

Diagnosing dangerous ministry

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Date: 29 October 2006

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if you turn up the little letter of Jude and have it open in front of you, it'll be a great help. We're asking the question all the way through this series, will the Western Church survive the 21st century?

And tonight these verses, verses 11 to 15, are really all about diagnosing dangerous ministry. It's a few weeks now since we took a break from being in Jude, and I suppose, to be frank, I was quite glad of the break, really.

It was pretty tough going. Not always very savoury subjects that we have to deal with in this little letter. And nor is it easy. A couple of weeks ago I seemed to spend the whole week wrestling with Michael the Archangel and the devil over the body of Moses, and by the end of it, really, I could see all three of them far enough.

I have to say. But clearly, despite the difficulties, despite the unsavoury nature of some of what Jude is having to say to us, clearly it is a vital message for the church in Jude's day and the church in our day, the church in every day.

And that's the point, really. What faced Jude's first readers is exactly, really, what faces us in the church today, just as plainly. The problem he's dealing with is that there are serious influential influences within the Christian church, within the professing fold of the church, that are putting the very foundations of the faith in serious jeopardy.

[1 : 4 1] That's what Jude says, quite plainly, in verse 4. Verse 4. Powerful people are within the orbit of the professing church, and what are they doing, he says?

Verse 4. Perverting the grace of God. That is, they are destroying the true gospel of grace. They're denying our only Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

That is, they're devaluing the uniqueness of the Son of God. And the gospel, instead of being a gospel of transformation by grace from sin to holiness, has become a message of affirmation of sin.

And the Lordship of Jesus Christ has changed just into a license for immorality, for living the way that you please. And so the whole future of the faith in these churches that Jude is writing to is at stake.

That's what it's about. And yet, he says, and it's extraordinary, isn't it? It's all been so smooth and so subtle that people seem hardly to have noticed what's going on.

[2 : 4 7] They've crept in unnoticed, these influences. And the faith has been subtly rebranded. It's been successful because it's a rebranding that plays to our great weakness.

The love affair that we as human beings have with this present world. And so the focus of the true salvation of the Bible, a salvation we wait for, Jude says that plenty in verse 21, do you see?

The eternal life that comes when Jesus Christ appears. That's when we are saved, finally. Not until then. A salvation we wait for has been changed and shifted so that all the emphasis is on a spiritual experience we can have now, in the present, in this world.

And it's very subtle, it's very beguiling, but ultimately it is devastating to the truth once for all delivered to the saints. And Jude is writing there for to expose this for what it really is.

He's saying to us, don't be taken in. Recognize the enemies that you're facing. And realize that actually you're just facing the same old struggles that the people of faith have faced since the very beginning of history.

[4 : 05] That's the point of all his references here to the Old Testament. It's not a new story he's saying. In other words, from the very earliest days of Genesis, right through until Jude's day, and right on till our own day, and right till the end of the world itself, we will always face these same errors in the church.

The same problems will be the enemies of true faith. And we need to learn to recognize them and to resist them. Their clothes will change, of course.

Outward appearances in different ages. But their spots will always be the same. And so verses 8 to 16 are really like a little book of clinical signs.

We're to look at the pictures, we're to remember them, and they're to help us to make the diagnosis when we spot them. My favorite medical book has always been Hamilton Bailey's Clinical Signs.

It's a book full of the most grotesque pictures. Even worse than some of those ones that Scott Murray was showing us on Friday night and made some people queasy. They have grotesque pictures that show up the symptoms, the signs, of dreadful systemic disease.

[5 : 18] And these pictures that Jude is putting before us are rather like that. They're somewhat grotesque, aren't they? But just as, in fact, you do find in clinical practice these telltale grotesque signs of disease and pathology, so Jude says you will find these things in the Christian church.

And so you have to be aware of them. And the last time we looked at verses 8 to 10 and we saw the telltale signs of the message of these interlopers in the church.

They have a message that was marked by, well, they called it progressive morality. But Jude, in fact, exposes it for what it is, perverse morality. Then their message is marked by what they think of as a sophisticated and developed theology.

But, in fact, Jude exposes it for the truth. It is, in fact, scornful and sceptical on belief. And the effect of this teaching, well, no, it's not to lift us onto a higher plane of human experience and development.

That's what they like to think. No, says Jude, it's the opposite. Verse 12 is very plain. Sorry, verse 10. They cause people to act like animals.

[6 : 35] They reduce human beings to the level of bestiality, acting on instinct, allowing them to destroy themselves. And that's always where rebellion against God's law and God's way takes us.

It's God's ways and His law that is the way of true humanity. Rebellion against Him is what destroys God's highest image in us.

We become, then, like beasts. And ultimately, such rebellion will always destroy those who follow that instinctive path of sin away from God, away from holiness, away from true humanity.

So those were the telltale signs of these people's message. But what of the messengers? These so-called leaders, these influencers, these people who say, we have the way forward for the church today in our generation.

Well, in verses 11 to 15, Jude turns to the clinical signs that mark them out as men. And he gives us a devastating exposure of the truth about these problem church leaders.

[7 : 45] He wants us to be able to recognize them and to see their ministries for what they really are. And the truth is, according to Jude, that however impressive they may seem, and they must seem impressive, mustn't they?

Otherwise, they wouldn't have any influence. They wouldn't have any sway. However impressive they may seem to us, in fact, Jude says, their ministries are worldly. That's the true motivation for their ministry.

Their ministries are worthless. That's the true results where their ministry takes you. And finally, therefore, he says, their ministries are frankly wicked.

That's God's ultimate assessment himself on what these ministries are. And notice just how serious a charge it is. Do you see how verse 11 begins? Woe to them.

That's very strong language, isn't it? It's a pronouncement of judgment, in fact, that in the scriptures we find mainly in the New Testament on the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

[8 : 50] Do you remember Matthew chapter 23? Again there, the seven woes. Who are they focused on? The leaders, the teachers of God's people. Those who not only refuse God's word themselves, but those who lead others astray, lead others into rebellion against the truth of the gospel that's in Christ.

Woe to them, says Jude. Woe to them, says Jesus. Because it is deadly serious to put the flock of the Lord Jesus Christ in peril.

It is the church bought by his blood. And therefore, if you interfere, if you imperil his sheep, the great shepherd himself will stand against you.

So it's a serious business, this that Jude is speaking about, and really we have to listen very carefully, don't we, to what he says. So let's look first then at verse 11. Jude makes it plain that theirs is a worldly ministry.

That's what binds together these three Old Testament examples of Cain, and Balaam, and Korah. They were all men who were motivated ultimately, one way or another, by the things or the thinking of this world.

[10 : 07] And that was what led them to rebel against God. And especially in Balaam's case and in Korah's case, to lead others away also in rebellion against God. And that's what's so serious. It does seem that there's something of a progression in these words.

We have the way of Cain going on to the error of Balaam, to the rebellion of Korah. And the act of disobedience seems to work to a crescendo too, doesn't it?

First of all, you're walking in the way of Cain, then you're abandoning to the way of Balaam and ultimately perishing in the rebellion of Korah.

And that is the way that sin and rebellion against God always progresses. Do you remember what James says in James 1.15? Desire, when it has taken place, gives birth to sin and sin, when it's fully grown, leads to death.

That's the way of walking away from God. Now obviously, we don't have time tonight to investigate in detail the stories of each of these in the Old Testament. It would profit you greatly to do that later on, no doubt.

[11 : 11] But I want you to see clearly, and I think we can see clearly, how this common theme of worldliness, of this worldly ambition, was at the root of all of their motivation and was the thing that led them into rebellion and into disaster.

So what about Cain, first of all, and the way of Cain? Well, Genesis chapter 4 tells us that Cain offered a sacrifice to God that was unacceptable to him, whereas his brother Abel's sacrifice was acceptable.

And Cain was bitter and he went off and murdered his brother Abel in a fit of rage. Well, what was the difference between Cain's sacrifice and Abel's? Well, Abel, we're told, offered the very best of his produce, the firstborn lamb and the fat portion.

In fact, he offered exactly what God's law later on makes quite clear and we read about it. Obviously, God had told Abel about sacrifice. He told him what was acceptable and what wasn't.

And he told him how to approach him as a holy God. And a holy God must be approached by sinful people the way that God himself demands it.

[12 : 23] Isn't that right? And God demands a perfect sacrifice as the way of approach to him. And Abel trusted God. He had faith. Hebrews 11 tells us that very plainly.

That's why God commended him because he submitted to God's revealed way of approaching him, to God's way of salvation by faith in God's perfect appointed sacrifice.

Simple as that. But not so with his brother Cain, you see. Obviously, Cain also knew what God had revealed. But Cain decided he would do it his way.

He was like Frank Sinatra. He was a true man of this world. I'll do it my way. And he just offered some of his produce, any old produce, and the way he wanted.

This is how I feel I should approach God and worship him. This is how I like to think of God and how I like to worship. Surely God will fit in with that, won't he? That's the man of the world, isn't it?

[13 : 28] But God wasn't fine with that, you see, with Cain. Because God takes his own holiness seriously, even if we don't take it that seriously.

God takes our sins seriously, even if we don't take it seriously. God was gracious to Cain, of course. God spoke to him and said, Cain, you can be accepted.

You know the way to do it rightly. Do what Abel's done. Submit to my way. You know what's right. Submit to my appointed way of salvation. Humble yourself and respond with faith.

But no, Cain wouldn't do that. He would often murder Abel. Cain, you see, was motivated by a worldly desire for personal autonomy.

He wanted to do it his way. He knew God's way but he rejected God's way. He thought God would have to adjust to the way of Cain. To Cain's preferred approach to worship and religion.

[14 : 31] Cain was quite happy to be religious and no doubt from the outside it looked very much like what Abel was up to. But it was utterly, utterly different, you see. One was a humble submission.

It was a trust in God's appointed way of a sacrifice for sin. It was trust in God's way of fellowship with him. The other was total presumption. Didn't take God's holiness seriously.

Didn't take sin seriously. He just scorned the altar of God. I'll do it my way, said Cain. And rather he asserted his own personal autonomy.

The way he thought about God was far superior he thought. And so he felt free to pick and choose from what God had said and to just do things his way. Well, it doesn't take much extrapolation does it?

We recognise that kind of thing all around us today. That is the way of the world. We'll do religion our way. We'll think about God the way we like to think about him. And sad to say there are plenty of folk who think like that apparently in positions in the churches and in the academies of our world.

[15 : 42] Just like Cain. Friends, that has been the blight of the last century or so in theology in this country and theological training. The way of the world in the church.

Scorning God's appointed way of sacrifice. Scorning the cross of Christ. Scorning the message of a single way, a unique way of salvation in Christ alone.

No, no. Asserting our personal autonomy. Feeling that we have enlightenment that God could really do with, frankly. Therefore, rejecting God's plain word, how to approach him, and reinterpreting it according to our own sense of freedom of conscience or whatever it might be.

But unfortunately, you see, the Bible just calls that unbelief. Hebrews 11 contrasts Abel, the man of faith, with Cain, his brother, who quite clearly is not of the faith.

It doesn't say, well, Cain was of a slightly different theological position as part of a broad church. In fact, if you read 1 John 3, verse 12, it's even more blunt. Cain was of the evil one, we're told.

[16:57] It's ironic, isn't it, that people who think that they are asserting their personal autonomy, their way, their choice, about the way they want to think about God, they think they're in charge of their own thoughts.

Actually, the Bible says their mind is captured by the evil one. Well, that's the way of Cain. No humility, no submission to God's revealed way, rather an assertion of a worldly personal autonomy.

still very religious, but in fact, just unbelief. Well, what about Balaam and his great error? Well, Balaam is a tragic case.

Balaam was a brilliantly gifted man. He was one who had spiritual gifts and many qualities of good. He was a prophet. God spoke to Balaam. God spoke through Balaam. You can read the stories in Numbers 22 to 24.

Balak, a pagan king, tried to hire Balaam as a prophet to pronounce curses on God's people so that he could overcome them in war. But Balaam could speak only the truth. And in fact, Balaam had on his lips some of the most wonderful prophecies of the Messiah that you'll read in the Old Testament.

[18:12] But in the end, just like Cain, his worldliness floored him. His worldliness ruined him. For the sake of gain, he ended up capitulating and leading Israel into great sin.

Numbers 25 speaks of it. It was terrible. The Israelite men were led into sexual promiscuity with cult prostitutes. They were led into worship of Baal. And Numbers 31 later on tells us that this was Balaam's strategy to lead the people of God into sin.

And he did it for gain, for what he would get in the gold and the riches. You see, with Cain, it was a worldliness expressed as a desire to rule himself.

It was personal autonomy. So common today. With Balaam, it was just as common an expression of worldliness. It was a lust for possessions.

And that worldly motive led him to lead many others into unholiness, into sexual immorality, into idolatry. Isn't it amazing how monetary gain, material wealth and prosperity and sexual immorality and idolatry all goes so closely related in the Bible?

[19:27] Well, it's because our desire for possessions, either material or sexual possession, they're just expressions of idolatry, aren't they? They're seeking satisfaction and meaning and value and identity in this world's things.

And materialism and sexual desire are such a lure to God's people in every age, in our age. Remember what the Lord wrote to the church in Pergamum in Revelation chapter 2.

You have some who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, that they might offer sacrifices to idols and practice sexual immorality.

You notice that and? You see, that's the great lure, isn't it? Listen to our message, listen to our enlightened theology, and you can worship God and indulge all those passions that come naturally to you.

Isn't that an attractive message? Just imagine a conversation, can't you? What's the worship like in your temple? You know, the one to the Lord God, the God of the Bible.

[20 : 40] Well, we go along and we listen to the Bible being taught and God commands us to live holy lives and to be continent and self-controlled and to persevere in holiness.

That's the sermon. And then after that, we sing some hymns. Well, you should come to our temple. We get a great message and it says, with our God, any old sexual practice you like is just great.

And then we don't bother with hymns, we just get on with some real practical demonstrations straight afterwards. Fantastic. So, a sermon and hymns sexual instruction and then practice on the job.

Which one's going to sound more attractive? Which sounds more contemporary exciting worship? Which one sounds more likely to attract the world? It's obvious, isn't it?

And it's so powerful the worldly motivation of personal gain in all of these ways can so easily lead good men, gifted men astray.

[21 : 45] And they can lead others into total disaster. It seems that so easily men who know the truth will throw away eternal gain for temporal fleeting worldly gain.

It's a striking thing, but it's true in the church. And the lure of possessions is very, very powerful. That's why Paul writes to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6 that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.

Many, many people he says have been pierced and wandered away from the truth because of that. And we've seen that in the church. We see it today, don't we? Maybe we don't see it quite so much in this country.

It's probably not really the thing you do if you want to be on the make is to go into the clergy or something like that. But in some places it is. We've seen in the United States, haven't we, the scandals of the prominent television evangelists.

And what fuel that gives to the sneering skeptics. I'm reading Richard Dawkins book, The Delusional God, and he's full of swiping attacks at Christianity. You see, slapping down these TV evangelists.

[22 : 53] Well, who can blame them? But somebody said to me recently that in Africa today, where they work, the biggest single problem they face is the prosperity gospel. Pastors, full of glitter and gold, driving their big cars, all their promises.

That's why it's so impressive an example when you have people standing up against it. Do you remember? I think it was when John Piper was here. He was telling us about these hundreds of thousands of books and the many hundreds of thousands of dollars of royalties that come in every year, but not a penny goes to him, it all goes to the work of the gospel.

He made that decision public. Just like Billy Graham, right at the beginning, said he would draw a salary of X amount and no other, no profit from the Billy Graham organization, because these men knew the deceitfulness of their own hearts, the deceitfulness of riches.

But you know, it can happen that we can be seduced by the love of money even if we don't have too much of it. That's the beguiling thing. You see, it's easy, isn't it, to have resentment that you don't have too much of it.

You can be a lover of money, you can always be on the lookout for what you can get, even if you're not rich, even if you're not wealthy. It's very subtle, you see, because you can pretend to yourself, well, I'm so far away from that prosperity thing that that could never be a problem for me, but actually it is a problem for you in your heart.

[24 : 20] You could harbor love for possessions. I've known ministries of the gospel to be ruined before they even begin because of that attitude. And Jude says it's a warning sign, it's a warning sign of danger ministry.

When you have somebody who all they want to know about is how they can get more on their expenses or how they can boost their income or how they can get this or that, that's a sure fire mark, says Jude, of a Christian leader who will end up being a problem leader because he's motivated by a desire for personal possessions.

It's worldly. And that can lead you and it can lead many others into total disaster. you can end up being so beguiled by the love of money that you forget about all sorts of other things that God takes really very seriously like holiness, like faithfulness to God as your soul master.

I could take you into my study and I could show you books, brilliant books by brilliant men who were once like Balaam prophesying great things about the Messiah Jesus Christ.

And now they're far, far away pierced by the love of this world. Personal autonomy, the world's thinking, possessions, the world's wealth and position, the world's power.

[25 : 45] That's the fatal motivation of Korah's rebellion. You can read about that in Numbers chapter 16. Korah led a rebellion of 250 soldiers against Moses and against Aaron, God's appointed leader and mouthpiece.

There's a strikingly contemporary ring actually about that chapter. It's very populist, very democratic. You've gone too far, Moses, they said. We're all holy in the congregation.

God is among us all. Why do you exalt yourself in authority above all of us? That's what they said. They resented, they rejected God's ordered authority for his people.

They wanted position and power for themselves. God, of course, had clearly anointed Moses and Aaron. As his leaders to speak for him. But then again, these people reckon God didn't really mean what he said and that they had better insights and ideas.

Well, again, it's been with us in the churches and it still is, isn't it? God has set down his pattern for leadership in the churches. It's very clear in the New Testament.

[26 : 50] It tells us things like who should teach in the churches and who shouldn't and so on. But today there's plenty of Korahs around who say, you've gone too far. We know better. We're all equal.

We're just as good as you. Moses didn't assert himself. Moses said quite plainly, God knows those who are his and he stood back and he said, God will vindicate those that he has chosen.

And God did very dramatically, remember? The earth opened up, swallowed Korah and all the tents of his people. The fire fell down and destroyed the other 250. Because it's a serious thing to scorn God's ordered authority in his church.

You might not think so, but it is, whether with Moses in the Old Testament church or the commands and the rules laid down by the apostles and Jesus in the New Testament church.

And we should realize that before we think that we know better how to reorder things. Rebellion against God's appointed mouthpieces of his revelation is just as common today though, isn't it?

[27 : 57] We know that. No one, of course, has Moses' authority today in the church. Nobody has the authority of Paul or any other apostle or Christ, of course not. But servants of God today have to speak Moses' words and Jesus' words and Paul's words.

And when people say, oh, that's gone too far, then they have to take the flack for it too, haven't they? Some of us have been praying for a minister in another part of this country who is facing vitriolic attacks on his preaching just in exactly this way.

They're saying, you've gone too far. We don't want all this stuff about sin. We don't want to hear this about repentance and about obedience. Well, be careful.

That's what the Bible says and God's spokesmen have to say it. And be comforted and be encouraged those of us who do speak because, as Moses said, the Lord knows those who are his and he will vindicate true mouthpieces of his.

Not just in pulpits, but in your workplace, in your family, speaking the truth for Jesus. But you see, these men that Jude is writing about are themselves leaders and teachers and yet they're the ones who are rejecting God's law.

[29 : 13] They're rejecting Moses. They're rejecting the apostles. They're rejecting Jesus himself. They're denying our only Lord and Master. And they need to be aware.

They need to remember Korah's rebellion. In the end, they were destroyed, Jude says. They perished. But we need to remember this too, says Jude, and we need to recognize them and avoid them.

Interestingly, Paul, when he's writing to Timothy in 1 Timothy chapter 2, to encourage him in the ministry against the likes of Hymenaeus and Philetus that Paul says have swerved from the truth.

He quotes Moses' words from Numbers chapter 16 almost exactly. God's foundation still stands, he says. The Lord knows those who are his. In other words, he's saying God will vindicate his true servants.

God will vindicate you as you stand for the truth of him. These interlopers may have all the panache, all the popularity, but God knows their heart.

[30 : 16] He knows that they're ensnared by worldly desires for position. And he knows your heart. You're open before him. And he'll vindicate true ministry in the end.

God always will. And these people will be shown up for what they are. They are worldly. And one way or another, all that is worldly in ministry will be exposed in the end.

And one of the ways that it will be exposed is that all ministry, which is ultimately motivated just by worldliness, will be ultimately fruitless. In real spiritual terms, it is a worthless ministry.

And that's the glaring message, isn't it, of these vivid descriptions we have in verses 12 and 13. Ultimately, such ministry is empty. It's sterile.

It produces nothing that will last. It is worthless. It's a bold condemnation to make, isn't it? But it is the unavoidable message of these verses, these vivid pictures that Jude's hearers would have understood so readily, but are perfectly easy for us to see.

[31 : 26] Their ministry is worthless. And that must be, mustn't it, I'm afraid, the verdict on so much ministry in the Christian churches today. It's hard to avoid that when we see the calamitous decline in so many of the older denominations in the Western world.

But it must also be true of what still seems to be in many ways very impressive and very cutting edge in ministry in the Christian churches. Things that perhaps we still think are really quite good.

Don't forget that at one time liberalism was seen as the great salvation for the churches, the way forward, the way of revival. Yes, it was. And that's the point of these pictures, isn't it?

Do you see them? The point is that they all look very impressive, don't they? Here are leaders boldly occupying the limelight in the Christian meetings. Like vast, impressive clouds.

Like crashing waves. Very impressive, theatrical. And yet they're absolutely empty. In the end they yield nothing. They're waterless clouds. They're empty trees, dead, no fruit.

[32 : 37] And worse, Jude says, they leave dirty blemishes on your love feasts. The Christian meetings. I think the alternative translation is probably better. Reefs or rocks.

They're like rocks. They're invisible from the surface, but they're right below the surface, bringing about danger, bringing about disaster. And that's so true, isn't it? Teaching that can seem so wonderful, such plain sailing, but actually it's so dangerous to your Christian life.

Think of the many recurrent fads that there have been through the ages in the evangelical church. Think of the false teaching on holiness and guidance and sort of things like that that cause such disaster to so many young Christians.

Jude says in verse 12, they feast ostentatiously, but they feed only themselves. If you've got the NIV, it says they're shepherds who feed only themselves. That's because the verb feed is the word to shepherd.

The whole purpose of the shepherd is to feed the flock of God. And Jude's alluding here to Ezekiel and his condemnation of the false shepherds of Israel who didn't feed anyone. Woe to you, says God to them.

[33 : 48] And these leaders starve the flock of God, or worse, in fact, they poison the flock. They lead them to spiritual shipwreck. They bring them to a place where their faith goes onto the rocks.

Well, that does happen, doesn't it, in the church again and again. Just think of all the manifestations of the prosperity gospel. So many attractive promises.

Pray for this and the Lord will surely answer your prayer. And then, of course, disillusion sets in. The promises are empty. You don't get the health that you prayed for, or the healing, or the wealth, or the relationship, or whatever it is.

I've heard it time and again. So have you. Well, God didn't answer my prayer about such and such, and I prayed and prayed, but he never heard a thing, and ultimately I've given up on him.

Haven't you heard that? How can we be so easily taken in by these things? It seems very extraordinary, doesn't it, that the Christian people, that the sheep of the flock of Jesus could be so daft.

[34 : 57] But, of course, the problem is that we also love this world, don't we? We're so susceptible to what seems so good and so wonderful, too good to be true. Things that blind us to reality.

Happened to me just a little while ago. I was trying to buy a computer on eBay, and I saw a deal which I thought was just too good to be true. And it was. And somebody ran off with 600 pounds of my money.

I never saw a thing. Why? Why was I so stupid? Because I just thought that paying that amount of money for that computer was just terrific. Sheep are not always the brightest things, are they?

We swallow things just like sheep that do great harm to us. I was thinking about this, I was remembering the plant ragwort. Any of you know about ragwort?

I looked up an article on it just to be absolutely sure. Common ragwort, Latin name *Sinapis jacobaea*. Toxic alkaloids are present in all parts of the plant, and it regularly causes loss of livestock through liver damage.

[36 : 03] Sheep are partial to it in the young state. You see it growing all over the field. It's got lovely yellow flowers. It looks so attractive. Listen to this. The flowers are among the most frequently visited by butterflies in Britain.

Did you know that? The presence of ragwort in hay, silage, or dried grass is the main source of poisoning. See, it hides in amongst the good stuff.

And it poisons the sheep. It looks lovely, but it's deadly. And it grows again and again and again. Isn't that exactly the same as the kind of perverted look-alike gospel teaching that we find?

It hides in amongst the truth. It poisons surreptitiously. And we're so easily taken in, aren't we, by impressive claims. It happens to us again and again.

But they turn out to be empty, like waterless clouds, absolutely no use, no relief in the dry dust of summer. Fruitless trees, nothing to sustain us in the winter of our faith.

[37 : 09] And for all the froth and excitement, like crashing waves on the sea so often, they not only disappoint us, they actually damage us. I was on the beach recently when I was on holiday in the summer.

It was lovely and warm and I was desperate to go into the sea. It looked wonderful. The surf was crashing in on the waves. But as I went down to the water, I could see there was a whole green line all the way along the sand.

And I looked in. And of course, the sea was full of horrible green algae. That's why nobody was swimming. And that's where worldly ministry leads, says Jude.

It's worthless. It's empty. In fact, it's worse. It's like putting faith for navigating your life, not in a fixed source of light and of truth, in God's word, but like a wandering star, he says in verse 13.

And if you put your navigation in a wandering star, a shooting star, when you're in a ship, you're going to head for shipwreck. That's where any ship will end up if it takes its directions like that.

[38 : 16] And that's where any church, any Christian will end up. And that's why worldly ministry and worthless ministry is condemned by God.

That's why he says it's condemned to the gloom of utter darkness, to the punishment of hell itself. It seems so drastic, doesn't it, to us? But because any who touches the church of Jesus Christ touches the apple of his eye, God will not have his church ruined by that kind of damaging false teaching.

And that's why verses 14 and 15 are so blunt, do you see? That's why God's assessment on this ministry, not only that it's worldly and worthless, it's frankly wicked.

It's not progressive, it's not an alternative viewpoint, it's not just one wing of the church. What does Jude say four times in this verse 14, 15? It's ungodliness.

Same word as in verse 4 and verse 18. It's wicked and it will be judged as wicked and ungodly. Actually, you know, there's great encouragement in these verses for us.

[39 : 29] Jude's saying, look, this goes right back to the beginning. Even Enoch, seventh from Adam, prophesied and talked about this sort of thing. And let's not forget that, friends. God is not surprised by the struggles that we're facing in the churches today.

Isn't that helpful for us to remember? God's seen it all before. He's seen it again and again and again and again. It's just the same thing. Moses also talks about these myriads of angels coming with the giving of the law.

Isaiah talks in similar terms about the day when God comes surrounded by angels to judge the world. And that's Jude's point. He's saying, remember the past. God isn't impotent.

He's judged in the past. And he'll judge in the future. That day of ultimate judgment is coming. So don't you be tempted. Don't be taken in.

However impressive, however attractive these things look, it's sheer ungodliness. It's wicked. We're reluctant to pass judgment in those sort of terms, aren't we?

[40 : 32] And in a sense, that's quite right. But God does sometimes speak very plainly about these things. And he does here through Jude. And he calls us to recognize wicked ministry for what it is, ungodliness.

Ungodliness. So that we can avoid it. So that we can resist it. So that we can reject it. Do you see that there are two words in verse 15 that really dominate the verse?

The first is that word ungodly. And ungodliness. And it's ungodliness that will be condemned at the judgment. That's what Jude says. That is the morality that counts.

And the only morality that counts is God's morality. That will come as a shock, won't it, to some very good people who assume that their morality will be just as good as God's on judgment day.

But no, God says it's his sovereign ordering of the universe that is the right one. We have only one Lord and Master, the God of Scripture, revealed to us in Jesus Christ, his Son.

[41 : 42] And judgment will be according to his criteria, nobody else's. The second word in that verse that appears again and again is all, isn't it? He'll execute judgment on all.

He'll convict all the ungodly of all the deeds, of all the harsh things that sinners have spoken against him. It doesn't matter how successful a movement you have, how impressive a ministry you might seem to have, all of that's going to be exposed.

All of it on the last day. And all who have at heart been motivated by worldliness, who have had worthless ministries, well, they'll be exposed for what they really are, ungodly, wicked.

Not only are they not speaking for God, says Jude, they're speaking against God. And it would seem that there will be those on the last day expecting great reward from God because they feel they've spoken for him who will discover quite the reverse.

That's what Jesus told us in Matthew 25. And Jude is telling us that we will expect to find such people in positions of influence and authority in our churches today, just as in Jude's day.

[43 : 01] We shouldn't be surprised. It goes right back to Enoch. It shouldn't panic us either. God's seen it all before. But it should warn us, shouldn't it? It should warn us to beware of the influence, influences that can and will shipwreck our faith, shipwreck our churches, if we don't recognize them and if we don't refute them.

But the Bible always warns us so that we will respond, doesn't it? It's not passive. It's always looking for an active response. What are we to do living in a world and in a church where there will always be worldly and worthless and frankly wicked ministry?

What are we to do? Bury our heads? Throw up our hands in horror? Or, let me give you a negative and a positive. We're to be wise to and we're to reject that kind of worldly and worthless and wicked ministry.

We're not to be taken in by it. We're not to have anything to do with it. How? Well, Jude's not writing to church leaders here. He's writing to all of us, isn't he? He's writing to all the church.

He's saying that the churches will get the kind of leadership and influences that they accept and that they listen to. So listen and learn, says Jude. Fortify yourselves in the true gospel once for all delivered to the saints and recognize and drive away the wolves and the false shepherds.

[44 : 31] That's the negative thing. What about the positive? Well, we're surely to seek ourselves to do all that we can to establish true ministries of the gospel in the churches, to rebuild the foundations, to proclaim the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

Let me suggest you two Bible verses that you could think about and read and meditate upon and pray about every single day. verse 1 is Matthew 9 verse 38.

Pray earnestly that the Lord of the harvest will send out laborers into his harvest field. Let's make that the focus of our prayers individually in our personal lives.

Wouldn't that be a good thing to do? Here's the second verse, 2 Timothy 2 verse 2. That's a good verse for us to focus on corporately as a church also, isn't it?

Paul says, put the gospel into the hands of faithful men who will be able to teach others the truth. And so build the church against the falsehood and the error.

[45 : 41] Final quote about Ragward. Ploughing and the introduction of sound arable rotation is the only effective method of control.

You see, you only get rid of weed and rot by a balanced, careful, true ministry of the living word of God. That's what we need in our churches.

And if we do these things, if we pray to the Lord to give us increasingly leaders like that, and if we make it our business to be growing the church by producing such people, if we do these things seriously and determinedly, then we will have understood what Jude's message is for the church today.

It's only because Jude's first readers did those things that we are actually here today, that there is a Christian church today. Think about that. Will there be a church in the West? Will there be a church in Scotland in the 22nd century to look back and say, because that generation did these things, we are here today?

that's the question Jude's asking us. Well, let's pray. Father, it does grieve us to have to deal with these urgent and sobering warnings that you give us in your word, but they're there for a reason.

[47 : 10] We don't scorn your word. Help us to understand what you're saying to us, to have the right response, not to depress us, for we know that you will build your church.

But we know that you build your church where your people are faithful and where we pray and where we work that the faith once for all delivered to the saints will be made strong in advance and be a bulwark against all that you have warned us will come against us.

help us, we pray, to encourage one another and to urge one another on to love and good deeds that the truth of this great salvation that which we share will be preserved and increase in our communities, in our land, as well as in the many parts of the world where countless thousands are believing day after day.

So help us, the prayer part, we ask, for the glory of our Savior Jesus. Amen.