

**Core Seminar**

**Marriage**

**Class 22: 2 Peter & Jude: Perseverance in the Midst of Falsehood**

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**Introduction & Purpose: False Teaching “Among You”**

One of my favorite things to do when I take a flight somewhere is to spend some time browsing through the airport bookstore. The bookstore is a reminder that we live in a pluralistic age, where atheist manifestos sit in the same sale bin as Buddhist meditation guides and commentaries on the Qur’an. As a Christian, I walk through and notice plenty of falsehood: everything from the book God Is Not Great by the late atheist Christopher Hitchens, to a Hindu text promising “A Life of Purpose, Happiness, Prosperity, and Freedom.”

Now, I must say that it’s discouraging to see these titles; these books are dangerous, they deny the one true God. But it typically doesn’t ruin my flight – this is what we expect from people who don’t claim to believe in Jesus. *But* what happens when I get to the Christian section of the bookstore? Is that shelf full of truth? If I grab any book with a Christian label, will I arrive in my destination as a wiser and more faithful follower of Christ?

With that question in mind, listen to the Apostle Peter’s words from 2 Peter 2:1: “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies” And then listen to the 4th verse of the letter written by Jude: “For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and lord, Jesus Christ.”

In 2Peter, there “will be” false teachers that come; in Jude, they have already “crept in” unnoticed. But did you hear what phrase both authors use: “**among you**.” These two letters aren’t about defending the faith against Roman polytheism or Greek philosophy. They’re fighting something even more dangerous: falsehood with the Christian label. Poison wrapped up like a candy bar. The question is: will we be those who eat the poison? Or will we be alert and aware? As you see there under “purpose,” Peter and Jude write *To warn Christians against false teaching and to encourage them to persevere in the true faith.*

So, first, we’ll look at some background and an outline for each book, and then we’ll talk about four main themes, four certainties that these books call us to know. We’re going to jump around a bunch between these two letters, so you’ll want to keep your finger or a pen on both of them as we go.

**II. Authorship, Audience & Context**

Let’s begin by talking about who’s writing. **Please turn to** **2 Peter** 1:1 (p. 1204). The book begins, “*Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ*” We see the author here identifies himself as Peter, and then look at 1:16: “*For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye witnesses of his majesty.”* Peter goes on to tell about how he personally saw the transfiguration of Jesus.

Who’s Peter writing to? Look over at 3:1: “*This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder.”* It’s likely that the first letter is the Biblical letter of 1 Peter, which as we saw in 1 Peter 1:1 was written to Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor, modern day Turkey. Peter wrote that letter to encourage believers as they suffered through persecution. But now, it’s not just attacks from the outside that concern Peter – it’s attacks from within. And Peter says in 1:14 that *“I know that the putting off of my body will be soon.”* – he can tell that his death is near. And so he pens one final warning to his people.

**Turn over to Jude** and let’s ask some of the same questions. Who wrote it? Verse 1, “*Jude a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James*.” Scholars agree that the James he’s talking about is James the half-brother of Jesus and the leader of the Jerusalem church who wrote the book of James. This means that Jude too is a brother of Jesus.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Who is he writing to? Verse 1 makes it clear that his audience is Christians: “*To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ.”* When we look at the rest of the letter, we can guess that his readers were most likely Jewish Christians, because Jude refers to some characters and stories that would have been known in the Jewish community. Now, if you read through Jude this week, you’ll probably be curious about these references because a couple of them don’t actually come from the Old Testament. Jude alludes to a story about the archangel Michael in verse 9[[2]](#footnote-2) and quotes from a book called 1st Enoch in verse 14. What’s Jude doing here? He’s not saying that these things are scripture. Instead, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he’s illustrating his points using stories that his audience would be familiar with. The things he refers to are true, but he’s not suggesting that all of 1 Enoch is inspired or inerrant. Paul did the same thing when he quoted true statements from non-inspired Greek philosophers in Acts 17 and 1 Corinthians 15.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Now, one of the interesting things about these two books is just how alike they are. They don’t just deal with similar themes, they actually share the same language in many places. For this reason, it’s likely that the books were written in light of each other. In the early days of Christianity, letters such as these would have been widely distributed, so it seems like for the sake of having a unified message, one of the writers decided to echo phrases and themes from the other letter. You see in your handout there a chart that shows which verses resemble each other. You can look at that at home and notice all the similarities.

Which letter came first? Really hard to say. But whatever the order of authorship, what we should take away is that the reality of false teaching was serious enough to deserve two letters in the New Testament, and so it’s certainly serious enough for us to take notice and examine closely.

**III. Outline**

With that background in place, let’s look at how these books are structured so we can see how the authors mount their arguments. You’ll see the outlines on the back of the handout.

2 Peter

Looking first at 2nd Peter, you’ll see that in many ways it’s a symmetrical letter. It begins and ends with exhortations for believers. First, in 1:1-15, Peter reminds them that they are saved only by God’s power and calls them to “make every effort” to live in a way that confirms God’s work in them. Similarly, the book closes at the end of chapter 3 with an instruction to “make every effort” to live in holiness as we wait for the second coming of Christ. In the the second section, Peter gives reasons we can be confident that Jesus is returning, and in the 4th section, 3:1-13, Peter explains what will happen when the day of the Lord comes. The middle section, then, chapter 2, is really the center of the book’s message. Peter describes the false teachers, their godless way of life, and the horrific destruction that will God will pour out on them.

Jude

And we see a similar structure in Jude. It’s one of the briefest books in the Bible – you can tell that Jude is like a loving father who is spurred to passionate writing by the dire circumstances his children face. Like 2 Peter, the center of the book is a portrait of the empty lifestyle of the false teachers and the judgment that awaits them. And immediately before and after that center portrait are again two exhortations – first, in verses 3-4, to contend for the faith, and second, in verses 17-23, to be built up in the knowledge and love of God. At the very beginning and end of the book, Jude in his greeting and doxology reminds his readers that in the midst of such falsehood, God is a true and faithful hope. God is the one who called them, and God is the one who will keep them from falling until they appear before his glorious presence.

***Any Questions****?*

**IV. Main Themes**

Let’s turn to 4 major themes we see in these books. You can follow along on the 2nd page of your handout.

First: **A. The Certainty of Your Call**

Think about what Peter and Jude’s readers are facing. You’ve got false teachers looming, spreading error and confusion like confetti around the early church. In this climate, it was key for Christians to be sure of their salvation. So, first, the authors tell them that their **salvation is utterly and totally God’s work**.

Look, for example, at the second half of Jude v. 1: “*To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ.”*  Being called means being chosen by God personally for new life in Christ.

Peter says something similar in 2 Pet. 1:3-4. Go ahead and turn there: “*His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.”* What a comfort these words are: ***He*** has given us everything we need for life and godliness. It’s through ***His promises*** that we escape the corruption of sin and become spiritually alive. Verse 1 says even our faith is something we’ve received from God. Jesus died and rose for the salvation of sinners. And by repentance and faith, we are clothed in the pure, spotless, and complete righteousness of Jesus.

And yet, even though our calling is from God, it has implications for us. Peter continues in verses 5-11: “*For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”*

He’s saying: God has saved you. Now, your responsibility is to live in such a way that confirms that you really are saved. Here’s a great example of how the Bible upholds both God’s sovereignty and human responsibility: It’s God who calls, and yet God’s call results in our action. The image of adoption is useful for illustrating this – the Bible says elsewhere that God has adopted us as his sons. And what do children do? They’re supposed to live Iike their father. They uphold the family reputation. It’s like he’s saying, “You’ve been made part of the family by grace, you didn’t earn it, and you can’t lose it. Now, as you imitate the Father and live like him, your assurance that you really are part of the family will deepen and grow.”

So, Peter tells usto “**Be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election**” – verse 10. How? We make it sure by what we do: “For if you practice these qualities you will never fall.” – not meaning that you’ll be perfect in this life or that you’ll never sin, but that the pattern of your life will confirm that your repentance and faith are genuine. What things do we do? Verse 5 – we make every effort to grow in Christ-like virtues and qualities.

To put it in more theological language, sanctification, the process by which we become more like Christ, is both passive and active. It’s passive in that we depend totally on God’s strength to grow us – verse 3, his power gives us all we need for godliness. He has given us his Holy Spirit. And it’s active in that we are responsible to pursue holiness the way an athlete fights for the gold medal.

So let me ask us this morning: when was the last time you **examined the fruit of your life**? Look at the qualities Peter lists in verses 5-7 – goodness, knowledge, self-control – do you see evidence of these virtues in your life more and more as you follow Jesus? Do you expend effort on growing in godliness? Can you think of one way this upcoming week you could “make every effort” to grow in these characteristics? One of the ways we can serve each other as brothers and sisters is by helping to give one another this assurance that Peter is talking about. We should notice evidences of grace in the other members of this church, and we should tell them about it! “Hey, I just wanted to let you know, I can see how God has grown you in perseverance this past year and you should be comforted to know that the Spirit is at work in you!”

Jude’s letter has a good reminder for us here. He says in verse 21, “*keep yourselves in the love of God.”* – that’s this kind of active sanctification we’ve been talking about – but then he adds, *“waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.”* It’s not our good deeds that cause us to persevere to the end. It’s the **mercy of Jesus**. So: one of the ways we *know* we are saved is by the evidence in our lives. But the way *that* we are saved is by trusting in the mercy of Jesus alone.

The first certainty is the certainty of our call; Second is **B. The certainty of God’s truth.**

When falsehood is waiting around every corner, we don’t just need to be certain about our own faith – we need to be certain about what’s true.

So, Jude tells his readers in verses 17-18 to **recall the words of the apostles**. Their teaching is true. They predicted false teachers would come, and now false teachers are here, so that’s one good piece of evidence that their teaching is correct!

And then in 2 Peter chapter 2 he says, “listen, the false teachers will make up stories and introduce heresies.” But we have something far better: Look **at 1:19-21**. *“And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”*

Why should we trust the writings of the Old Testament? Because they are God’s Word. Here we have one of the clearest statements in scripture about the Bible’s inspiration. The authors used words and concepts natural to them, but the source of the revelation was the Holy Spirit. So if anyone comes and teaches in opposition to the scripture – then they teach in opposition to God himself.

And, importantly, God’s Word is **not just the Old Testament**. Look at 2 Pet. 3:15-16: *“And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.”* This is a significant verse, because we have one of the early church apostles already calling Paul’s writing scripture. And, what a comfort to know that we aren’t the first to find some parts of Paul’s letters hard to understand, right?!

All of this should be a reminder to us: A Christian is an echo-chamber of God’s Word. The church is the community in which God’s Word reverberates. I appreciate in 2 Peter 3:2 where he tells his readers and us, what he wants us to do, straight up, pure and simple: “*you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets.”* What do you do to keep God’s Word on your mind? He says in 1:19 that we should pay attention to the Word like we would to a light shining in a dark place. If you’ve ever been out in the woods late at night; if you’ve ever been in a dark area where you don’t know how to get back to your cabin or your car; what do you need? The light. Maybe the problem is that we so often forget just how dark the world is. We get comfortable, our retinas adjust, and we think we can make it on our own in woods. We should pray that each day we might recognize the value of the light of God’s Word. We should point one another to the light of God’s Word. What’s the greatest resource I have in making sure I know how to discern which “Christian” book I pick up at the airport is actually true – the light of God’s Word. False teachers 🡪 they breed uncertainty. God’s Word 🡪 leads us to certainty of the truth.

**Any Questions or Comments?**

Let’s turn to theme that is front and center in each of these books:

C. **The Certainty of Bad Fruit from False Teaching**

Peter says in 2 Pet. 3:3, “*Knowing first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires.”* One of Peter and Jude’s main goals in writing? It’s that their readers wouldn’t be surprised. They are saying: you can be absolutely, 100% sure that false teachers will emerge, and their fruit will be rotten. So don’t be shocked; be prepared.

One of the ways they call their readers to be prepared is by describing some of the **flawed doctrine** these scoffers hold. We can sum it up this way: in 2nd Peter, the false teachers say “It doesn’t matter what we do because Jesus isn’t coming back.” Look at 2 Pet. 3:4: “*They will say, ‘Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.”* And it’s similar in Jude. Here the false teachers say “It doesn’t matter what we do because God’s a God of grace!” Look at Jude v. 4, starting in the middle of the verse, he refers to these false teachers as: “*Ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.”*

We saw in the letter of Galatians that one of the false teachings that can cripple the church is legalism – the idea that we have to earn our standing in God’s sight by obeying his law. But in these two letters, we’re on the other side of the spectrum. Here, we’re dealing with **antinomianism** – literally, *anti*, “against,” *nomos*, “law.” These false teachers twist the Gospel so that God’s grace is not about us being forgiven so we can please God; it’s about God not caring so we can please ourselves.

But the main way Peter and Jude call their readers to be prepared is by describing the **godless lifestyle** of these teachers. Just as Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount: “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them.”[[4]](#footnote-4) What kind of fruit do these teachers have?

* For one, they **reject authority.** 2 Pet. 2:10: *Especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority. Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones.”*
* Second, they **embrace immorality**. 2 Pet. 2:13-14: *Suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you. They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children!*
* And third, they **serve only themselves**. Turn over to Jude vv. 12 and 16: “*These are hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, shepherds feeding themselves…” [Verse 16:] “These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires; they are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage.*

These guys are like fake doctors who promise healing when they only want the money.

What are we called to do in **response?** Look at Jude 3: “*Beloved, although I was eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.”* **Contend for the faith.** 2 Pet. 3:17 says “*Take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.”* In other words, defend the truth of the Gospel against those who teach it wrongly, and live in obedience that provides a stark contrast with the lifestyle of those who rebel against Christ. Now, this doesn’t mean we should spend all day writing angry blog posts or turn every spiritual conversation into an argument. What it means is that we should know the truth, love the truth, and stand for truth even when it goes against the grain.

For us, today, especially thinking about falsehood that slips in under Christian label, there is a whole host of unbiblical teaching that we need to be aware of and contend against. On the one hand, you’ve got groups like Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons that deny truth about Jesus, on the other you have the prosperity Gospel that misunderstands who God is and how he works. There’s theologically liberal Protestantism that rejects the bodily resurrection of Christ, and then there are those who may believe in Jesus but also discard key doctrines like the atonement, hell, and the idea that God knows the future. All of this means that we should do what Jude v. 20 says and build ourselves up in the most holy faith – making sure that we know the Gospel, we know the Word, and we’re sitting under faithful teaching.

But in contending for the faith, we also need to know that it’s not our job ultimately to defeat false teachers. That’s God’s role. And that leads us to our fourth and final theme,

**D. The Certainty of God’s Judgment**

Right now, we can only see the fruit. But God knows the heart.

And so Jude says in v. 14: “’Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousand of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him.’”

What’s even more tragic is that the false teachers don’t realize this judgment is coming. In fact, as we saw in 2 Pet. 3:4, they mock the idea that Jesus would ever return.

Why is it wrong to think God will never judge? Peter gives 2 reasons: First, time is completely different for God. Look at 2 Pet. 3:8: “*With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”* Second, the fact that God hasn’t judged *yet* doesn’t mean he never will. In fact, the reason judgment hasn’t come yet is because he is merciful. 3:9, “*The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”*

But when God does judge, it will come suddenly. 3:10, *“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.”*

But false teachers aren’t the only ones who will face God’s judgment; we will, too. And when we face God on that day, our teachers won’t be standing beside us. Each of us will someday give account for how we have used the lives God gave us. It may be a useful exercise this week to look through the passages in these books that describe the false teachers, and reflect on the fact that without the grace of Jesus – the false teachers would be us. Selfish, lustful, manipulative, grumblers and faultfinders... 2 Pet. 2:19, “slaves of corruption.” We should be in shock and awe at the great, painful judgment that awaits false teachers. But we should be in even more shock and awe that Jesus took every ounce of the destruction we deserve, for all who would repent and believe.

Since God is indeed coming to judge the whole universe, how should we live? 2 Peter has a couple of instructions for us:

* First, **Pursue holiness.** 2 Pet. 3:11-12: *“Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God.”* Don’t live as if God doesn’t care. Don’t take his patience as license to sin. We can ask ourselves, in moments of temptation: “On the day of God, will I be happy that I indulged this sin?” Pursue holiness.
* Second, **Look forward**. 2 Pet. 3:13: *“But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”* What will that new heaven and new earth be like? A home of righteousness where wrong, and injustice, and rebellion are vanquished. Why would we not long for such a place? And God has given us his Word so that we can know something of this new heaven and new earth – the books of Thessalonians and Revelation that we’ll be studying in the next few weeks will point our gaze to that day. We can meditate on heaven. It’s kind of like a travel guidebook – I love these things, if I’m going somewhere where I haven’t been, I grab the guidebook from the library, look at the pictures, imagine the streets, anticipate the taste of the food – I love meditating on where I’m going. Of course, when I get there, usually it’s much better than I ever imagined. Brothers and sisters, how much more will heaven exceed every meditation and anticipation of our hearts. We should meditate on heaven.

That’s what 2 Peter and Jude call us to do – to look forward to that day when we will see Christ face to face. **Any questions?**

**Conclusion**

In many ways, reading 2 Peter and Jude is like stepping out into the winter air. These books confront us with the cold reality of false teaching and the calling for us to brace ourselves and contend for the faith. It’s enough to leave us feeling a bit scared and inadequate, if we’re honest. But these authors do not want us to be without hope. In the end, we can be certain of our call – we can be certain of God’s Word – we can be certain that false teachers’ bad fruit will be recognizable – and we can be certain that God himself will judge. And we can be certain that in the midst of all, God will sustain us and keep us until the end. So listen to how Jude closes his letter and let’s take comfort in the reality that this is the God that we serve:

24Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before his presence with great joy, 25to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

**Let’s pray.**

1. “Jude” is an English translation of the same Greek word “Ioudas” which can also be translated “Judah” or “Judas” – so it is likely that the Judas of Mt. 13:55 and Mk. 6:3 is the Jude of this book. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Early Church Fathers said that this episode was found in *The Assumption of Moses*. See Carson and Moo, p.694. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Acts 17:28: “‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’” 1 Cor. 15:33: “Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character.’” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Mt. 7:15-16 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)