

Contending for the faith

Lesson Scripture: Jude 3-4, 17-25

Lesson Aims: To remember the need for constant vigilance against heresy, to distinguish between false teachers and the real ones, and to acquire more accurate knowledge of God.

Background: Today our study comes from one of the shorter books found in the New Testament - Jude. Along with James, he is the half-brother of Jesus (Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3). In these Scriptures, he is referred to as Judas (not the betrayer). From Nazareth, he too was probably a carpenter. He didn't initially accept Jesus as the Christ. Once he believes, Jude becomes an avid defender of the faith against apostasy (abandoning one's beliefs). False teachings corrupt the faith. The interpretations are laced with pagan views. A common heresy of the day was "antinomianism."

This doctrine held that the material and spiritual were sepa-

rate; therefore one could yield to the flesh and develop a strong spiritual life at the same time (UMI). Not so! The early church was seriously threatened by the heresies of the day. The message found in this epistle was originally to Jewish Christians, but it applies to all.

The challenge to believers is to contend (struggle) against heresies and to keep the faith.

Lesson: Jude, like Peter, wastes very little time getting to the heart of the matter. After a brief introduction of himself, he gives his purpose. He desires to write about the nature of their salvation, however, he is led in another direction. Jude warns them that godless men have slipped into the body (congregation) to change God's grace into a license for immorality and to deny the sovereignty of Jesus Christ. Verses 5-7 give historical examples of judgment of rebellious unbeliever - death of the adults after Mt. Sinai, judgment of fallen angels, Sodom and



Sunday School Lesson
Mildred Peppers

Gomorrah.

Beginning with verses 8-13 and 18-19, they are given a description of false teachers. Here he links moral pollution with refusing to recognize valid authority (Richard's Complete Bible Handbook). These false teachers not only pollute their bodies but their behaviors resemble that of animals (acting on instinct). Self serving they boast a lot; are always trying to impress others; and cause division. Again, the writer calls to their remembrance an Old Testament example - Enoch. Genesis 5: 19-24 recalls his life

and Hebrew 11:5-6 speaks of his faith. The believers are also reminded that the apostles told them of the coming of scoffers. They're response to them is to build a firm foundation upon their faith, continue to pray, and to live godly lives. Their faithful living, by the aid of the Holy Spirit will empower them to stand and God will bless their lives.

The believers' life style will serve as an example for others who may falter and as a rescue for the sinners. The rescue is motivated by Christ's love yet they are to remain cautious not to fall to sin them-

selves. Finally, the doxology is an excellent description of Jesus Christ. He is the One who saves us. He presents us spotless before God. To Him be glory (praise), majesty (sovereign power), power (jurisdiction) and authority (dominion) now and forevermore.

Application: Everyday of our lives, we encounter confusion brought on by the confused. Very often they are seeking truth, security, and acceptance. Unfortunately, some claim to have found it all by rebelling against God. They have "sweet mouths" as old folks used to say and are very convincing to those who don't know. The observant believer relies on their knowledge of Scripture and the Holy Spirit to discern truth from a lie. The knowledge of Scripture serves as a light in darkness.

Our daily battle is a spiritual one (read Ephesians 6:10-12). No, we aren't going to shoot up the place or bomb it (Ephesians 6:13-

17). Our victory is not based on intellect, physical strength, networking or the like. The victory is achieved by keeping the faith, knowing the Word of God and being guided by the Holy Spirit. False teachers have always been around - they're waiting on us tomorrow! The lesson today and II Peter teaches us what to look for.

These scoffers make very little of God's grace; Christians appreciate it and live in the spirit of holiness (controlling the flesh). Our witness is awesome. God doesn't want us to fall away. The body of believers is under siege. We must keep the faith, study the Word, and follow the Spirit. Our study life and prayer life strengthens our faith; thereby empowering us to remain loyal to God in all things.

To paraphrase Jude 24-25, let me close by saying "to the One that sustains us, and stands with us, be praise, majesty, and honor now and forevermore, Amen!

Leaders from N.C. join in concern over environment

Raleigh — More than 100 leaders from the corporate, civic, scientific and academic sectors have joined forces to form Save Our State, which hopes to draw attention to environmental problems in North Carolina and encourage conservation of the state's natural resources.

Steve Neal, the former Congressman and current president of the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, said Save Our State's mission is "to ensure economic development that is consistent with preserving a high quality of life, including a healthy environment." The foundation, which has focused much of its grants making on environmental issues, has taken a leading role in developing the Save Our State initiative.

A majority of the charter members of Save Our State attended the group's inaugural meeting in Raleigh today and received a briefing on water quality in eastern North Carolina from a panel of six experts. Wayne McDevitt, North Carolina's Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources, was the luncheon keynote speaker.

With members from all parts of North Carolina, Save Our State charter membership includes former Congressmen, a former United States Senator and Governor, corporate chief executive officers, award-winning scientists and other academicians, and personalities form the arts and literary worlds.

Hoping to influence public policy through education, Save Our State plans a series of briefings on various environmental concerns.

The initial briefing in Raleigh focused on water quality in eastern North Carolina. Degradation of water quality, caused primarily by enormous hog operations and inadequate municipal waste treatment plants, poses a serious threat to streams, rivers, and sounds in the east and threaten the whole state's image nationally and internationally, Neal said.

Gerry Hancock of Raleigh, an attorney and former legislator who represents the Travel and Tourism Coalition of North Carolina, told fellow Save Our State members that the problems caused by water and air quality degradation could have a devastating effect on travel and tourism, North Carolina's second largest industry.

"Tourists choose North Carolina largely because of our reputation for clean air, clean water, beautiful natural and historic resources and world class recreation. That reputation is a priceless asset, and it belongs to every citizen."

Speaking broadly about the state's image, Hancock said the loss of this reputation could produce irreparable economic damage throughout the state. "This potential economic damage would not be limited to the eastern counties featured in recent press articles. Outsiders judge the state as a whole and assume the problems they read about are statewide, not regional.

Hancock praised the General Assembly for taking strong action on this issue in the 1997 session.

"That legislation makes it clear we all had a role in creating the problem, and we all have a responsibility to fix it. Hog producers and growers, other agricultural interests, cities, towns, industries, busi-

ness and all the rest of us have a role to play in cleaning up the environmental problems we have helped to create. I am confident North Carolina will respond to the challenge. We have no other choice," Hancock said.

Douglas N. Rader, senior scientist with the North Carolina Environmental Defense Fund, told Save Our State members that "North Carolina is blessed with coastal resources that are among the most important in the world." He warned the group, however, "This vast heritage is now clearly at risk.

"Burgeoning coastal populations, urbanization in coastal watersheds, intensifying agriculture and forestry, and ever-more intense fish harvesting threaten the essential water quality which provides the foundation of this estuarine richness.

"Ah of these problems — the fish kills, the algal blooms, the contaminated fish and oysters — serve as evidence that the jewel in coastal North Carolina's crown is very much at risk," Rader said. "Only concerted action now by citizens to demand action in their name can begin to reverse the tide of water quality degradation. Only prompt action can begin the long task of protecting and restoring our coastal natural legacy," he warned.

Michele Nowlin, an attorney with the Southern Environmental Law Center in Chapel Hill, addressed the specific problem of agricultural wastes as a source of pollution. "The majority of the nitrogen entering the Neuse River comes from agricultural activities, including intensive animal production facilities. This type of pollution has proved the most elusive to control.

"In particular," Nowlin said, "non-point source runoff from the state's hog farms continues to add pollutants into the state's waters. With the state's hog population topping 13 million, it is essential that the state take advantage of the current moratorium on new farms to develop and exercise greater controls over the hog industry's waste disposal practices."

David McNaught, executive director of the state's recently formed Clean Water Management Trust Fund, was a panelist at the briefing also. "The citizens of North Carolina deserve a clean and healthy environment. Traditional water quality programs have not proved sufficient to protect or - where necessary - restore water quality in the rivers, lakes, creeks and estuaries of North Carolina. Several progressive initiatives to supplement traditional water quality programs have recently been implemented in North Carolina, but even these programs will not, in themselves, assure desired water quality standards.

"What these programs do," McNaught said, "is offer a wonderful opportunity to discover and foster the next generation of water quality protection strategies."

Save Our State is composed of citizens who want to safeguard North Carolina's natural and human resources while encouraging sustainable economic growth. Its members represent all geographic regions of the state and come from rural areas, small towns, and urban centers.

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