

How to Spot False Teachers

Jude 1:4-12

Bellevue Baptist Church

August 23, 2026

Open your Bible with me to the book of Jude. Today we complete our two week study of this short, but theologically thick book tucked away at the tail end of the New Testament.

If you remember from last week, Jude did not originally intend to write a warning letter. In verse 3, he tells us that he sat down eager to write about "the salvation we share." He wanted to write a joyful letter. A celebratory letter. A letter reminding believers of the hope they possess in Jesus Christ. But the Holy Spirit redirected him.

Jude wrote a letter of caution. He said in v. 3:

I found it necessary to write, appealing to you to contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all. Jude 3

In other words: Stand up for what you believe. Protect the truth. Don't let it be distorted. For that reason, I referred to Jude last week as the fire alarm of the New Testament. It is a short book that screams WARNING when the church doesn't see the smoke, the danger of drifting away from its core beliefs.

This raises an important question: How does a church drift? How does a congregation that loves Jesus slowly begin moving away from the truth? Jude answers that question immediately in verse 4:

For some people, who were designated for this judgment long ago, have come in by stealth; they are ungodly, turning the grace of our God into sensuality and denying Jesus Christ, our only Master and Lord. Jude 4

Notice those words: "*have come in by stealth*." They slipped in unnoticed. False teachers rarely announce themselves. They don't walk through the front door carrying a sign that says, "Hello, I'm here to destroy your church." They come in by stealth.

Recently I let the dog out one night. I cracked the door for just a second and didn't even notice what just happened. In that brief moment, a giant wasp snuck inside. I didn't detect it then, but that big gross bug was in my house. What would you do, if hours later, you were lying in bed, almost asleep, when suddenly you hear that unmistakable BZZZZZZZZ. It slams into the ceiling. BZZZZZZZZ. It bounces off the wall. BZZZZZZZZ.

What would you do at that moment? You would get out of bed. You would turn on the lights. You would deal with the intruder before he bites or stings you. That's exactly what Jude is doing here. He's warning God's people that a wasp has entered the house. Cast it out.

As I turn your eyes to v.4 and following, I want you to notice how Jude is creates a profile of a false teacher. Look again at what Jude says: *For some people, who were designated for this judgment long ago, have come in by stealth; they are ungodly, turning the grace of our God into sensuality and denying Jesus Christ, our only Master and Lord. Jude 4*

The first thing Jude tells us is that:

1. False teachers twist the meaning of grace. (v.4)

They take one of the most beautiful doctrines in Christianity—God’s grace—and they distort it into something God never intended. What does that mean?

When I was in college, I had a friend who claimed to be a Christian but regularly went out at night and participated in things that were clearly not Christian. One day I asked him—I thought you were a Christian? His answer was simple: "I am. God will forgive me. It's all good."

I don't think Jesus ever used the words "It's all good" when discussing sin in peoples' lives. He didn't say to Zacchaeus who was lining his wallet by overtaxing citizens—it's all good. I don't think he said to the woman at the well, who had five husbands: it's all good. I don't think he said to all the churches in Revelation: it's all good.

God's grace and his patience should not be interpreted as indifference to sin.

And that is exactly what Jude is confronting. The false teachers were teaching people that because God forgives sin, sin isn't really that serious.

The German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer saw this same danger in his time. In his famous book *The Cost of Discipleship*, he coined a phrase that has become very influential in Christian thought. He called it *cheap grace*.

What is cheap grace? Bonhoeffer described it as forgiveness without repentance, baptism without obedience, communion without confession. In other words, cheap grace says, "I want the benefits of Christianity without the demands of Christianity."

The Bible knows nothing of that kind of grace. The grace of God is free, but it is never cheap. It cost Jesus His life. And when that grace truly takes root in a person's heart, it causes them to want to live in the light, not in the darkness.

So whenever someone says, "Since God forgives me, I can live however I want," they have fundamentally misunderstood the gospel. False teachers twist grace into permission to live like the ungodly.

Now, let's move on in the passage, and see what else we can learn. Beginning in verse 5, Jude teaches us a second lesson:

2. False teachers ignore God's warnings. (vv.5-7)

To drive this point home, Jude reaches back into redemptive history and gives us three examples: the nation of Israel, the fallen angels, and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. He writes. This is why so many Old Testament stories were preserved—that people might read and learn and refuse to repeat the mistakes of those who came before. Jude writes:

Now I want to remind you, although you came to know all these things once and for all, that Jesus saved a people out of Egypt and later destroyed those who did not believe; and the angels who did not keep their own position but abandoned their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains in deep darkness for the judgment on the great day. Likewise, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns committed sexual immorality and perversions, and serve as an example by undergoing the punishment of eternal fire. Jude 5-7

At first glance, these seem like three unrelated stories. But they all point to the same truth: God takes rebellion seriously. First, Jude points to the people of Israel after they were rescued from Egypt.

If you travel back to the book of Exodus, you'll meet a very frustrated Moses. Here was a man who gave up everything to help God's people escape slavery. God performed miracle after miracle. The Red Sea parted. Bread fell from heaven. Water came from a rock. God showed His power again and again. Yet despite all God had done for them, the people constantly complained. They complained about the heat. They complained about the food. They complained about the water. At one point they even said, "Why don't we just go back to Egypt?"

Think about that. God had delivered them from slavery, and they wanted to put the chains back around their feet. Because of their unbelief, God refused to allow that generation to enter the Promised Land. Why does Jude bring this up?

Because false teachers always encourage people to go backward. The Christian life is meant to move in one direction: forward with Christ. Jesus didn't rescue you from your old life so you could spend your days longing to go back to it.

And that's exactly what false teachers were encouraging these Christians to do. They were saying, in effect, "You can follow Christ without leaving your old desires behind." Jude says, Don't believe it.

Don't go back to Egypt. Don't return to the patterns Christ rescued you from. Keep becoming the person He saved you to become. The grace of God doesn't just bring you out of something. It leads you into something: a new life of faith, obedience, and holiness.

Second, Jude points to the fallen angels.

He writes, *"The angels did not keep their own position but abandoned their proper dwelling..."*

While Scripture doesn't tell us every detail about what happened before the creation of the world, it gives us enough clues to understand the big picture. God created angels as glorious beings to serve Him. But one of them became consumed with pride. He wanted God's position. He wanted God's authority. He wanted God's glory.

We know him as Satan. When he rebelled against God, others followed him. Ever since that moment, the enemy has been selling humanity the same lie: "You don't need God. You can be your own master. You can define the truth for yourself. You can determine right and wrong. You can become your own god."

Jude points to the fallen angels and says, "Look what happens when you think you know better than God."

Finally, Jude points to Sodom and Gomorrah.

In the Old Testament, these cities became symbols of moral rebellion against God. Their citizens rejected God's design for sexuality and marriage. The Bible uses the language of perversion in describing these cities—they were perverse places. The word perverted means to turn something away from its original purpose. That's how sin often works. It takes something designed for good, and distorts it.

False teachers often do the same thing with Scripture. They take God's Word and try to make it say what they want it to say in order to justify the lifestyle they have already chosen. But God does not adjust His truth to fit our desires. His Word defines how we are to live our lives.

All three examples are essentially Jude pointing to the past and saying, "See what happens when people decide God's plans are simply suggestions?" Israel ignored God's plan. The angels ignored God's plan. Sodom and Gomorrah ignored God's plan. Be warned!

I remember working on a farm one summer when I was in high school. One day the farmer pointed at an electric fence and said, "Whatever you do, son, don't touch that wire. Trust me."

A few days later we pulled up to a gate in his truck. He asked me to hop out and open the gate. I wasn't paying attention and my hand brushed that wire. The next thing I knew, I was airborne. I experienced a kind of revival, but not in the biblical sense.

I looked back toward the truck and the farmer was bent over laughing. With his hands in the air, he mouthed the words: "I told you!"

That's essentially Jude's message. Warning. Don't touch the wire. Don't believe the lie that you can design your life any way you want it. You either follow God's plan, or you face great pain.

This is why false teaching is so sinister. It always promises people a life of greater freedom, but in the end it delivers pain. As the Proverb says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end, it leads to death."

And Jude loves these believers enough to warn them before they get shocked.

So far, Jude has shown us two characteristics of false teachers. First, they twist grace into permission to sin. Second, they ignore God's warnings. And now he says one more thing:

3. False teachers reject authority. (v.8)

Look at verse 8:

"In the same way these people, relying on their dreams, defile their flesh, reject authority, and slander glorious ones."

Circle those words: reject authority. Most people don't struggle with understanding what God says. They struggle with liking what God says.

We live in a culture that treats personal freedom as the highest virtue. We are told from childhood to follow our hearts, create our own truth, define our own identity, and live according to our own desires. But being a Christian means full-commitment to the way of Jesus as the way of life.

Philosopher Dallas Willard put it this way. He said, We have too many vampire Christians these days. What is a vampire Christian? Someone who wants just a little blood from Christ. A vampire Christian says, "I don't want to take your character Jesus. I don't want to take your cues. I don't want to have to take on your values, or to embrace what you declare as truth. Just a little blood to get me to Heaven, and I'll be on my way, thank you very much.

But discipleship is a much larger declaration. Jesus said, "Unless you take up your cross, you cannot follow me. This is going to be hard. It's going to be inconvenient. It's going to hurt sometimes.

But you were bought with a price and your life is no longer your own. Your body, no longer your body. The life you now live in that body, you live by faith in the Son of God. You can't have the protection of the Prince of Peace while clinging to your personal freedoms and devising your own plans.

He is your authority. Will you submit, or will you reject his voice. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey my commands."

Now, the next verse is one that trips a lot of people up because Jude brings up a story that does not appear anywhere in our Old Testament. It comes from a piece of Jewish writing that circulated during that time. It's confusing. It raises all kinds of questions, primarily: "Why would Jude refer to a piece of uninspired literature? Why go outside the Old Testament?" Great question, and I'll address in a second, but let's read it first:

Yet when Michael the archangel was disputing with the devil in an argument about Moses's body, he did not dare utter a slanderous condemnation against him but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" Jude 9

Now what in the world is going on here?

Best we can tell, Jude is referring to a well-known Jewish tradition concerning the death of Moses. The story suggested that after Moses died, a dispute arose involving Satan and Michael the archangel over Moses' body. The details aren't entirely clear, and frankly, Jude doesn't seem interested in explaining them. His concern is not the argument itself. He's just pulling that story to make a point about the angel Michael's behavior. Notice what Michael does not do. He doesn't trash-talk with Satan. He doesn't boast about his own power. He doesn't act arrogantly. He doesn't presume authority that isn't his.

Instead, he simply says: *"The Lord rebuke you."* In other words, even Michael understood that ultimate authority belongs to God. Michael knew where his lane ended and where God's authority began.

Now compare that to the false teachers Jude is describing. They speak carelessly. They speak arrogantly. They make bold claims. They reject authority. They act as though they answer to no one. Even an archangel demonstrated more humility than these teachers.

And that's Jude's point. The issue is not really angels and demons. The issue is submission. False teachers have a hard time submitting to authority because they ultimately want to be their own authority. And before we're too hard on them, let's admit something:

Every one of us struggles with this. There is something deep inside the human heart that resists being told what to do. When we are put under authority, we naturally want to buck it.

This is bad in human relationships, because we all have to learn to work under bosses, but it's even worse when we reject God's authority. Jude says that whenever people place themselves above God's authority, spiritual disaster soon follows.

Now, let me briefly answer the question some of you may be wondering about. Why would Jude reference a story outside the Bible? The simplest answer is that quoting a source does not make the entire source inspired. As I mentioned last week, in Acts 17, the Apostle Paul quoted Greek poets in order to make a point.. That didn't make those Greek poetry books Scripture. Likewise, Jude can refer to a story that was familiar to his audience without declaring the entire book to be God's Word. He's simply using an illustration his readers would recognize to make a larger point. And the larger point is crystal clear: Even Michael the archangel respected God's authority. False teachers do not.

So, in summary, Jude has shown us three characteristics of false teachers: They twist grace into permission, they ignore God's warnings, and they reject God's authority.

Now before we continue marching through every verse in this letter, why don't we come up for air and consider ways those three truths might apply to us this week.

As we often do, I'd like to answer three questions from three different perspectives.

A Seasoned Christian Asks:

How can I honor authority when I have little respect for the person in charge?

One answer is this: spiritual maturity is demonstrated by a growing respect for authority.

The reason that's difficult is because we live in a culture that increasingly views authority with suspicion. We are taught to challenge authority, question authority, resist authority, and sometimes even mock authority. To be clear, there are certainly moments when authority should be questioned. Human leaders are imperfect. Governments can become corrupt. Institutions can drift.

But Christians approach authority differently because we believe that behind every legitimate authority stands the sovereign hand of God. One of the clearest examples is found in the way Scripture commands us to pray for those who hold governing positions. The Apostle Paul wrote that we should pray for kings and all those in authority. That's easy when we like the person in office. It's much harder when we don't. What if the person elected is the exact opposite of what you thought the country needed? What if you disagree with his policies? What if you didn't vote for him? The Bible still says to pray. Why? Because our prayers are not ultimately an expression of confidence in a politician. They are an expression of confidence in God's sovereignty.

When we pray for leaders, we remind ourselves that God may have purposes higher than our own. He may be accomplishing things we cannot see. He may be writing a story we do not fully understand. As Christians, we respect authority not because every authority figure deserves it, but because God has ordained structures of authority for human flourishing.

Now, there are exceptions. When governing authorities command what God forbids, or forbid what God commands, believers may have to resist. That's why men like Dietrich Bonhoeffer opposed the evil of the Nazi regime. There are moments when obedience to God requires courageously standing against wicked authority. But those moments are the exception, not the rule. Most of the time, spiritual maturity looks like learning to submit. And that's something we practice throughout our entire lives.

I remember becoming a senior pastor at the age of twenty-nine. One day, a Sunday School teacher in his seventies approached me after church. He said, "Preacher, I want you to know that our class doesn't follow your curriculum. We do our own thing. We only teach prophecy."

I had concerns about that approach. I've seen the danger of focusing on one portion of Scripture while neglecting the rest. The Bible says that all Scripture is God-breathed and useful, not just the prophetic passages. But my bigger concern wasn't his curriculum. It was his attitude. It didn't take a brain surgeon to understand what he was saying. "Listen youngster. I've got socks older

than you. And I don't need some 29 year old boy telling me what to teach." He didn't use those words but the implication was clear.

Now, let's be honest. It's not easy for a man in his seventies to submit to a pastor who's twenty-nine. But here's the key. He wasn't ultimately being asked to submit to a twenty-nine-year-old. He was being asked to submit to the person that the congregation elected, because they believed I was who God wanted to lead in that season. For reasons only God knows, He wanted an inexperienced, but energetic, twenty-nine-year-old in that position.

The rejection of authority is often just another form of pride. It's the belief that my way is always best. My judgment is always superior. My preferences should always prevail. The book of Proverbs repeatedly warns us about that kind of arrogance.

Proverbs 12:15 says:

"A fool's way is right in his own eyes, but whoever listens to counsel is wise."

Do you hear the contrast? The fool says, "I'm right." The wise person says, "Teach me." The fool resists correction. The wise person welcomes it. The fool trusts himself. The wise person trusts God.

So what does spiritual maturity look like in a culture that rejects authority? It looks like praying for leaders even when you disagree with them. It looks like honoring those God has placed over you. And ultimately, it looks like bowing your knee to King Jesus, the highest authority of all.

A Good-hearted Skeptic Asks:

Why does God care what people do with their sexuality?

Think about it this way. When a builder receives the blueprints for a house from an architect, he doesn't have the freedom to pick and choose which parts of the plan he wants to follow. He can't say, "I don't think this wall is necessary," or "I'd rather put the windows somewhere else." A builder is called to build according to the design. The same is true of God's design for humanity. God created marriage. God created family. God created sexuality. And because He designed these things, He is the Master Architect who has final say on how things should be.

And he has spoken very clearly that marriage is between one man + one woman for life. It is crystal clear. People can reject it, mock it, or celebrate it.

Now, I realize that many people hear what I just said and immediately place me in the category of narrow-minded or judgmental. Our culture increasingly elevates a person's choice in all things—this is the highest form of freedom. But the Bible says any design we follow other than God's ultimately becomes a form of bondage. The world says if something feels right to me, it must be right for me. But Christianity begins with a different assumption that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. God knows more than I do. The Creator understands the design better than the creation.

The Apostle Paul touches on this when he says that spiritual truths are spiritually discerned. A person has to give their life to Christ, receive the Holy Spirit, before they can accept them.

He says in 1 Cor. 2:14:

But the person without the Spirit does not receive what comes from God's Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to understand it since it is evaluated spiritually. 1 Cor. 2:14

Paul isn't saying that non-Christians are unintelligent. Far from it. They may have an IQ like Einstein. He is saying that without the work of God's Spirit, even smart people cannot see God's design as beautiful or compelling.

And let me say a word about the intimacy designed for marriage. We are to treat sexuality as something very sacred. Something that is holy.

That's a principle you see throughout Scripture. Whenever God declares something holy, He expects His people to treat it as holy.

In the Old Testament, in Leviticus chapter 10, a priest named Aaron has two sons who misbehave. They walk into the temple and offer unauthorized fire before the Lord. They approached worship casually, treating something sacred as ordinary, and the consequences were severe.

In the New Testament, some believers treated the Lord's Supper like an ordinary meal. They gorged themselves, ignored the spiritual significance of what they were doing, and Paul says some became sick and even died because they failed to recognize the holiness of the moment.

What's the principle? Treat holy things as holy. Marriage is holy. The family is holy. Sexuality is holy. And when something is holy, God cares deeply about how it is handled. Throughout Scripture, God consistently reminds us that His commands are not arbitrary. They are given for our good.

A Student Asks:

If wisdom and maturity don't always come with age, why does God command us to honor older people?

You are correct that age is not a guaranteed indicator of wisdom. There are foolish older people, just as there are wise younger people. But God's command to honor older people is rooted in something deeper than age alone. It is part of learning how to be humble.

When we choose to show respect, we are acknowledging that we do not know everything. Scripture teaches that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Respecting others, especially those who have gone before us, is one way we cultivate that humility.

Older people have simply lived longer. They've made mistakes, endured hardships, raised families, navigated careers, and learned lessons that younger people have not yet encountered. Young people may have more energy, but their adventurous spirit can get them into trouble.

I'll give you an example. Our family went whitewater rafting this summer. Since we'd never done it before, we weren't sure whether to choose the easy, medium, or difficult route. So I called the rafting company and asked, "How often do people fall out of the boat? Because a few members of our family would strongly prefer to remain in the boat rather than be launched into the rapids."

The woman said, "People do fall out sometimes. But just about everyone who falls out is a male between the ages of 16 and 24."

I laughed out loud.

Now, I realize that the analogy is imperfect. Young men likely fall out of the boat because they think that's fun! Some are just adventurous, willing to take risks, and that can be a good thing, but those who have lived longer often have a better sense of when danger is approaching. They have been trained to see where trouble lies.

That's one reason God designed the church the way He did. In Titus 2, older men are instructed to teach younger men, and older women are instructed to teach younger women. God's plan is for one generation to help the next generation avoid unnecessary pain.

So honor older people not because they are always right, but because humility recognizes that people who have traveled farther down the road often have something valuable to teach.

The book of Jude warns us about arrogance. Stay away from those who trust their own instincts above all else. And one way to show God you take humility seriously is by respecting those with experience. Humility listens. And learns. Jude calls us to be the kind of people who are willing to learn God's way of doing things.