

A Spotters Guide to Ungodly Influencers in the Church: 1) Motivations and Fruit

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[0 : 00] Please do grab a Bible and turn to the New Testament, to the letter of Jude. And Paul Brennan will be preaching to us once again from this short but crucial letter of the New Testament.

And tonight we're going to be focusing on verse 11 to 13. But just to give us a refresher of the whole context of this section, we're going to read the letter as a whole.

So let's read Jude, beginning at verse 1. Hear the word of the Lord. Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ, may mercy, peace and love be multiplied to you.

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

For certain people have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were designated for this condemnation. ungodly people who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

[1 : 30] Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.

And the angels, who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day.

Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.

Yet, in like manner, these people also, relying on their dreams, defile the flesh, reject authority, and blaspheme the glorious ones.

But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment. But said, The Lord rebuke you.

[2 : 47] But these people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively.

Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain, and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error, and perished in Korah's rebellion.

These are hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you, without fear. Shepherds feeding themselves, waterless clouds, swept along by winds, fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted, wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame, wandering stars, wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.

It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones to execute judgment on all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness, that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own shameful desires. They are loudmouth boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage.

[4 : 29] But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, in the last time, there will be scoffers following their own ungodly passions.

It is these who cause divisions. Worldly people, devoid of the spirit, but you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

And have mercy on those who doubt. Save others by snatching them out of the fire. To others, show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

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

Amen. Well, amen. And may God bless to us this, his word. Well, please have the letter of Jude open in front of you.

[5 : 59] And as Phil mentioned, particularly looking at verses 11 to 13. Now we're perhaps savvy enough nowadays to beware the Instagram influencer.

We know that, or at least we ought to know, that all that glitters on social media is not gold. It is not the gold it claims to be. But even so, we so easily get hooked in by the impressive presentations that people project on Instagram online.

We believe it's reality. At least I do. I'm sure you do as well. I get sucked in. But when we stop to think about it for a moment, we know that it is not reality.

It can't be. You occasionally get those things online where it shows you the reality behind the Instagram post. You know, the reality behind the Instagram family and the absolute chaos that lies two seconds either side of that perfect photo.

At least in my family that's the case. We never get that perfect photo. It's always chaos. And Jude is warning us in this letter. He's warning us and he's showing us how to spot the Instagram influencer in the church.

[7 : 19] The people who project something that is just not the reality. There are dangerous people hiding in plain sight is Jude's warning.

learn to spot them. And here's how. That is what he's doing in these verses tonight. He's beginning to show us how to spot these dangerous people who have gone unnoticed in the midst of the church.

Now, Jude is not right with the aim to discourage or demotivate us. That is not what he's doing. Quite the opposite. This is a letter surrounded and saturated with great reassurances about God's dearly beloved Christian church.

Remember how the book begins. He's writing to those who are beloved, called, kept for Jesus Christ for all eternity.

It is a letter steeped in encouragement like that. It begins and ends in that way. But, there is an enemy within. Godless people have crept in and they present a very real threat to the church.

[8 : 33] And Jude is writing to help these dear Christian brothers and sisters to wake up to the danger, to see what is going on right under their noses. They've not seen it and he writes to help them spot it.

And having seen the danger, he wants them to contend for the faith. The faith once for all delivered to the saints, he's writing so they will contend for that faith.

But it's not just an issue for Jude's readers, for those living 2,000 years ago. This is a perennial issue for the church and for us today. There will always be those in amongst the professing church who threaten to draw people away.

from the one true faith. Powerful people are within the orbit of the visible church and they present a very real danger to the faith.

And we're told there in verse 4 they pervert God's grace, they deny Jesus as Lord. Theirs is a subtle message. It must be subtle, mustn't it?

[9 : 39] Otherwise they would have spotted it. A subtle message that actually affirms sin rather than challenge it and call it out and call people to repent.

It affirms sin. They in actuality have a different authority. Not God. It is not God's full and final revelation that there's authority. It's their own dreams and desires.

That's their ultimate final authority. reality. It is a sober and a serious message. There will always be, says Jude, dangerous people in and around the church who themselves are destined for judgment and they present a very real danger to others.

These are people with influence and they must be confronted. Reality, says Jude, reality must be faced. But facing reality must never be something to cause sadness or fear for God's people.

Remember the big picture of who God is. His sovereign care for those who are his. You have great and wonderful privileges as God's people. You are safe for all eternity.

[10 : 50] But, that brings with it real responsibilities. And given what I told you, says Jude, now is the time to contend.

You must contend for the faith. The future of the church is at stake. And as we began to see last time, these middle verses from 5 to 19 are an unpacking of what Jude lays out in verse 4.

So just cast your eye over verse 4. Four things he tells us about these people who are a danger. One, they've gone unnoticed. Two, they're destined for judgment. Three, they pervert God's grace as a license for immorality.

And four, they deny Jesus as Lord. Four key things about these people. And because of these four things, you must contend for the faith.

Once for all delivered to the saints. And last week, looking at verses 5 to 10, we noticed, first, the destiny of these people.

[11 : 55] They are destined for judgment. And second, we noticed that in reality, these people reject the authority of Jesus. They follow their own animal instincts.

And as we move into verse 11 to 19, Jude is painting a very vivid picture for us of what these people are like. And in this section, Jude is helping us to spot these people.

He's teaching us, here is how to spot these people who are in your midst. And having spotted them, well, you can contend for the faith. So this is Jude's spotter's guide, as it were, to these ungodly influencers who've crept into the church.

And again, as with last week, Jude is not holding back. His assessment is definitive and shocking, isn't it? Look at how he begins this section in verse 10, referring to these people, to these ungodly influencers in the church.

He says, right at the start of verse 10, woe to them. Woe to them. And that word, woe, it's not a word that's used very often in the New Testament scriptures.

[13 : 10] In fact, it's almost always spoken by the lips of Jesus. That word, woe. When Jesus spoke these words of woe in Matthew 23, he was doing it for the very same reasons that Jude does here.

Jesus pronounces woe, judgment, on those who have misled God's people. Just listen to these words from Matthew 23, words from Jesus.

He said, but woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

See, Jesus pronouncing judgment on the spiritual leaders for their role in leading the people astray. And Jude is doing the same thing here. He is calling out judgment on those who are leading God's people astray.

[14 : 22] and he goes on in verses 10, verses 11, 12 and 13 to draw attention to crucial things about these people on whom he's pronouncing woe.

He helps us to see what drives them and he helps us to see what they actually produce. So he's pointing us to their motivations and their fruit. What is it that drives these people?

And what do they actually deliver? What's the fruit of their ministry? So look firstly then at their motivations. What drives these people, verse 11?

And Jude is showing us that these people are motivated not by godliness but by worldliness. These are worldly people. Now as with the previous section, this section begins with a triad of examples from the Old Testament.

He did the same in verse 5. You look back there, he talks about those who are in Egypt and the angels in Genesis 6 and then Sodom and Gomorrah. A set of three examples from the Old Testament.

[15 : 31] And he does the same here in verse 11. Each of these examples from the Old Testament brings clarity and colour to the people Jude is warning about.

We're beginning to see what these people are really like and especially what their motivations are. what are they really after? What's really driving them?

Well let's take each of these examples in turn and the first is Cain. For they walked in the way of Cain Jude tells us.

Now Cain as you'll remember from Genesis kills his own brother Abel because of a jealous disagreement about a sacrifice. The Lord had regard for Abel's sacrifice but Cain's the Lord did not accept.

And after Cain became angry and before he committed murder God asks him why are you angry Cain? Why is your face fallen? If you do well will you not be accepted?

[16 : 40] And if you do not do well sin is crouching at your door. God warned Cain very explicitly but as the story goes on to tell us Cain deliberately ignored God's revealed will and he goes and kills his brother.

With regard to the sacrifice that was problematic it seems that Cain wanted to offer it his own way. And with regard to his brother well he ignored the clear warning of God.

He wanted to do things his own way. He wanted to exercise personal autonomy in everything. He thought he knew better than God's revealed will. I'll offer the sacrifice in my way.

I'll ignore your warning about sin and I'm going to kill my brother. And Jude says that these influences, these people who have crept in, they've walked in the way of Cain.

That is these people know full well the standards demanded by God. But they decide they are not going to go that way. They're going to do it their own way.

[18 : 04] Now they don't perhaps advertise their views quite that boldly. But with their winsome words and slick presentation they will start to subtly undermine God's revealed word.

The thinking of the world is what is really steering them. The approval of the world is what they really want. They're like Cain. They will not submit to God's ways. They will sacrifice in their own terms.

They will not pay heed to God's revealed will. These people who are in your midst are when I was in my early teens one of the figureheads one of the poster boys of the evangelical world was Steve Chalk.

He was often on TV he was generally considered a good chap. He was and still is a very able communicator. But bit by bit his real colors began to show through and I can remember my pastor at the time who was a discerning man I remember him reviewing one of his books in church I think it was the lost message of Jesus that he was reviewing a book that was being widely read at the time and with approval from some in the church and my pastor unpicked the book and showed what was really going on with Steve Chalk's theology and where it would lead and some in the church I can remember this they thought my pastor was being too hard and uncharitable as he sounded the warning but sure enough as the years went on Steve Chalk moved further and further away from the Bible's teaching on a whole range of issues and now he actively opposes orthodox

Christianity he's one of the people at the forefront of the so called conversion ban in England so my pastor was absolutely right he saw Chalk's ultimate motivation was not godliness but worldliness he wanted approval from the world he gets it he gets it but it's so tempting it's so attractive isn't it many followed Steve Chalk his was not a hard message it was an easy message a winsome message it's appealing because it gains the applause of the world beware those who walk in the way of Cain and it's not only the influences that are physically present Steve Chalk was never physically present in my church but his influence was there and our world is much more connected now than it was 20 years ago so beware be alert to the personalities that we listen to we watch the books we read exercise discernment as my pastor did beware those who walk the way of Cain beware those whose real motivations are worldliness and not godliness beware those who will not submit to god's word at the point where the pressures are where we come into conflict with the worlds beware those who take the easier path the subtle move into something more palatable beware beware don't go that way is warning

[21 : 49] Jude that's the first example next is Balaam you can read about that in numbers now Balaam was a gentile and he was hired as a prophet by the king of the moabites one of Israel's enemies and he was hired to pronounce curses on god's people but even though he was hired to do that job even though he was hired to pronounce curses he just couldn't do it Balaam says at one point he says though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold I could not go beyond the command of the lord my god to do less or more when it came to it he could not curse against god's people he could only speak blessings wonderful blessings but as you read on Balaam's work is not over even though he exits stage left it turns out he has influenced matters for selfish gain as we read on the story we see that the

Israelite men began to indulge in sexual immorality with the Moabite women and they then seduced them to go and worship their own gods and we're told in Numbers 31 that it was Balaam it was Balaam who was behind that scheme to get these Israelites men into sexual immorality with the women from Moab read about it in Revelation 2 as well it says there you have some there who hold the teachings of Balaam who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel so they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality Balaam was a paid prophet and in the end he came up with a scheme that would drag God's people into sexual immorality he did it for gain he was motivated by gold worldly possessions in the end that is what triumphed over and ruled

Balaam's heart and what does Jude tell us here they abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error these people in your midst says Jude they've walked the way of Cain they've followed Balaam they are greedy these false teachers are greedy and self interested and they seem to make some sort of profit from leading those in the church astray see their primary motivation their concern it seems was not the spiritual welfare of God's people but themselves their own pockets by gathering some sort of a following they were putting money in their pockets so beware says Jude beware those whose motivation is the worldly pursuit of money beware those in ministry who are obsessed with money who are motivated by profit who are always looking for an edge somehow to line their pockets it may not be as blatant as prosperity gospel teaching there'll be other ways in which money is a real driver for these people so beware people who are motivated by worldliness in terms of who they submit to like

Cain he wanted to go his own way watch out those who are motivated by money like Balaam thirdly he turns to Korah they walked in the way of Cain they abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam Zerah and they perished in Korah's rebellion now Korah led a rebellion of about 250 men against God's chosen leader of Israel Moses and you read about what happens there God destroyed those rebels in an awesome act of judgment the ground literally opened up swallowing all these rebels destroying them and the implication Jude is making here is that these false teachers these influences in the church they were seeking to rebel against God's authority God's chosen leaders in the church so look out says Jude look out for those who would seek position and power in the church who challenge and rebel against

God's ordained leadership now I'm not putting church leaders today on the same part with Moses or the apostles but there is isn't there there is a right ordering in the church and the Lord has set apart some to be preachers and teachers of the word it is the Lord who leads his church but he does so through his word as it's preached and pressed home as it's proclaimed so beware says Jude beware those who challenge the preachers and teachers of the word today those who preach have a difficult and unpopular task their task is to proclaim the word to proclaim God's truth the whole truth no matter how unpalatable it might be and there will always be those who don't like it who propose a softer gentler message and that's always going to be attractive be where those who seek to undermine the pulpit ministry whether it is seeking to turn a growth group gradually against the leadership or maybe it's under the guise of sharing concerns with others in the church be careful about that ask yourself is that a genuine sharing of concern or are they actually seeking to gain a following turning people against the leadership for their own gain if someone's got a genuine concern then the right thing to do is go and speak to them go and speak to the leadership if you've got a concern that's the right way to deal with it don't go talking to others seeking to turn people against the leadership it's not saying those in leadership are above reproach above making mistakes that's not what it's saying here but just be careful those who in reality are stirring rebellion the example of core is very very sobering isn't it it's sobering because the

[28 : 52] Lord cares deeply for his people they are precious to him and those who for selfish gain seek to win themselves are following by turning people away from the one true faith well they will face a day of reckoning so you see what Jude is doing he is unveiling with reference to the three Old Testament examples he's showing us the motivation what is it that drives these people they are worldly says Jude not godly they follow their own desires rather than submit to God they seek wealth and position be careful be discerning but also I think there must be an implication for all of us mustn't there to examine our own hearts we're all drawn aren't we in many ways to worldly thinking and not godly thinking we're drawn to the motivations of the world rather than godliness and so we must each of us take care and watch our own hearts lest the seeds of these things be present in ourselves so we must watch our own hearts the problem isn't just out there somewhere it may well be in each of us so just be careful watch yourself lest there be something of the way of

Cain or the seeking of gain to Balaam's error or even the rebellion that Korah led so that's the first thing that Jude is highlighting to us the motivations behind these people who crept in second and finally notice what they produce we've seen their motivations what about the fruit what do these people actually produce and Jude shows us that these people they do not deliver what they promise they do not deliver what they promise so looking here at verses 12 and 13 and he piles up image after image in these verses seven images are set out in these two verses and there's a rough structure the first three are all to do with eating the eating related images the first three in verse 12 and then he turns and end of verse 12 to a set of four illustrations all of which are drawn from the natural world so he talks about waterless clouds fruitless trees wild waves and wandering stars so look at the first three all to do with eating and

Judah showing us that these people are deceitful consumers they are deceitful consumers not sacrificial servants first image is that of hidden reefs at your love feasts now a love feast is likely just the meals they enjoy together as a church fellowship perhaps they would finish with the Lord's supper communion but Jude says these people are present in your midst and they're dangerous they're like hidden reefs like rocks just below the surface of the sea they will shipwreck anyone who comes near them you can't see them all looks well on the surface but lying just beneath their dangerous rocks they hide themselves in plain sight they're in and amongst you perhaps they're reputable people well thought of not those who immediately arouse suspicion but they are dangerous rocks they hide their true motivations they're not up front they hide their true motives they feast he says without fear they've no shame they are in fact he tells us shepherds feeding themselves now a shepherd's whole existence a shepherd's whole purpose is to serve the sheep their job is to see that the sheep are protected and well fed that's the job a shepherd who feeds only himself well he's no shepherd at all is he and yet that is what these people are like says

Jews they purport to feed God's people but they do the opposite they do the opposite they are in it only for themselves now shepherding imagery is all over the Bible it's often used to describe those whose job it is to shepherd God's people and we've seen this sort of selfish shepherd before let me read to you from Ezekiel chapter 34 hear this warning against the shepherds of Israel son of man writes Ezekiel prophesy against the shepherds of Israel prophesy and say to them even to the shepherds thus says the Lord shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves should not shepherds feed the sheep you eat the fat you clothe yourselves with wool you slaughter the fat ones but you do not feed the sheep the weak you've not strengthened the sick you've not healed the injured you have not bound up the strayed you have not brought back the lost you have not sought and with force and harshness you have ruled them so they were scattered because there was no shepherd and they became food for all the wild beasts my sheep were scattered they wandered all over the mountains on every high hill my sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth with none to search or seek for them therefore you shepherds hear the word of the

Lord as I live declares the Lord God surely because my sheep have become a prey and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts since there was no shepherd and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep but the shepherds have fed themselves and not fed my sheep therefore you shepherds hear the word of the Lord thus says the Lord God behold I am against the shepherds and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep no longer shall the shepherds feed themselves I will rescue my sheep from their mouths that there be no food for them those are sober words aren't they selfish shepherds have always been present in and amongst God's people be warned says

[36 : 06] Jews see them for who they are they do not seek the welfare of the flock but only seek to establish a comfortable existence for themselves that's the reality these people they present themselves as shepherds but in reality they feed themselves when the going gets tough when the sheep need searched for and rescued they're not there to do it when the sheep need bound up they're not there to do it they're in it for themselves so that's the first set of three then look at the next four images he gives these four images and he's showing us here that these people they don't produce what they promise they are like waterless clouds this is quite a difficult image to get across to a church in Glasgow waterless waterless clouds good one never seen one of those but

Jude is addressing a church in Palestine which as we know is a hot dry place so any sign of a cloud was a sign that water might be on the way farmers needed that water desperately and so a waterless cloud promising to bring life to a parched land is instead blown away by the wind there's not a drop of rain utterly useless to the farmer and Jude is saying these ungodly people in your midst are like that they promise much but like a cloud promising rain these people seem to promise the biblical gospel but in reality they preach no gospel at all they are like waterless clouds useless but like autumn trees without fruit fruit a tree's health can be judged by its ability to produce fruits which you'd expect to find on a fruit tree in autumn but to find an autumn tree without fruit that shows you there's something wrong fundamentally wrong with a tree so it is with these false teachers they will not despite promising appearances they will not ultimately produce fruit they fail to produce what they promise perhaps they promise great results and growth from teaching that seems more acceptable to the surrounding culture perhaps they promise this is the message this is what the world needs to hear

I've toned it down the difficult bits this is a message people will want but as time goes by nothing of lasting value ever comes from it their ministries produce no harvest the ministry that produces the almost always looks unimpressive I think back to my youth growing up in church a very unspectacular youth ministry teaching the word week by week and yet the fruit is to be seen now almost all my peers are walking with the Lord and the majority are serving in ministry in some way at the time you wouldn't have thought it the much more spectacular youth group down the church with the great music and the cool people that fritted away in the end there was nothing of lasting value so beware it takes time to see sometimes but beware the ministries that produce no fruit you've got to look carefully look beyond the outward appearance and as a result look what happened to the fruitless tree up rooted there was a certain judgment coming as

Jude has told us already for those people wild waves that's the next image if you've ever been on the coast or by the beach following a storm and in certain conditions you'll see this grim foam piling up it's filthy scum you don't want to go near it these people Jude warns about are like wild waves they look impressive you can hear them crashing on the shore from a long way away they do produce things but it's nothing you really want it's like filthy sea foam being dragged up from the seabed spewed up on the beach that's what these influences are like says Jude what they actually leave behind is a polluted mess they're like wandering stars stars until our sat navs and other navigation systems stars were the way in which we navigated they were used as a fixed point which helped travelers head in the right direction however a wandering star which is probably a planet a wandering star would be absolutely useless for navigation it would lead you astray in the same way these people they're like that star they promise a safe way home they promise a safe path but actually they deliver uncertainty and danger they will steer you off course these influences says

Jude they promise a lot they look at first glance very impressive but consider what they actually produce look at the actual fruit what's actually being delivered here and that can take time to see now we are people that are drawn by the visibly impressive it's always been the case but I think much more so now we have these amazing black boxes in our pockets through which we see a wonderful world of color and we can go almost anywhere in the world and everything looks amazing on little phones doesn't it we love new and shiny things advertising works we fall for it but Instagram reality is a long way from the real world and just beware the Instagram type influences in the church beware those that look very impressive who talk the game but watch long enough and the reality will become plain and Judah's telling us that destiny is certain and it's very sobering you do not want to go where these people are leading you it does not end well see beneath the facade says Jude see what is really there do not automatically believe what people project do not automatically believe what they're saying especially if they're taking on the leadership look at the fruit look at what's really there what do they produce look at the signs says Jude help he's helping us in this passage he's helping us to spot these people look discern their motivations and look hard enough and long enough to see their fruit and beware it's a sobering message but it's one we need to hear isn't it and we'll see next time more of how

[43 : 35] Jude is warning us before we get and I'm looking forward to this to verse 20 where we get to see how it is we do contend but before we get there we need to learn to spot these people well let me pray and we'll sing Father we do thank you for your sober warnings but they are loving warnings and please would you help us together and as individuals to be those who guard the church family that we are discerning to spot those who might creep in amongst us with worldly agendas seeking to draw people away help us to learn to spot that and Lord give us the humility to spot it in our own hearts that we might by your grace repent and turn from these desires when they arise in our own hearts so Father please protect us as a fellowship and thank you for the great assurance there is in this letter that you will keep us to the very end as we keep ourselves in you help us to that end for we ask it in Jesus name

Amen well as we close let's remind ourselves of where our real hope is and it's found in one place only in Christ alone my hope is found he is my light my strength and my song remember I wish as we our happy the yes I would see