

SERIES: A New Testament Postcard: The Acts of the Apostates

SERMON: **You Already Know All This, But . . .**

SCRIPTURE: Jude 5-11

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Last Lord's Day we began a four-week study of a small but powerful book of the NT, the book of Jude. It's so short it's been called a postcard instead of a letter, but it's not easy reading and it's certainly not pleasant in its tone. It is what is sometimes called a diatribe, which Webster's defines as "a thunderous verbal attack," a strong warning about traitors in the church. Last week we called these traitors *apostates*, which refers to those who were once knowledgeable about Christianity but have since fallen away and completely abandoned the Faith.

I am very grateful that we don't have a large problem with this spiritual disease at First Free, but by the same token, I don't want to be naive and suggest that we are immune to apostasy. In a church this size there are undoubtedly some sitting in the pew, and perhaps even a leader here or there, who have essentially abandoned the faith but have remained in the church because of some social or political or even financial benefit that accrues to them through their association with the church. My purpose this morning is not for us to become paranoid and suspicious of the person sitting next to us, but I do believe it is essential for us to be watchful. And certainly it is always appropriate to examine ourselves.

As I get older I struggle more and more with my memory. Names, places, events all escape me with increasing regularity. As concerned as I am about my own forgetfulness, I believe an even greater problem is spiritual amnesia in the Body of Christ. The reason it's so dangerous is that those who forget the mistakes of the past are condemned to repeat them. John Eldredge writes perceptively,

We're certainly warned about forgetfulness in Scripture, both in word and by example. In the Old Testament, the pattern is so predictable, we come to expect it. God delivers his people from the cruel whips of Egypt by a stunning display of his power and his care—the plagues, the Passover, the Red Sea. The Israelites celebrate with singing and dancing. Three days later, they are complaining about the water supply. God provides sweet water from the bitter desert springs of Marah. They complain about the food. God drops breakfast out of the sky, every morning. Then it's the water again. God provides it from a rock. Enemies attack; God delivers. On and on it goes, for forty years. As they stand on the brink of the promised land, God issues a final warning: "Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live" (Deut. 4:9 NIV).

They did, of course, let it slip from their hearts. This was the pattern for the entire history of Israel. Jude is very concerned that forgetfulness not become *our* pattern, and so he opens our text today with these words: "Though you already know all this, I want to remind you . . ."

Most people my age know the importance of reminders. We may have photographic memories but we're out of film, or, for the sake of the young people who don't know what film is, we've lost our memory card or our hard drive has crashed. So to compensate we have various ways of

reminding ourselves. Little electronic gadgets beep at us. Post-it notes cover our desks. Secretaries jog our memories. Mostly our wives remind us.

I hope this morning we will allow the OT Scriptures to remind us of some very important historical events. Please give your full attention to the Word of God, as found in the Book of Jude, verses 5-11, but just to make sure we recall the context, I'm going to start at the beginning of the book:

Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James, To those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ: Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.

Dear Friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. 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.

Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

In the very same way, these dreamers pollute their own bodies, reject authority and slander celestial beings. But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" Yet these men speak abusively against whatever they do not understand; and what things they do understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals—these are the very things that destroy them.

Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion.

This brief passage from verses 5-11 is almost entirely historical in its perspective. It goes back to the Exodus from Egypt, back to Genesis, even back before the earth was. Jude's original audience was very familiar with these stories. We are probably less so, but we must be familiar with them if we're going to grasp the truth God has for us.

The message Jude seems bent on communicating is this: those who get involved in apostasy face certain judgment. If the end result for false teachers and apostates is so awful, why do we tolerate them in the church? And why do professing Christians remain in apostate denominations long after the Gospel has ceased to be taught? Oh, I know there are a few who stay as undercover missionaries, and I honor them for that. But the fact is that many stay because it's easier than leaving.

I've talked to evangelical pastors serving in apostate denominations who have told me that they

stay because of their pension. Some lay people stay because they have family or friends there, others because they never hear anything convicting and it's comfortable. These Christians are a lot like Lot's wife, who was so slow leaving Sodom and Gomorrah that she got turned into a salt statue when God brought fire down upon those cities. When Jesus told us to be the salt of the earth, He wasn't thinking of Lot's wife as a positive example!

Jude opens this section with three stories from the Pentateuch which all have essentially the same moral lesson:

Based on historical precedent, apostates face certain judgment for their unbelief and their immorality. (5-7)

Example #1: The ancient Israelites were destroyed. (5) Verse 5: "The LORD delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe." Every Jew was aware of the single most important event in their nation's history—the Exodus from Egypt. God miraculously opened up the Red Sea (or the Sea of Reeds), allowed His people to cross on dry land, and then caused the water to swallow up Pharaoh and his armies.

But just a year later, after they had camped at Mt. Sinai, received the Ten Commandments, and were welded into a survivable nation, they traveled to the very doorstep of the Promised Land at Kadesh Barnea. They sent twelve spies into the land, ten of whom returned to warn them about two G's—the giants in the land and the grasshoppers (themselves) Two of the spies, Caleb and Joshua, urged them to look at another G—God, instead of the giants or the grasshoppers. But the people deliberately chose unbelief and opted to follow the advice of the ten spies.

So what did God do? He destroyed those who did not believe. He told them they would have to wander in the desert for almost 40 years until everyone over 20 at the time of the spy incident had died. Paul speaks of their corpses being strewn over the dessert in 1 Cor. 10:5. Now please understand that God didn't do this in a fit of anger. If you read the story carefully you will see this was the last straw. Again and again they tested God. Again and again He forgave them for their disobedience and unfaithfulness. But God will not delay His judgment forever. There comes a point when unbelief or apostasy must be dealt with. That's as true today as it was 3500 years ago.

Example #2: The evil angels were incarcerated. (6) Verse 6: "And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day." What in the world is this talking about? Well, clearly Jude is not talking about all angels, just evil angels or demons. And he's not even talking about all evil angels, but just a certain group of them who did something so heinous that God put them in a dark dungeon and bound them with chains until the final great Judgment, with no chance of parole.

Originally, you see, God created only holy angels. But at some point in the far past, as hinted at in Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28, and the book of Revelation, one of the choicest and most gifted of the

angels, named Lucifer, decided to stage a coup against God. A large number of angels, perhaps one third of the total number, followed him in his rebellion and became what we know as demons or evil spirits. (As far as I can tell, angels had only one opportunity to turn against God. If they remained faithful to Him, they were confirmed in their holiness for the rest of eternity. If they fell, they were confirmed in their wickedness forever. There is no plan of redemption for evil angels).

Evil angels or demons are Satan's servants today, but not all of them are loose to do his bidding. Some have been imprisoned by God. Why? I think the key to understanding this is the account that leads up to Noah's flood in Genesis 6:

When men began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. Then the LORD said, 'My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years.'

The Nephilim (or giants) were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.

The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. So the LORD said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth . . . for I am grieved that I have made them." But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

Now whatever it was that happened here was so evil, so despicable in God's sight that He killed off the entire human race except for Noah and his family and started over. What would cause God to do this? I believe the "sons of God" mentioned in verse 1 and 4 were fallen angels. (Every other time that phrase "sons of God" is used in the OT it clearly refers to angels). I believe they took possession of the bodies of some wicked men and had sexual relations with some wicked women, producing a race of beings that were essentially demon-possessed from birth, called Nephilim. (By the way, the frequent mention of sexual demons in science fiction literature, beings called *incubus* and *succubus* depending upon their gender, may actually have a basis in this story).

As judgment for this ungodly liaison, God not only nearly eliminated the human race; He also imprisoned the evil angels who participated. He has kept them in darkness, bound with chains, awaiting the final judgment when they will be thrown into the Lake of Fire. Again the message is clear: if God judges apostate angels this harshly, why do we think He will wink at apostasy in the church?

Example # 3: Sodom and Gomorrah were wiped out. (7) Verse 7: "In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire." The phrase "in a similar way" indicates that the perversion in Sodom has some parallel to what the angels did, namely violate God's established order. What happened in these two towns that were

located near the southern end of the Dead Sea that caused God to wipe them out? Well, you can read the disgusting story in Genesis 18 and 19.

It's a Bible story not for children, so I won't read it this morning, but when liberal theologians try to tell us the problem at Sodom and Gomorrah was just a lack of hospitality, but that is just clear evidence of their own morally perverted theology. Jude's conclusion is this: "they (i.e. the Sodomites and their neighbors in Gomorrah) serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire."¹

The tragedy is that so many religious apostates in our country have surrendered any commitment to biblical morality on the issue of human sexuality. They have decided that morality is relative, to be determined by a particular culture and society. So the very backbone of the homosexual lobby in our country is the mainline Protestant denominations! They're the foundation of the abortion lobby, too. Both movements would be seriously handicapped were it not for the strong moral and financial support they receive from the National Council of Churches, various denominational headquarters, and leading Protestant seminaries.

Here is Jude's message to us: "Though you already know about (or should know about) the ancient Israelites, the angels who sinned, and Sodom and Gomorrah, I need to remind you, based upon these historical examples, that apostates face certain judgment for their unbelief and their immorality."

Based on historical precedent, apostates face certain judgment for their blasphemy. (8-10)

Listen again to verses 8 and 9:

In the very same way, these dreamers pollute their own bodies, reject authority and slander celestial beings. But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you! Yet these men speak abusively against whatever they do not understand."

In contrast to the archangel Michael, apostates speak abusively and ignorantly against things they do not understand. (8-10a) Arrogance and ignorance are two common characteristics of religious apostasy. Twenty years ago some of the leading mainline denominations established what they called "The Jesus Seminar" to help clear away as much of the "mythology" as they could from the NT. They wanted to find "the real Jesus." This is a news report that came out of one of their meetings in 1991:

Jesus never predicted he would return to Earth in a second coming, a majority of the 50 biblical scholars voted March 4 in a meeting of the Jesus Seminar at Sonoma, California. For example, a key passage in Mark 13 attributed to Jesus actually was composed at least four decades after the crucifixion, they said in a majority vote. The four-year-old 125-member seminar ruled in a vote last fall that Jesus did not compose the Lord's Prayer. Vernon Robbins, an Emory University religion teacher, said the group wants to encourage others to read the Bible with fresh eyes. And Arthur Dewey of Xavier

University hopes people will be “prodded” to re-think and “re-imagine” Christ.

Do you know what this is? This is not reading the Bible with fresh eyes. This is ignorance compounded by arrogance. It is blasphemy. That is all it is. Truth isn't established by majority vote. There's not a shred of evidence for what these so-called scholars are claiming. And a generation from now the participants in the Jesus Seminar will be right where the God-Is-Dead theologians of the 70's are—dead and forgotten.

Jude contrasts this kind of arrogant ignorance with the behavior of Michael the Archangel. When Moses died, you may recall, God decided to handle the burial Himself on Mt. Nebo, a remote desert mountain just across the Jordan River from Israel, so no one would know where he was buried. Why? Presumably so no one could build a shrine there and start worshipping his bones. Apparently God assigned the actual burial to Michael, but in the process of carrying out the task Satan opposed Michael. I don't know why—maybe Satan knew the value of Moses' bones in promoting idolatry among the Israelites (not that they needed much help!). So here we have the highest of the good angels disputing with the highest of the evil angels.

But Michael respected Satan's power sufficiently that he refused to speak arrogantly or slanderously toward the devil. He didn't say, like I've heard some Christians say, “I rebuke you, Satan.” Instead he said, “The Lord rebuke you!”ⁱⁱ In contrast to Michael's caution, apostates tends to speak abusively against things they do not understand.

Then Jude adds that apostates end up being destroyed by the things they *do* understand, namely the animal instincts they live by.

Apostates are destroyed by the things they do understand. (10b) Religious leaders in our country have developed ceremonies to celebrate divorce in the church; and families are destroyed. They promote homosexual marriage; and moral lives are destroyed. They protect and encourage abortion; and children's lives are destroyed. But don't get me wrong—these religious radicals are not all bad. They do care about turtle eggs and they do care about the rain forest! (Just a note of sarcasm there, in case you didn't pick it up!). How do these actions end up destroying them? Because God is going to judge them.

Based on historical precedent, apostates face certain judgment for their disobedience and rebellion. (11)

Here Jude offers three more examples from the OT. The first is Cain.

Example #1: Cain was a self-willed humanist. (11a) He was the first murderer, the first apostate, the first one who completely abandoned God and God's ways. I think Jude has in mind here the sacrifice that Cain brought. You perhaps remember that Abel brought a blood sacrifice but Cain brought a grain sacrifice. Abel's was accepted by God but not Cain's, and so Cain murdered his brother. It is possible that God had made it clear, even at this early stage in the human race, that a blood sacrifice is the only kind that could atone for sin. But Cain had a better idea. He would do it his own way.

Are you aware that one common characteristic of virtually all apostates in the church is their rejection of the sacrificial atonement of Christ? In Protestant pulpits around the country you might hear occasionally of the Cross, but if you listen closely, the Cross is treated as a noble example of love, a symbol of altruism. It is not the once-for-all sacrifice for sins. After all, man is essentially good, so he doesn't need atonement; he just needs examples to follow so he can reach his full potential. The apostates have taken the way of Cain.

Example #2: Balaam was a religious mercenary. (11b) Balaam has the distinction of being the only person in Scripture to be rebuked by an animal, a donkey. His story is fascinating and quite lengthy, as found in Numbers 22, 23, and 24. Let me just summarize it by saying that this prophet was a mercenary, a man who saw ministry as an opportunity to get rich. This is a characteristic of apostates in the church as well. There is a lot of money in religion for those who want to milk it. But Balaam has an even blacker mark on his record. He seduced Israel into sexual immorality. Apostates are often guilty on this score as well. Their lax attitude toward fornication, adultery, living together, pornography, and homosexuality sends a loud message to their congregations: if it feels good, do it. Just don't smoke!

Example #3: Korah was a rebel at heart. (11c) The story of Korah's rebellion is found in Numbers 16. Korah was a Levite who wasn't satisfied with being a Levite; he wanted to be a priest also. He developed the idea that the people of God are a democracy—he wanted total equality. Here's how he expressed it as he opposed Moses and Aaron: "You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the LORD's assembly?" Well, the reason Moses was leading was because God appointed him the leader. But Korah felt Moses should run for election—he had no right to assume authority.

Apostates in the church today talk the same way. Women should be completely equal, not only in value but in roles—both in the home and in the church. Many churches have quotas now for women elders and if they have more than one pastor, the second has to be a woman, and the head pastor often is. In many mainline seminaries today the number of women preparing for pastoral ministry exceeds the number of men. This complete equality concept bleeds into the ordination of homosexuals also. About the only thing that will eliminate you from being ordained in many denominations today is if you believe in the authority of Scripture. *That* they will not tolerate.

Cain, Balaam and Korah all illustrate disobedience and rebellion. These are always characteristics of apostasy.

Well, I've painted a pretty bleak picture of the apostasy the Christian church is facing today. But I must ask the question, "So what?" What does this have to do with to us at First Free, a biblical church in a biblical denomination? Can't we just do our own thing and ignore the apostates all around us?

Do you realize that the good apple in the basket of bad ones will never turn the bad ones good? But a bad one will turn the good ones bad. We can't ignore the bad apples because they are writing books, producing movies TV shows, getting on newscasts, and impacting our kids in college. History repeats itself, and if we are not constantly on guard, even we can be lured into thinking like an apostate. So,

how can we be vaccinated against apostasy?

How do we defend the faith against apostasy?

1. Conquer biblical illiteracy. I use battle terminology because this is war. Friends, if you did not know these OT stories when you came here this morning, there is no way you could know the lessons found in them. Biblical illiteracy is dangerous; it can be fatal. I challenge every person here this morning to become a student of God's Word. Read it. Study it. Meditate upon it. Memorize it. Live it! We have scores of ways to help you. There are dozens of weekly Bible studies for men, women, and couples, there are discipleship groups, there are youth groups. Our children's ministry pours the Bible into the lives of children from the cradle roll on up. Our Sunday morning services almost invariably take you through books of the Bible in a paragraph-by-paragraph journey.

I am especially excited about The Truth Project, which about 150 of our people have already taken. We're going to offer it again this Fall, and I encourage you to sign up. Mark and Amy Michaelis are leading a class that is reading through the Bible in a year. The goal of all these opportunities is to conquer biblical illiteracy so we can effectively combat apostasy.

2. Refuse cultural accommodation. The churches and denominations I have criticized this morning and the seminaries I have denounced have all been guilty of excessive cultural accommodation. They don't like to be looked upon as irrelevant or old-fashioned, so they will do almost anything to be accepted by the cultural elite. This is a particular temptation among the intelligentsia, and that is why the seminary has so often become the Devil's playground.

We need to question everything in our culture by asking, "Is this biblical, or am I succumbing to the 'frog in the kettle syndrome'?" We need to ask this about the entertainment we participate in, the books we read, the movies we watch, the financial goals we set, the consumerism we adopt, everything!

3. Have the courage to stand alone, if necessary. There may come a time when everyone around you, even your fellow evangelicals, will cave. Don't be afraid to stand alone. Be like Micaiah the prophet. When Jehoshaphat asked King Ahab if there wasn't a single prophet in his kingdom through which they could inquire of the Lord, Ahab responded, "There is still one man through whom we can inquire of the LORD, but I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad. He is Micaiah son of Imlah." (1 Kings 22:8). Would that God would give us a whole harvest of Micaiahs.

Friends, this is spiritual warfare we're talking about this morning. The Evil One is doing a number on the Church of Jesus Christ. In regard to both doctrine and behavior apostasy is everywhere around us. Though you already know all this, I just thought I would remind you.

Let's pray. Father, we're in a spiritual battle for sure. As the Apostle Paul said, "We battle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and

we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor. 10:4-6). Father, may it be so.

i. I want to take a moment and say something to anyone who might be struggling with homosexuality, and there are undoubtedly some in an audience this size who are. God doesn't hate you; in fact, He loves you. Nor is this passage predicting the punishment of eternal fire on all those who have homosexual tendencies. I will go further—it's not even a sin to *be* homosexual; what is a sin is *acting* on homosexual feelings.

Everyone of us has tendencies in our nature that are evil, tendencies which if acted upon are going to get us into big trouble. Some have the temptation to lie; others struggle with lust for the opposite sex; others with gluttony or greed; and still others with anger or rebellion against parents. I'm not suggesting that these tendencies are all equal in their consequences, but I am suggesting that none of us is free of temptation or addiction. It's when we feed our fantasies or act on them that we cross over into sin.

ii. I am troubled by the flippancy I see in some Christians' attitudes toward Satan. I hear people praying things like this: “I command Satan to leave this place,” or “I take authority over Satan and all his demons.” I'm not sure where the biblical basis for those kinds of prayers comes from. I know that “greater is He that is in us than He that is in the world.” And I believe that. But if the Holy Spirit is the one who is greater, maybe we should ask *Him* to take authority over Satan. Maybe we should let *Him* rebuke the evil one. Please understand that I am not suggesting that these prayers are evidence of apostasy in the individuals who pray them—not at all. I am just taking advantage of Jude's warning to address a separate issue I see in the church.