also Rom. 7 on this struggle
- **The Need for Contending:** Jude addresses a situation where false teachers have “crept in unnoticed.” They were using grace as an excuse for sin. They were effectively denying their Lord and Master. Clearly, the church was not entirely pure, even in the NT! Therefore there was a need to contend vigorously for the faith, the doctrines handed down. Many other parts of Scripture show a similar threat to the church (Is. 42, Mt. 13, especially vss. 24-30, 36-43; 1 Cor. 5:6-8; Galatians; 1-2 Tim.; 2 Pet.; Rev. 23). But it was all in God’s hands, having been foretold and foreordained by Him.
- **The Warning of Judgement:** The fact that the church is not pure in practice – there are false teachers in her midst – leads Jude to warn of God’s judgement on those who rebel. He cites as examples the judgement on unbelieving Jews who had been rescued from Egypt but were destroyed in the wilderness; the judgement reserved for fallen angels who, in pride, were not satisfied with their princely authority and domain; and the destruction of the Plain Cities, where the men went after “strange flesh”

Second Point: How We Respond to That Knowledge

- **Responding to Grace:** The fact that the church is not perfectly pure yet demonstrates the mercy of God. For He still loves and calls her (vss. 1-2). She is created and preserved entirely by God’s initiative. This should motivate us to grateful obedience, worship and prayer. In prayer, we thank Him for His mercy and seek His help to deal with remaining impurity
- **Contending Earnestly:** The presence of impurity should lead us to strive for “reformation,” contending earnestly for a greater degree of purity. This includes focusing on the “marks” of the true church. For these marks involve contending for the Truth, in the face of opposition. See WCF 25:4
- **A Humble Attitude:** The fact that we are not perfectly pure is a cause for humility. We, too, need God’s grace, the multiplication of fruits, the contending against sin, the warnings. When we criticize others, we must remember that we do not do so from a position of perfection. However, the fact that the WCF speaks of “more or less pure” and even the most pure being subject to mixture and error, does not conflict with the sharp “True/False” distinction of the BCF. The WCF refers “more or less pure” only to churches that the BCF calls “true.” Humility should not weaken our contending for the Truth!
- **Confidence in the Promise:** The true church is God’s “beloved” and “called.” He shows mercy and only removes those who do not believe. The rest are “kept,” preserved by grace. The gates of hell will not prevail against the church (Mt. 16:18). This gives us great confidence concerning the church – and our own congregation, so long as we keep relying upon the Lord and His Word