

Clouds Without Water

Jude's criticism of the 'ungodly men' who entered the church and laboured to deceive the Lord's people continues unabated. He first denounced them by linking them to examples of God's judgment in Egypt, Sodom and upon the fallen angels. Then he likened them to some of the most disreputable characters in the Old Testament scriptures. Now he describes their barren state and self-serving actions. All who look to such men for spiritual help will be poorly served.

Jude's need to write

Jude has the spiritual wellbeing of believers at heart. These verses are warnings to the Lord's people to resist false teachers, to reject false teaching and to call-out inappropriate conduct that contradicts the true, life-changing gospel of God's grace. The church is the society of believers in Jesus Christ who worship and share together in spiritual union. Its members fellowship and serve together in practical ways through mutually supportive activities. False doctrine is divisive and jeopardises this.

'Feasts of charity'

One of these activities in the early church was the agape meal or love feast, a simple meal designed to feed, nourish and comfort the poorest members. These ungodly men seem to have commandeered this church-ministry to feed their own appetites. Perhaps Jude had in mind the way Jewish passover celebrations had descended into occasions of greed and gluttony. The presence of these men in the public and practical ministry of the church and their misuse of resources for their own pleasure had become a blemish on the church's testimony.

Empty and useless

The apostle lists four powerful descriptions to underscore the barrenness of these graceless men in the church fellowship. He likens them to clouds without water, trees without fruit, roaring, foaming waves and wandering stars. The metaphors emphasise the futility and sterility of a Christless gospel. When there is no spiritual life in a man and no gospel truth in his ministry there can be no lasting usefulness to his labours.

Today's church

The huge faith-machine that presents itself as the church today is full of self-serving, career ministers who preside over a structure largely bereft of the quickening power of Jesus Christ. Today's church majors in religious tradition instead of spiritual truth. It preaches human improvement without the need of transforming grace. It substitutes music and performance for spiritual worship. It specialises in good-works activity with no genuine spiritual direction.

Real faith

Jude's contrast is that the gospel of sovereign grace is spiritually enlivening and refreshing, like rain on dry ground. The gospel of God promotes growth and nourishes the soul as sweet fruit sustains a body. God's love and mercy is silent and deep as the ocean. It creates faith and joins that faith to the eternal Sun that is the risen Christ. Outside of Christ sinners are reserved in the blackness of darkness for ever. In Christ is light, life and everlasting joy according to the salvation He has accomplished.

Earnestly contend

The Lord's faithful apostle is warning the church of Jesus Christ not to be complacent about false teachers and not to be tolerant of false doctrine. He is advocating that we earnestly contend for the truth once delivered to the saints. We do this by recognising the difference between the true gospel and the false, and by marking those who trouble the Lord's people by their error. We do it by denying such men a role in our love-feasts which is the preaching of the gospel and the ministry of the word.

Truth that frees

The Lord Jesus Christ told His disciples 'ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free' and Paul told Timothy 'in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils'. As believers we should note and believe these scriptural statements. The apostles were anxious that we should defend the true gospel, being convinced it is the proper means of grace, given for direction in the way of life and suitable for

instruction on the path of righteousness.

Amen

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