

Dr. David A. DeSilva, 2 Peter and Jude Session 6

Jude continues his appeal by drawing two strong contrasts between the interlopers and the congregation or congregations Jude addresses. The contrasts, of course, drive strategic rhetorical wedges between the two parties so as to position the hearers further against affirming, let alone embracing, the authority and example of those rival teachers. The incompatibility of Jude's audience and the interlopers is vividly drawn in two pairs of parallel, contrasting statements.

In verse 16, these people. In verse 17, but as for you, beloved. In verse 19, these people.

And again in 20, but as for you, beloved. The paragraphing in many English versions does not follow these verbal cues from Jude himself, but the cues are unmistakable. These people are grumblers, finding fault with their lot while going after their own desires, and their mouth utters lofty things while they flatter for the sake of profit.

Exactly what Jude thinks the interlopers to be doing remains unclear, but calling them grumblers is certainly strategic as this was a characteristic of the Exodus generation, particularly in the two episodes that Jude has already recalled. The rebellion of the people en masse at Kadesh Barnea in Numbers 14 and the power play of Korah and his party in Numbers 16. Jude suggests that the grumbling is directed against the human condition, which the interlopers perhaps use as an excuse for making the best and getting the most out of life in the present, since short and sorrowful is our lot.

By artful juxtaposition, however, Jude hints that it is the interlopers' commitment to gratifying their own impulses and yearnings that is to blame for the ills of the human condition. Rather than commit to the God-given cure for that condition in the holiness that Christ and the Spirit empower, they continue to nourish the disease at the root of our condition. Jude also paints them as merely Christianized versions of the sophists and the religious charlatans clamoring for attention in the city marketplace.

So these people also make great claims for themselves and their spiritual insight in their speech while fawning over those from whom they hope to profit. Jude then shifts his attention to his audience and to the warnings they had previously received about such people as they now encounter. Indeed, Jude's description of the interlopers as people who go after their own desires anticipates the content of the apostolic warning against these people that Jude now recalls.

But as for you, beloved, remember the words spoken in advance by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, how they used to say to you that in the last time there will be scoffers going after their own godless desires. Jude thus calls a second witness against the interlopers in addition to the prophetic word of Enoch, having already offered strong arguments concerning their fate on the basis of historical examples or precedents. The catchword "ungodly" in Jude's representation of the apostles' warnings resonates with the language of 1

Enoch 1:9 cited above in Jude verses 14 and 15, where again the lexeme aseb, the lexeme for ungodly, appeared three times.

Jude's representation of this apostolic warning does not match up verbatim with any other known apostolic text. It might represent a recollection of their oral teaching or simply a paraphrase of well-known and widespread warnings against self-serving false teachers. Jesus himself warned against such people who are sure to come along in Matthew 7 and 24.

Paul is remembered in Acts 20 to have taken the elders of Ephesus aside in Miletus to warn them against savage wolves that would come along to fleece the flock, and indeed to have claimed to have given such warnings often. First Timothy and First John also contain similar admonitions. Labeling false teachers scoffers is quite apt, particularly for the interlopers whose influence Jude seeks to undermine.

At the heart of the problem is their scornful attitude toward the faith handed down once for all to the saints and the constraints that walking in line with the faith puts on indulging one's own desires and pleasures. But Jude will remind his audience that the faith initiates people into a way of life that promises blamelessness before God in God's glory, not gratification of any impulse that presents a stumbling block to blamelessness. The second contrast focuses on a decisive difference between the interlopers and the audience, one that disqualifies the interlopers from legitimately exerting any influence upon the Christ followers.

These people are the ones creating divisions, worldly-minded people, devoid of the spirit. But you, beloved, as you keep building yourselves up in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God as you await the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto life eternal. Jude asserts that the interlopers, whatever their pretensions to charismatic experiences and fresh revelations, their dreaming, as Jude put it in verse 8, is in fact just operating on their natural intelligence and instincts.

This is the sense of the Greek word *psychikoi*, translated here as worldly-minded. Jude had already hinted at this in verse 10, where Jude denied to the interlopers any genuine spiritual understanding and suggested that their practices and priorities showed them to be operating on the level of any other animal. The audience, however, has been endowed with the Holy Spirit in whom they are to continue to pray, whose presence assures them that they must remain steadfast in the faith as they had already received it and not be swayed now by teachers who are themselves guided by their passions rather than by the Spirit.

Contending for the faith means negatively resisting the influence of those who claim to be sisters or brothers and yet have not submitted themselves to the authority of the apostolic witness to God's purposes for those who are in Christ and have therefore not committed themselves to follow the Holy Spirit in the direction of blameless practice. Contending for the faith also means positively allowing the faith to take ever deeper root and bear ever fuller fruit in one's own life and facilitating the same in the lives of one's sisters and brothers in Christ. It involves preserving a very particular orientation and set of priorities, keeping oneself in God's love and looking expectantly ahead toward the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, which results in eternal life.

The demands of holiness and the experience of divine love are not regarded here as at all in opposition. The latter calls us to fulfill the former. Walking in the former positions us to continue in the latter.

The interlopers give their attention to making room for their desires and impulses. Genuine believers give their attention to honoring the God who called them into his love and to living with a view to finding mercy, to standing blameless as Jude will put it in verse 24, before God and God's Christ. Contending for the faith also involves accepting our responsibility for our sisters' and brothers' steadfastness in the faith, particularly in regard to their practice.

Thus Jude continues, show mercy upon some who are uncertain. Save some, seizing them from the fire. Have mercy on some without sorrow, on some with fear.

Hating even the garments polluted by the flesh. Jude commissions his hearers each to serve as a guardrail, as it were, for the other. Committing themselves to keep one another on track.

He entrusts those whose foothold on the path of blamelessness has faltered to their brothers and sisters so that the latter will take pains to restore them. Such a duty grates against our modern sensibilities, which have been trained largely not to interfere, to meddle in the lives of others, especially around the sensitive issues of living out our religious commitments. It grates against contemporary notions of what it means to judge.

And this is a season in which judge not that you not be judged has become a more popular verse than God so loved the world. But Jude does indeed call Christ followers to judge in the sense of discern when a sister or brother is moving away from alignment with the blamelessness to which God calls us. And to do this with a view to restoring that sister's or that brother's secure footing on the path to eternal life.

The path that anticipates the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jude thus joins many other New Testament voices that similarly commit each one of us to one another's care. Acknowledging the necessity of communal or social reinforcement of the faith and walk of each individual member of the body of Christ, if that member is to remain securely on the path to life.

Jesus, for example, is remembered to have taught, If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

Similarly, Paul. Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.

And also James. My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another, you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins. It is quite possible that Jude would also have his hearers exercise such a godly and redemptive influence upon the interlopers themselves.

For at no point does Jude urge them to expel these teachers as Paul had done on several occasions. Jude is simply concerned that the influence flows in one direction only. And the manner in which he has alerted his audience to the danger posed by the interloper's practice, if their pollution were to become contagious, has positioned them well to accomplish this.

Jude closes his brief letter not with the customary elements of a letter. Travel plans, greetings to and from particular individuals, parting words of instruction, a final word of farewell or wish for grace, but rather with a well-crafted doxology, that is, a statement praising and blessing God. This is no doubt in keeping with what Jude anticipated would be the setting in which his letter would be read.

The assembly gathered for worship and prayer, perhaps even for one of the very love feasts that he mentioned in verse 12. To the one who is able to keep you from stumbling and to make you stand before his glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority before all time and now and into all the ages. Amen.

The interlopers with their disdain for the authority of the apostolic tradition and the guardrails that tradition has placed around the behavior of those who look for God's mercy constitute a potential stumbling block for the congregation or congregations Jude addresses. Were they to be persuaded by the interloper's word and example to make room for gratifying the passions of the flesh that wage war against their souls, to borrow language from 1 Peter? But Jude closes with the assurance that God himself is able to keep and by implication desirous of keeping the believers from stumbling, but rather to preserve them blameless in God's presence so that they will have no cause for shame when they stand before God's glory.

As they keep themselves in God's love through their faithfulness to the faith entrusted to the saints once for all, they have every assurance that God will keep them as well. In verses 16 to 25, as throughout the rest of his brief letter, Jude raises the question of the location of authority, particularly of the authority to lay out the parameters of faithful response to God's saving acts in Christ. Jude insists that this authority is not located in the charismatic or spiritual experiences of any individual or group among the churches.

It is not based on experience or a fresh assessment of what is reasonable for flesh and blood humans to attain, while not missing out on the pleasures of this life. It is not in personal experiences of alleged revelation, but in the common tradition that has been handed along to the saints once for all. It is based on the revelation of God through Jesus and the apostles' witness, which is itself consonant with the revelation of God's righteousness in the Jewish scriptures and the para-scriptural tradition.

If any teacher in the church is to have authority, it derives in turn from that teacher's faithfulness to and consonant with the faith entrusted to the saints once for all. Our collective understanding of that faith may deepen. How to align oneself with that faith in new contexts may require fresh discernment.

But the trajectory upon which God had set the church in the early 19th century, and the apostles' teaching, cannot be allowed to move away from a commitment to blamelessness

before God in the direction that our own desires or mere natural instincts, as the NIV renders Sukukoi in verse 19, would lead us. Once again, some significant textual issues emerge in regard to this short letter, particularly in Jude verses 22 and 23. The textual witnesses differ as to whether we should hear two or three restorative actions prescribed as independent clauses.

They also differ concerning the nature of the first action. Does it involve having mercy or convicting? Witnesses in favor of three independent clauses include Codex Vaticanus, have mercy on some who doubt or dispute, save snatching them from fire, have mercy on others in fear, hating, etc. Codex Alexandrinus also favors three independent clauses, convict some who doubt or dispute, save others snatching them from the fire, have mercy on others in fear, hating, etc.

And then the corrector of Codex Sinaiticus in the 12th century, have mercy on some who doubt or dispute, save others snatching them from the fire, have mercy on others in fear, hating, and so forth. Witnesses preferring two independent clauses denoting the restorative actions include Papyrus 72, a third or fourth century Papyrus, snatch some from the fire, have mercy and fear on those who doubt or dispute, hating even the garment, etc. And then the Codex known as Ephraim Rescripti, a rewritten Codex, a Codex that's been used twice in the 5th century, there we read convict some who doubt or dispute, save others snatching them from fire and fear, hating, etc.

And then a corrector of Codex Ephraim Rescripti a century later writes Have mercy, replacing convict, have mercy on some who doubt or dispute, save others snatching them from fire in fear, and so forth. Three 9th-century manuscripts similarly present two restorative actions: have mercy on some while disputing, presumably with them, save others in fear, seizing them from the fire, hating, etc. The essential agreements of Vaticanus, Alexandrinus, and Sinaiticus tend to tip the scales in favor of their representation of Jude's phrasing against the rule that the shorter reading is generally to be preferred because scribes tended to expand text rather than shorten them, unless by accident.

And against the witness of our earliest manuscript, Papyrus 72. This does not resolve the issue, however, of what that first action is. Here, the witnesses of Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, and even P72, which essentially blends the first and third actions, suggest that Jude urged having mercy in both the first and the third clauses.

The reading in Alexandrinus could be explained as a stylistic improvement to eliminate that redundancy. Based on these considerations, a probable reconstruction of these verses would read as we have above, show mercy upon some who are uncertain, save some, seizing them from the fire, have mercy on some with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh. This example, like our close study of the textual variance behind verse 5, also bears witness to the complexities that often attend the, to most readers of scriptures, invisible task of textual criticism.

The earliest sign that Jude was being read and used in the early church appears, perhaps surprisingly, in 2 Peter, a letter that also bears witness to the circulation of Paul's letters among the Christian churches. 2 Peter was written to address the challenges posed by a rather different group of teachers. The author appears to weave in the content of Jude

verses 5 to 18 into his own denunciation of these other teachers, using many of the same Old Testament references and images, and these in much the same order as we find in Jude.

2 Peter was written to an audience that the author, at least, believed would be less familiar with or receptive to the Palestinian Jewish traditions to which Jude refers, and thus the author of 2 Peter makes some modifications along the way to the material he appears to have borrowed from Jude, replacing references to 1 Enoch, for example, with more familiar scriptural texts. Use of Jude's letter continues in the 2nd through 4th centuries as ammunition against new, innovative teachers emerging among congregations. Clement of Alexandria, for example, harnesses the text and the rhetoric of Jude to combat the influence of a group known as the Carpocratians, an early 3rd-century Gnostic group active in Clement's Egypt.

Martin Luther regarded Jude to be a pseudonymous digest of 2 Peter, and thus, while the content is derivatively apostolic, Luther did not hold the document itself to be apostolic and viewed it, moreover, as redundant. John Calvin, on the other hand, valued the text enough to write a commentary on it. 19th-century writers became even more vocal in their criticism of the text as a specimen of post-apostolic thinking, inferior to the more creative and innovative thinking of a Paul or a John.

The ethos of the late 20th and early 21st century has certainly also not been conducive to embracing Jude with its vision of a rather straight and narrow road to finding mercy on the day of judgment, and its intolerance of the alternative voices and practices of the teachers it denounces. Jude did not immediately come to enjoy canonical authority in the church. While Origen accepted the letter's authority, he already knew of debates concerning this question in the early 3rd century.

The earlier editions of the Syriac New Testament, the Peshitta, omit Jude, though it is included by the 6th century. Athanasius, the Bishop of Alexandria, however, included Jude in his list of canonical writings in his celebrated Easter letter of 367 AD. The fact that Jude cited a verse from 1 Enoch as an authoritative text was an important factor in this debate.

It did not stop the author of 2 Peter from using the text, but he did purge it of all the references to 1 Enoch, perhaps merely because of its obscurity for his audience, but perhaps also because of distaste for such extra-biblical references. Jerome, the 4th or early 5th century father of the church, knew of sectors of the church that denied Jude's canonical authority, specifically on the basis of its using a non-canonical text. The Venerable Bede discussed the problematic nature of Jude's citation of 1 Enoch, which he considered to be a book that contained, quote, incredible things about giants who had angels instead of men as fathers, and which are clearly lies.

Though Bede himself defended the authority of Jude by noting that the particular verse from 1 Enoch that Jude quoted contained nothing objectionable or out of alignment with the apostolic faith, some sectors of the early church, quite to the contrary, promoted the value of 1 Enoch and regarded Jude's citation of 1 Enoch to be an endorsement of 1 Enoch's value and even canonical authority itself. Tertullian, the 3rd-century church father, fell into this camp.

The Ethiopic Orthodox Church stood and continues to stand in this tradition, receiving not only Jude but also 1 Enoch as canonical. Jude's presence in our New Testament canon is, I think, a gift. This short letter reminds us first that God's grace has a trajectory.

Accommodating the gospel to our old self, or as Jude puts it, transforming the favor of our God into indecent self-indulgence, amounts to a rejection of our Lord, for it is a rejection of what God, in God's grace, is seeking to accomplish in us through our redemption in Christ. God's grace, rather, leads us to conform our old self to the gospel, to bear us along toward blamelessness, and this is not a trajectory that we dare diverge from for our own gratification. Jude reminds us of the consistency of God's righteousness and God's judgment of all that is unrighteous.

The God of Jesus Christ remains the God who condemned the rebel angels, committed Sodom and its sister cities to conflagration, and sentenced the Exodus generation to wander in the desert until its members, who had seen God's power but refused to trust it, died to the last person. He remains ever the God in whom we are beloved and before whose righteousness we will be held accountable. And Jude offers us a concise picture of what is involved in contending for the faith.

This involves us in investing in mutual encouragement, tapping into the support of the Holy Spirit through prayer, and courageously reaching out to and restoring those whose spiritual foothold is faltering.