

Fighting for a Faith Under Fire

The Challenge of Jude

Introduction – six word stories

The story is told that Ernest Hemingway was once challenged to write a story using only six words. He took the challenge and came back with the phrase:

For sale: baby shoes, never worn

He won the bet! I don't know about you, but Hemingway's six words certainly tell a story to me. I can't help but flesh it out – seeking to understand the reason why the shoes were for sale, who was selling them and why they had never been worn. It is amazing how much can be said in just six words. This story inspired the recent publication of a book called *Not Quite what I was Planning*. It is a collection of the attempts of a wide range of people (some famous, and some obscure) to summarise their lives in six words. Some of the resulting phrases can be found online at: <http://www.smithmag.net/sixwords/>.

The phrases included range from the sublime ...

Danced in fields of infinite possibilities (Deepak Chopra)

... to the ridiculous ...

I managed not to destroy anything (Tucker Frazier)

I ate, drank and was hairy (Yianni Varonis)

They expressed frustration ...

Thought I would have more impact (Kevin Clark)

... unfulfilled potential ...

Never really finished anything except cake (Carletta Perkins)

... and thwarted plans ...

Not quite what I was planning (Summer Grimes)

There was humour ...

Without me, it is just aweso- (Chris Madigan)

... and sadness ...

Everyone who loved me is dead (Ellen Fanning)

Some people focussed on their own image ...

Wasn't born a redhead, fixed that (Andie Grace)

Quietly cultivating my inner Lynda Carter (Joanna Sheehan)

... others on the joys of relationships ...

She kissed me and said yes! (Ricardo Saramaga)

Secret of life: marry an Italian (Nora Ephron)

... still others on the disappointments when they go wrong ...

Never should have bought that ring (Paul Bellows)

Ex-wife and contractor now have house (Drew Peck)

Of course, there was the joy of new parenthood ...

Found true love after nine months (Jody Smith)

... and the result a decade down the line ...

I'm ten and I have an attitude (Tillie Seger)

Some even commented on faith, albeit with a confused understanding ...

Not a good Christian, but trying (Alexander Tsai)

The challenge to me was, how would I summarise my life in six words? It's an exercise you might also want to undertake. As I was preparing for this message it also made me wonder if I could summarise the message of a Bible book in just six words. The title of this message is my attempt to capture Jude's message in six words. As I got into Jude, it also challenged me to think more deeply about the real meaning of life and the centre of the Christian faith that is shaping me.

Not quite what Jude was planning (v1-3)

Jude describes himself as a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James. There are a number of people called Jude (or Judas) in the New Testament, but only one is described as having a brother called James. In Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3 we read of half-brothers of Jesus with these names. So, we can conclude that Jude was the son of Mary and Joseph. We know that these brothers did not follow Jesus during His ministry, but clearly after His death and resurrection they came to faith in Him. James, who wrote the letter that bears his name, became a leader in the church in Jerusalem. It seems likely that Jude also lived and ministered in the region of Judea, and the extensive use of references to the Old Testament and Jewish writings indicates that this letter was written to a church or churches in Judea whose members would have been familiar with these texts.

In v2 we have an example of what Gilbert Lennox (author of *Getting the Message*, an excellent guide to Bible study) calls a "key in the front door". Jude's greeting is to wish his readers mercy, peace and love. This seems fairly unremarkable, but it differs from most other New Testament letters, where the greeting includes grace and peace, sometimes with the addition of mercy. The fact that Jude does not mention the word grace may make us ask the question whether that is significant. As we read on in the letter we will discover that there was indeed a problem with the use of the word "grace". Also, we will see that the idea of mercy is important.

Jude then speaks in v3 of his reason for writing. There has been a change of plans, and this letter is not the one he originally intended to write. It seems he had eagerly wanted to write a letter celebrating the salvation he had in common with them, but that he had become aware of a challenge facing the church and had decided instead to write the letter that we now read. His intention is to urge them to:

contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints

They must fight for (the word is surely stronger than "defend", as some translations express it):

- **The faith** – this phrase refers to the truth of the gospel – the central claims of Christ and His apostles. The use of the phrase implies that this message is truth that can be trusted. We may compare this to our current age of postmodernity in which there is suspicion of any claim to absolute truth. The gospel is an absolute reality – a truth that can transform the lives of all who trust in it – a concrete foundation for life.
- **Once for all** – the gospel was established by Christ and the apostles. It does not, and cannot change. Every generation must fight for the faith against new challenges, and, often, against the same age old challenges in new packing, but the faith itself does not change. We must be grounded in the faith, committed to learning and growing in it and prepared to fight for it against whatever challenges it may face.
- **Entrusted to the saints** – notice that Jude doesn't say that the gospel has been entrusted to him, or to the church leaders or those with the responsibility and gift of teaching. The faith has been entrusted to the saints – to every believer – to all of us. This is a shared responsibility. We must stand together and each play our part in the fight.

The challenge (v4)

The challenge that faced this local church was because of people – "certain men" as Jude calls them. It is worth pausing for a minute to let this sink in. We may tend to think of problems in church in terms of wrong ideas and behaviour or unhelpful programmes, traditions or patterns, but these things would not exist if it were not for people. It is through people that wrong ideas are taught and spread. It is people who hold on to unhelpful practices. It is people who fall into sin and influence others to sin. The church is simply a gathering of people, and where there are people there will be problems. Having said this, Jude does not make excuses for the people who are causing problems in this church, and he doesn't mince his words. This is a common feature of the New Testament, and one which might make us pause to think about our practice in the 21st Century Church. Where people were harming the church, the apostles and other New Testament writers were not slow to confront, expose and challenge them. In this case Jude has some pretty strong things to say about these men:

1. Condemnation awaits them

The word translated "was written about long ago" is *prographo*, which literally means "written before". This phrase has been understood in two ways:

- a) That it was God who did the writing and that it means that these men were pre-ordained or pre-destined for condemnation before creation. This understanding is reflected in the NIV footnotes, "who were marked out for condemnation", but raises difficult questions about the fairness of God's judgement and the nature of human choice.
- b) That the writing beforehand refers to Old Testament and other predictions about the condemnation that awaits people who act as these men have acted. This author believes that this understanding is most in keeping with the context, since Jude continues from v5 onwards to detail the written predictions about such people, and with the Biblical revelation about God. Most importantly, it would be unwise to base a belief in the pre-ordination of some people to judgement on this verse alone.

So, these men will face condemnation – their actions will not be allowed forever to plague the church. We will return to this in greater detail later when we examine verses 5 to 16.

2. They had "secretly slipped in" among the believers

The Greek for this phrase is *pareisedysan*, and is related to the word used by Paul in Galatians 2:4 of "false brothers" who had "infiltrated" the church to spy on them and to influence them towards legalism. It is unclear whether Jude is saying that these men have intentionally infiltrated the church with the conscious aim of causing damage, or whether they are genuine but wrong and have slipped in because their wrong teachings and influence was not immediately obvious. In some ways the distinction, although important to our modern sensibilities, is unimportant in Jude's view. Whether these men are doing it deliberately or through ignorance the fact is that they are threatening the health of the church and the reputation of the gospel. Again there is a reminder to us that we must not allow our desire to be gracious and respectful of others to lead to compromise in the core truths of our faith. One cannot imagine Jude (or Paul, Peter or John for that matter) saying, "We respect the views of our opponents, and we have much in common, but there are a few issues on which we differ". I am not advocating an aggressive or unloving approach to those who hold different views, but we must be clear, honest and firm in our objection to ideas that are contrary to the "faith once for all entrusted" to us. The reality is that the greatest threat to the church is from within. Much as the attacks of atheists and secularists from without are serious and must be faced, fact is that the church suffers much more from compromise, false teaching and ungodliness within. There is no greater challenge when trying to share the gospel than the objection that Christians do not live up to what they profess.

3. They were "godless men"

Once again, Jude is strong in his exposure of these men. They are godless (*asebes*). In other words they live without any connection to or reverence for God. This is a deeply spiritual issue, and the only possible interpretation of this phrase is that these men are not true believers in Christ at all. In v15, Jude elaborates on this idea. Four times he uses words related to *asebes* to describe these people as "the ungodly" and "ungodly sinners", who do "ungodly acts", in an "ungodly way". The message is clear, the words, actions and attitudes of these people are simply a reflection of their nature. They are not God's people, they are living without Him and in rebellion against Him.

4. They had changed the faith

What, then, was it that these men were guilty of? Undoubtedly there were actions that were sinful for which they must be held accountable (these become clear in v5-19), but in this verse Jude's focus is on the distorted version of the true faith that they believed and were teaching. They had replaced the faith entrusted to the saints with a counterfeit version. Their message was distorted in two ways:

- a) **Their understanding of grace was wrong** – they believed that God's grace towards us gives us license to live in an immoral way. This may, at first, seem fairly obviously wrong, but we need to think a little further before we conclude that it is unlikely to be a snare to us. Paul was very concerned with this argument when he wrote Romans. In Romans 6:1 he anticipates people who will say they can keep on sinning as this will actually provide an opportunity for God's grace to increase. The remainder of chapter 6 and all of chapter 7 is dedicated to showing why this kind of thinking is absurd. For Paul, grace could never be an excuse for sin. If truly grasped, it would transform the person's life and lead to godly character and behaviour. This is captured succinctly in Titus 2:11-12, where Paul imagines grace as a teacher:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age. Jude clearly agreed with Paul in his assessment of true grace. To claim to have received God's grace and then to live in ungodliness is nonsense. Grace produces a profound change in us. When we respond to it in humility and gratitude, it motivates us to reject our sinful nature and to offer our lives fully to God. In this author's experience this understanding of grace is being lost among many contemporary professing Christians. In the name of a reaction against legalism they engage in lifestyle choices that show little regard for truth. The claim that they can be more effective in reaching others by living like them becomes a cover for self-indulgence and lack of self-control.

- b) **They denied the Lordship of Christ** – the end result of the transforming work of grace in our lives is to bring us under the Lordship of Christ. The Christian realises that in Christ they are free from sin and law, but that they are utterly dependent on God's power to overcome the deception and desires of the sinful nature. They have renounced their claim to live independently and have gladly surrendered to Christ's Lordship over their lives. This is nothing more than a recognition of the true nature of reality – that Jesus Christ is Lord and should therefore be Lord of my life. There is a pernicious and persistent idea that circulates in Christian circles that it is somehow possible to have received Jesus Christ as Saviour but not as Lord – that a person can have become a Christian without understanding the need to surrender to Christ's leadership. The New Testament knows of no such possibility. A person who has denied that Jesus Christ is their sovereign Lord has never known Him at all. They remain ungodly and trapped in the snare of their sin. To become a Christian is to acknowledge Jesus as Saviour **and** Lord.

Their condemnation foretold (v5-19)

Jude now presents us with no less than nine examples of earlier warnings that judgement would come upon people like those who had infiltrated this church. They are structured in five sections marked out by the phrase "These men" or similar phrases.

Before we examine Jude's examples, we must first address a potential difficulty in the sources he uses. Jude refers (in v9 and in v14-15) to two Jewish books that were not regarded as inspired by either Jews or Christians, and hence were not included in our Bible. It has been suggested that Jude must have regarded these books as having equal authority with the Old Testament stories to which he also refers, and therefore that these references cast doubts over whether we can be confident that the books contained in our Bible are the only ones that should be regarded as inspired by God, or whether it is even correct to speak in terms of divine inspiration. These concerns are, however, unfounded. The fact that Jude deliberately separates these apocryphal examples out from the Old Testament examples, which are distinctly grouped in threes, shows that he regarded these texts differently from the inspired Old Testament books. Jude is merely using these Jewish writings to build a cast iron case for God's judgement on the men troubling the church in his time. He is showing that there is a consistent principle of judgment in both inspired and uninspired sources. This usage is similar to Paul's references to the words of Greek poets (Acts 17:28) and Cretan prophets (Titus 1:12). The inclusion of their words in the text of Scripture does not imply that they were inspired by God, but simply that they are true. The basis on which we accept the books of the Bible as inspired is a combination of their authorship (especially as regards New Testament books, which were produced within the circle of apostolic authority), their acceptance by God's people (did they receive general acceptance at an early stage) and their influence (how have they impacted God's people). The phrase "all truth is God's truth" is often used to explain that everything that is true, however it is discovered, can teach us something about God's nature. God has revealed Himself to us through His creation and through our conscience as well as through His inspired word, but His ultimate revelation of Himself is in the person of Christ. In speaking about God's truth it is often helpful to refer to statements of Christian and non-Christian sources wherever their words are consistent with what we know about God from Scripture. Preachers frequently do this, and there is no reason why it should seem odd that Jude does too.

So, now we turn to Jude's nine examples:

Three Old Testament examples (v5-7)

- *The Israelites* who left Egypt but died in the desert because they didn't believe (v5) – see Numbers 14 and other passages
- *The fallen angels* who abandoned their positions and are bound awaiting judgement (v6) – these angels are referred to in Genesis 6
- *Sodom and Gomorrah* and their surrounding towns who surrendered themselves to sexual sin and set an example of punishment with eternal fire (v7) – see Genesis 19

There is a crescendo of punishment in these examples, from physical death to binding in darkness to eternal fire, which is probably intentional as Jude builds the dramatic tension.

APPLICATION: “These dreamers ...” (v8)

The fact that Jude calls these men “dreamers” may imply that they based the authority of their teachings on revelations they claimed to have received in dreams, or it may simply be a reference to the lack of substance in their ideas. Jude lists three things that “these dreamers” do:

- a) *Pollute their own bodies* – probably a reference to sexual sin, like that of Sodom and Gomorrah
- b) *Reject authority* – like the angels who sinned by rejecting the position God had assigned them
- c) *Slander glories* – this is presumably a parallel with the Israelites who died in the desert. It is probably based on the Jewish belief that the Law was given through angels (the truth of this belief is confirmed in three New Testament passages: Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:19; Hebrews 2:2). It is possible that these men slandered Satan and demons by rebuking them on their own authority.

One example from an apocryphal Jewish writing (v9)

The reference to *Michael and the body of Moses* is from a Jewish writing called *the Assumption of Moses*. The story refers to a dispute between Michael and Satan over the body of Moses. Michael did not rebuke Satan on the basis of slander or in his own authority, but simply said “the Lord rebuke you”. This example probably refers back to the slandering of glories mentioned in v8. Satan, even though he is the enemy of God, is not to be treated lightly. He remains immensely powerful and it would be all too easy for human beings to fall into the snare of pride by treating him with disdain and thinking that we are able to defeat him in our own strength. Only in God's power and using the resources He gives can we stand strong against the devil (Ephesians 6:10-11).

APPLICATION: “These men ...” (v10)

These men speak abusively against things that they don't understand. They are “unteachable”. When there are gaps in their knowledge they do not seek truth or understanding! Furthermore, they do not trust in God when they reach the limits of their own understanding, but engage in unhealthy speculation, seeking to fill in the gaps with theories that lead them away from God and His truth. They will be destroyed by following their instincts like animals. In other words, they are fundamentally not led by the Spirit of truth, but by the sinful nature. It is important to say that there will always be gaps in our knowledge and understanding, but where this is the case we should continue to read Scripture and seek to understand God's truth more fully. Where Scripture does not completely and definitively answer our questions we must accept that God has chosen not to reveal an answer to us, or perhaps that we are unable to understand the issue fully. In these situations it is hugely dangerous to engage in speculation or to attempt to tie up every loose end. Perhaps some of our theological systems are in danger of straying into this territory, especially when we become dogmatic about formulations and statements that are not found in Scripture, or where they become measures of the orthodoxy of other Christians who have a different view. Perhaps if we were content to restrict ourselves to what Scripture says we could avoid unnecessary excesses and divisions. It is also important to emphasise that Jude is not criticising doubters. These men are not condemned because they doubt aspects of the faith, but because they follow their own sinful desires, and twist the faith to suit them. Doubts can either lead us towards God if we respond in humility and seek Him, or away from Him if we allow our sinful nature, which is fundamentally in rebellion against God, to take the opportunity they present to lead us into sinful behaviour. Too often people speak of “doubting” aspects of the faith, but on listening carefully to them it becomes clear that their intellectual struggles came secondarily to moral failings. The fundamental problem is that they have given in to the sinful nature and have been forced to choose between God's revealed truth, which goes against what they basically want to do, and an alternative that allows their behaviour. This process can be obvious, but it can also be subtle. I am convinced that many professing Christians make choices that they defend on supposed biblical grounds but that are actually simply about justifying what they want to do. A classic example is the argument

for certain lifestyle choices on the basis that they will make it easier for them to reach non-Christians for Christ when in fact they are simply doing what they want to do even where it may in fact harm the cause of the gospel. On the other extreme are people who argue from the silence of Scripture or the example of Old Testament individuals to justify their wealth rather than seriously seeking God's guidance about how they should use the possessions He has entrusted to their stewardship. Before leaving this verse I want to make one final observation. It seems to me that in recent times some Christian authors have developed a tendency to be deliberately provocative and to speak in abusive terms about aspects of truth. Although their intention may be genuinely to be thought-provoking and to stimulate debate, we must be careful that we don't run into the error of speaking abusively about things that we simply don't understand, especially when our lack of understanding is because we have never engaged sufficiently seriously in searching the Scriptures on the matter.

Three Old Testament examples (v11)

Whereas v5-7 mention three Old Testament groups who sinned and came under judgement, v11 mentions three individuals who sinned and were judged:

1. *Cain* (Genesis 4) – Cain rejected God's appointed way of sacrifice and brought the wrong kind of offering without humility and faith. When he was exposed rather than repenting he gave in to his anger and murdered his brother. Cain is also mentioned in I John 3:12 as an example of evil
2. *Balaam* (Numbers 22-31) – Balaam was a prophet for hire. He offered his services as a prophet for material gain rather than faithfulness to God. He was repeatedly prevented by God from prophesying against Israel, much to the annoyance of Balak, king of Moab. The most famous incident was when God placed an angel in the road to prevent Balaam advancing, and his donkey had to speak to warn him about the impending doom if he proceeded. Balaam eventually succeeded in leading Israel into idolatry by advising Midianite women to inter-marry with the Israelites. He died by the sword during Israel's war against Midian. Balaam is also mentioned in II Peter 2:15 as someone who "loved the wages of wickedness".
3. *Korah* (Numbers 16) – Korah rejected the authority of God's appointed leaders, Moses and Aaron, on the supposed basis that the whole community of Israel was holy and therefore didn't need senior leaders. He was joined by 250 community leaders. In a spectacular scene the ground opened and swallowed up all the possessions and families of these men, and they themselves were consumed with fire. Despite this, many of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron because the men had died. God sent a plague, which led to the deaths of a further 14,700 people.

In v5-7 we noted a crescendo in judgement, but in these examples the progression is in the behaviour of the words Jude uses to describe the individuals, from Cain's "way" to Balaam's "error" to Korah's "rebellion". These three examples were increasingly influential over God's people. Although Cain was Abel's older brother and should have been responsible to him, we are not aware of Cain ever having a genuine faith in or obedience to God. It is relatively easy to spot that Cain is the "bad guy" of the story. Cain's way involved an outright rejection of God's appointed way of worship. He was Scripture's first example of an alternative religion. Balaam's error is more subtle than this. Although he was a Moabite, not an Israelite, he was still a prophet and received some kind of revelation from the true God. His eventual influence over Israel was not direct, and didn't involve an outright rejection of God but rather a blending of worship of God with worship of false gods. This kind of error is less easy to spot, but happens wherever God's truth is mixed with tradition, superstition or human opinion. In the case of Korah, the issue is more subtle still. Korah was a Levite, and as such a leader and teacher of God's people. He did not openly reject God's appointed way of worship, and there is no suggestion that he advocated idolatry. In fact, his initial appeal may even seem to have some justification at first hearing. There is an element of truth in it – the whole community of Israel was holy to God – but it was a distortion of the truth. Moses and Aaron were God's appointed leaders, and they had His authority to lead the nation. Korah's rebellion was a subtle distortion of truth that was fundamentally anti-authority, but by rejecting Moses and Aaron they were actually rejecting God. Although leaders in local churches today do not have this kind of authority, the word of God does. The parallel here is with people who distort Scripture to make it a smoke-screen for their own sinful desires, or with people who desire power in the church.

APPLICATION: "These men ..." (v12-13)

Jude now relates the impact of these Old Testament individuals on the community of God's people to the impact that "these men" will have in the church community. The problem with Cain was not simply his own sin, but the fact that he ended up founding a city that would become a centre of sin (Genesis 4:17). Balaam not only sinned but used his influence as a prophet indirectly to lead Israel into idolatry (Numbers 31:16). Korah not only rebelled, but led to the deaths of nearly 15,000 people who followed him (Number 16). In the same way, the men in the church(es) are not simply in danger of judgement themselves but are a threat to the church(es) as a whole. Jude describes them as:

1. *Blemishes at you're their love feasts* – the love feast was a fellowship meal during which the Lord's Supper would be celebrated. These men were present at these gatherings, and they ate with the true believers without the slightest qualm. They had no conscience at all about this, believing themselves to be right. In fact they are "blemishes". It is possible that this word should be translated "reefs", emphasising the danger of shipwreck they pose to true believers, but if the verse parallels II Peter 2:13 then the word should be translated, as in the NIV, "blemishes" (the Greek word originally meant "reef" but later came to mean "blemish"). As God looks at the beauty of His people gathering in fellowship to remember His Son these men stand out as ugly carbuncles.
2. *Shepherds who feed only themselves* – "shepherd" was always a word used to describe the leaders of God's people, and this phrase includes an allusion to Ezekiel 34:2. Clearly some of these men were in positions of leadership in the church, presumably as elders (elders are also known as shepherds – see Acts 20:28 – this is the meaning of the commonly used word "pastor"). Instead of guarding, caring for and feeding the flock, they care only for themselves and feed themselves. They are wolves in sheep's clothing, using the flock for their own selfish gain. This gain may well have been financial, like Balaam, or may simply have been about power, like Korah. Sadly, the same problem can arise in churches today when people engage in ministry for selfish gain.

Jude then follows these two images with a series of illustrations from nature. These men are like:

- a. *Clouds without rain*, blown along by the wind – an allusion to Proverbs 25:14. Imagine the picture of a land parched with drought. The people rejoice as clouds appear in the sky, but their joy turns to dismay as the clouds blow past without delivering the rain they promised. These men appear to be just what the church needs, but they disappoint eventually.
- b. *Autumn trees*, without fruit and uprooted – in a similar way, these men are twice dead. This may be reference to the "second death" or may simply be used for emphasis. Again, a tree in autumn should bear fruit, but these men produce nothing good.
- c. *Wild waves of the sea*, foaming up their shame – an allusion to Isaiah 57:20-21, the verses that gave us the saying "no rest for the wicked". These men are restless, and only churn up mud and create danger for seafarers.
- d. *Wandering stars*, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever – the wandering (Greek *planētēs*) stars is a reference to the planets, whose orbits make their movements irregular in the night sky. Unlike the actual stars, they are useless for navigation. Following them will lead to going round in circles or going nowhere at all. There may also be a play on words here, as the word for Balaam's "error" is *planē*.

The basic point of these illustrations is that these men don't deliver what they promise and lead others astray in the process.

One example from an apocryphal Jewish writing (v14-15)

Jude quotes from the apocryphal book entitled I Enoch. Enoch was, as Jude says, the seventh person in line from Adam. He is remarkable in the Old Testament because he enjoyed a special relationship with God and did not die but was out of the world by God (Genesis 5:24; Hebrews 11:5). The quotation attributed to Enoch in the apocryphal book that bears his name is a pronouncement of coming judgement by God. The Lord is pictured coming with his "holy ones" (presumably angels), numbering "thousands upon thousands", to judge everyone. The ungodly will be judged and convicted for their ungodly actions and words. In this one verse the word ungodly is used as a noun, a verb, and an adjective. The implication is clear – these men are ungodly through and through, in their very nature, their actions and words, and in their manner.

APPLICATION: "These men ..." (v16)

The quotation from I Enoch, which emphasised both the actions and words of the ungodly is now applied to the men threatening the church(es) of Jude's time. In particular, Jude focuses in this verse on their speech. He describes them as:

1. *Grumblers and faultfinders* – people who grumble and constantly find fault are a curse in any church, but these men are not simply people with a tendency to complain. They have an agenda to undermine those who teach truth and lead according to godly wisdom, and so to establish themselves as the popular leaders of the church.
2. *People who follow their own evil desires* – this is at the heart of the behaviour of these men, and is essentially a definition of what ungodliness is. The reason these men speak as they do, whether grumbling and finding fault or, as in the next phrase, boasting and flattering, is because they are motivated by their own sinful desires.
3. *Boasting and flattering for their own advantage* – the phrase "they boast about themselves" literally means "their mouth speaks haughty things". In other words, these men beef up their own reputation by claiming great achievements and promising great things to those who will follow them. On the other hand they also engage in flattery so that others will be drawn in by them. It should always be a cause for concern to the believer whenever a teacher or leader is full only of praise for them or seems to be effusive in their encouragement. Although this may simply represent a weakness on that leader's part in tending to avoid more negative feedback, it may also be a sign of a leader who is seeking only his (or her) own advantage by gathering around himself (or herself) followers who will be reluctant to question his (or her) motives. A leader of integrity will be honest with people even when it may not play to their own advantage.

The apostles' warnings (v17-18)

Finally, Jude mentions the warning of the apostles. Before considering the warning itself it is worth mentioning two things. Firstly, Jude does not count himself among the apostles. This is worthy of note as some contemporary Christian writers are somewhat careless in their use of the word apostle. The word simply means "messenger", but the New Testament uses it in two senses. The less frequent usage is simply to describe people who were church planters (e.g. Barnabas in Acts 14:14 and Andronicus and Junias in Romans 16:7), but in the vast majority of cases the word refers to the twelve, and later includes Paul. They were witnesses to the risen Christ (Acts 4:33; I Corinthians 15:7-9), the foundation of the Church (Ephesians 2:20; Revelation 21:14), called by Christ (Romans 1:1) to be His witnesses, and their teaching had special authority (Acts 2:42) and performed miracles as evidence of their apostleship (II Corinthians 12:12). Since it is impossible for there to be any apostles in the church today in this sense of the word I maintain that it is unwise to use the term apostle to refer to missionaries or church planters today, as some tend to. Secondly, Jude clearly views the apostles' words as being of foundational importance for the faith. Although he doesn't specifically refer to this quotation as Scripture, and, as we have seen, he also quotes from apocryphal sources, it is worth noting that this verse includes an early quotation from the New Testament.

Now to the quotation itself. Although not verbatim, this quotation is essentially the same as II Peter 3:3, as the following comparison shows:

<i>Jude v18</i>	In the last times there will be scoffers who will	follow	their own ungodly	desires
<i>II Peter 3:3</i>	in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and	following	their own evil	desires

The fact that this is the verse to which Jude is referring becomes even clearer when we realise that the word translated "scoffer" is found only in these two verses in the New Testament.

APPLICATION: "These are the men..." (v19)

This application of the apostle's warning is short and to the point, exposing the false teachers for what they are. Jude says three things:

- a) *They divide you* – the unity of the church should be based on the recognition of one Lord and one core faith entrusted to the saints (Ephesians 4:5). These men cause division by denying that Lord and distorting the faith (v4).
- b) *They follow mere natural instincts* – these men are motivated only by the sinful nature. The word means basically "soulish" or "unspiritual".

- c) *They do not have the Spirit* – this is a contrast to the preceding phrase. Rather than being motivated and led by the Spirit of God these men do not even have the Spirit. Jude is leaving us in no doubt that these are not true believers.

Summary of Examples:

Jude uses examples from the Old Testament, uninspired Jewish writings and the apostles, but all of them all teach the same truth. He has assembled a formidable case for his claims about the false teachers who threaten the church(es) of his day. All of these examples have two things in common. In every case:

- a) **The core problem was a rejection of God's authority or word and of His Spirit**
- b) **There is judgement which is executed directly by God, not human beings**

These two points are vitally important as they prepare the way for the response that Jude urges for his readers.

Like Jude's examples the false teachers of his day are...

- Sexually impure (v8) – like Sodom and Gomorrah
- Anti-authority (v8) – like the angels who rejected the limits of their authority
- Unteachable (v8) – like the Israelites they speak abusively about what they don't understand
- Abusive in leadership (v11-12) – like Balaam (who loved money) and like selfish shepherds
- Unproductive (v13) – like rainless clouds and fruitless trees (not teaching Scripture)
- Grumblers & faultfinders(v16) – like the Israelites in desert, complaining and criticising
- Boasters & flatterers (v16) – in their speech about selves and others
- Divisive (v19) – in their rejection of the Lord and distortion of the faith
- Unspiritual (v19) – they are simply not true believers!

We can see these same traits in the Old Testament, in New Testament times and, of course, in the present day! All of them are symptoms of a fundamental distortion of the faith. Like Jude's examples, judgement will come these false teachers directly from God

Contending for the faith - *ourselves* (v20-21)

How, then, are we to respond to this challenge to the faith? In these verses Jude begins to explain what it means to contend for the faith (remember that us the intention of the book – v3). Jude begins his challenge by reminding us that our primary responsibility is always to contend for the faith in our own lives first. How can we recognise falsehood? By being strong in the truth! How can we recognise unspiritual people? By being strong in the Spirit!

The shift in Jude's focus is evident from his language. Whereas before he has repeatedly commented on "these men", he now addresses the believers with a tender phrase, "But you, dear friends ..." (more literally *beloved*). He challenges us to do four things. The tense Jude uses in his Greek indicates that these are to be ongoing actions for the believers. Our behaviour is to be marked by these four things. We are to:

a) **Keep building ourselves up in our most holy faith**

The challenge here is not to increase in faith, but to be built up in "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (v3). If the threat of the false teachers is marked by their distortion of the faith then we must be firm in our grasp of the faith. There is no substitute for our growth than the Bible. It is God's inspired word to us, and it needs to shape our thinking. There should be a sense of continuing ongoing progress in our understanding of the Word, our application of it and our obedience to it. It should be the centre of our lives as individuals and or life together as local churches. It is also interesting to note that Jude places the responsibility for this on our own shoulders. It is true that the elders of the church have a particular responsibility to recognise error and to protect the flock, but the responsibility for remaining true to the faith rests with all the saints. You have your part to play in this. Every believer should be building themselves and one another up in the faith. We need to be grounded in God's word.

b) **Keep praying in the Holy Spirit**

The second challenge is to pray continually. Jude speaks of prayer "in the Holy Spirit". There is no reason to believe that he means a special kind of prayer here (as some Charismatic teachers may suggest). Rather, he is emphasising that all prayer must be led by and responsive to the Spirit. This is intended to provide a contrast with the unspiritual men who threaten the church (v19) and is also important in establishing the trinitarian pattern of v20-21 (in v21 the Father and the Son will be mentioned). Realising that prayer is "in the Holy Spirit" is a reminder that it is an expression of a dynamic, loving relationship, not an abstract, static or distant thing. Just as the Word must be central to our lives, so also must prayer be. It is sad to say that prayer is often neglected in churches. The prayer meeting is likely to be among the smallest of all meetings, and there is often little sense of this dynamic, Spirit led prayer that Jude speaks of.

c) Keep yourselves in God's love

This phrase has troubled some people as they are concerned about whether it implies that it is possible for people to remove themselves altogether from God's love, in other words to lose their salvation. To read such a suggestion into the verse would be to go beyond the text, and a full consideration of the idea of eternal security is beyond the remit of our discussion here. What Jude is saying is that we must remain in close dependence upon God. His love towards us is unchanging, but our position with regards it is open to change. This idea is reminiscent of John 15:9, where Christ challenges the disciples to remain in His love. In that context He is calling them to obedience in relationship to Him, and that is surely Jude's meaning here. It is not that we can make God love us more – His love towards us is unconditional, and has been lavished on us through Christ – but that disobedience on our part will make it impossible for us to experience the blessings of His love. It seems likely that this challenge is a continuation from the challenge to be grounded in the Word and prayer. It is through God's word to us and our prayerful dependence on Him that we can remain in His love. If we examine our hearts even now, is it possible that we have strayed from God's love? Is it possible that we are like the Church in Ephesus, which had forsaken its first love (Revelation 2:4)? Do we need to be restored in our relationship with the Father?

d) Wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ

Finally, Jude reminds us that this current situation of contending for the faith will not last forever. The day is coming when the battle will be over and the victory won. Jude's description of Christ's return as the "mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ" is significant for two reasons. Firstly, because of the descriptive title "our Lord". This is a reminder of the central issue of Christ's Lordship which was denied by the false teachers. Secondly, the mention of mercy prepares the way for v22-23 where we are called to show mercy to others as we wait for Christ's mercy. We await Christ's return when we will enter into the fullness of eternal life. We have already received God's mercy and His gift of eternal life, but the final installment of His salvation will be future, when we are saved from the presence of sin and presented in glory before Him (see v24).

It should be noticed that there is a beautiful balance here:

- *Word and Spirit* – both produce holiness. Too often believers have strayed to one extreme or the other – either emphasising the Word in a way that neglects the vital need for the Spirit to fill, empower and transform us, or emphasising the Spirit in a way that downgrades the role of the Word of God. The Spirit and the Word are both vital. Without the Spirit we cannot understand let alone obey the Word. Without the Word the Spirit will be unable to lead us into truth and we will be unable to discern His leading amongst the many conflicting voices we hear.
- *Truth and experience* – in the current postmodern climate there is an increasing emphasis on experience as an indicator of reality. Jude upholds both truth and experience as being vital for a healthy Christian life. Without truth there is no substance, but without experience there is no reality. Both are vital.
- *Action and patient waiting* – Christians await a future salvation, and our hope is pinned on the personal return of Christ to finally put all things right, but in the meantime we have been given a mission from God, and we are not to be lazy or to remain static. The Christian life involves patience as we await Christ's return, but this patience is forged in the fires of endurance in a world where we face challenges, and where we have been called to live with and for our Lord.
- *Trinity* – we should not overlook the fact that these verses contain references to all three persons of the Godhead – the Holy Spirit, God and our Lord Jesus Christ. This is only one of many occasions where the New Testament brings these three persons together in perfect harmony, and we realise that the three are equally God and one in purpose. Our faith is a relationship with all three – indwelt and empowered by the Spirit, loved

and fathered by God, and saved and led by Christ. We have been brought into the fellowship that these three persons shared together before the world was even created. We must always avoid any approach to the Christian faith that creates a false separation between Father, Son and Spirit or that emphasises one at the expense of another.

Contending for the faith - *others* (v22-24)

Having told us how we need to contend for the faith in our own lives, Jude now turns to our responsibility towards others. In the face of opposition to the faith we must not be complacent or defensive. In the fight for the faith there is ground to be taken. However, we must pay attention to the way in which this battle is to be waged. Too often Christians have been guilty of responding to falsehood in a way that denies the very faith they claim to be defending. If grace is the centrepiece of the gospel, then how can those who speak for the gospel be anything but gracious? Jude does not tell us how to respond to the false teachers who threaten the church. Surely we must recognise their presence and confront their false teachings, but his emphasis has been entirely on how God will deal with them in the final judgement. In other words, judgement is God's prerogative. Our focus should not be so much on trying to confront or argue with those who teach falsehood, but to rescue those who are threatened by them. Jude focuses our attention on the true believers who are being affected by false teachings. He divides them into three categories:

- a) **Waverers** ("those who doubt") – to those who are beginning to be affected by the false teaching, who are showing signs of moving away from the faith towards false ideas we must show mercy. It is the demonstration of God's love towards them and the faithfulness of His people, motivated by the grace we have found in Him that will lead them to heed our warnings. There is no room here for heavy-handedness or hard-heartedness. As we seek to rescue the waverer we must be motivated by genuine love for him or her.
- b) **Others who are in "the fire"** – these people have gone further down the road of believing the false ideas they have heard. In this case there is a greater degree of urgency. They have not yet been corrupted, but they are in grave danger. Just as we would move swiftly and decisively to rescue a loved one from flames so we must snatch these people from the fire. There is clearly a judgement to be made here as to when to be more patient (when a person is simply wavering) and when to be more direct in confronting the danger a person is in. In either case we must act from the motivation of love and in a way that reflects God's mercy.
- c) **Others who are already corrupted** – the final group of people have already followed the false teaching and have become corrupted. To these people we must still show mercy, but it must be "mixed with fear". In other words, we are to exercise caution. We must realise that we are not beyond the possibility of being corrupted ourselves, and we must be sure that we hate the effects of the sin that results from following the false teaching (this seems to be Jude's meaning in the enigmatic phrase "hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh"). When a believer known to us falls into sin because of some disbelief in the gospel we must always be equally gripped by mercy for the fallen brother and hatred for the sin that he has fallen into. Sin must never be taken lightly, and we must be careful that in seeking to rescue the fallen one we do not ourselves fall or bring the gospel into disrepute. Those who seek to rescue fallen believers must do so prayerfully, and with support and accountability from other Christians.

Doxology (v24-25)

The message of Jude has been challenging, with a large part of the book taken up with the theme of judgement against those who mislead and deceive God's people, reject His truth and distort His grace. Jude leaves us in no doubt that God will judge – how could we expect anything else when we look at the examples from history and hear the warning of the apostles? We, in the meantime, are to defend the faith by continuing to build ourselves up and by rescuing those who are in danger. We do this as we wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring us to eternal life (v21). Jude has emphasised our responsibility, but now as he closes this short letter with this remarkable doxology he presents us with the flipside of that reality. We must build ourselves up in our faith, but we are not in any sense attempting to save ourselves. Our Saviour is God (v25)! He is the one who is able to:

- **Keep us from falling (v24)** – as we live in a world of challenges, confronted by false teaching and temptation to sin, our confidence is in God as the one who alone can keep us in the faith and can preserve us from falling. Our faith is centred in Him.
- **Present us faultless in His presence with great joy (v24)** – Jude presents a glorious image of the end of our faith, when Christ returns and we finally enter into the fullness of the eternal life we share in Him. God Himself will present us before His glorious presence without fault, made righteous through Christ, with great joy. The thought that we will bring joy to Him and that we will share in His joy is truly amazing. What a wonderful prospect we have through God our Saviour.

We may expect that v24 is the highest point to which Jude could bring us, with this glorious image of our future, but the ultimate focus should not be on us and what benefit we have received from God but on Him. Jude's final verse reminds us that forever all glory, majesty, power and authority are to be God's. These qualities belong to Him alone, and should be ascribed to Him alone. The ultimate purpose of Christ's incarnation and our salvation is that God would be acknowledged and praised as the one who alone deserves glory. Jude's choice of these four words is not accidental, but ties in with the overall message of the book:

- **Glory and majesty** – these qualities speak of the innate quality of God, that He is glorious and majestic. He is the sovereign one, enthroned over all.
- **Power and authority** – the focus in these words is on how God's glory and majesty expresses itself. Because of who He is He has all power and authority. It is the denial and rejection of this authority that is at the heart of the attitude of the false teachers, as we have seen, and so it is on this note that Jude finishes his letter. Those who know and love Christ will shout out in joyful agreement with this doxology.

Your life's story in six words?

So, as we reach the end of this study, we can revisit the question we asked at the outset. How can I summarise my life in six words? Based on all that Jude has said, the summary must surely focus on the centre of the faith that defines me and the centre of that faith is Christ. So, my six word summary is as simple as it is vital:

Jesus Christ my Lord and Saviour

May it always be so, for God's glory!