

Defending the Faith III

November 20, 2011

Jude 3-4

I'd like to draw our attention to the epistle of Jude 3-4, "3Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. 4For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ."

When John Newton, that old wicked sinner, bent down on that dock and begged for the salvation of God, God saved him through and through. Not long after, he penned the words to Amazing Grace where he praised his God for saving such a wretch as he. God's grace IS amazing.

So, can you believe there are those trying to infiltrate the church to turn God's grace into lasciviousness, as shown in verse 4? I explained that word as referring to *sensuality*, with particular weight thrown toward the *sexual* kind of sensuality. The local church is threatened with the infiltration of people whose example, teaching, or at least whose undercurrents will be to turn the grace of God into sexual sensuality. And it is our job to contend with this "Twisted Grace" that accommodates sensuality among God's people. But to do that effectively, we first have to understand what "untwisted grace" is. What does the Bible just broadly say about grace? What is "straight grace"? And if you just open your Bible and begin reading, you quickly realize that God's grace IS the gospel. **The gospel itself is the good news of the grace of God.**

The second thing you quickly realize about grace is that, having received the gospel – the good news of Jesus Christ – we are no longer under law, but are under the reign of grace. **Believers live each day under the reign of God's grace.** Of course, that being the case, when we sin, we are not confronted with more rules. God does not deal with us in terms of punishment because our Savior *took* all the penalty for our disobedience to the law. Rather, what we encounter from God is MORE GRACE! He forgives us; He does so *freely*; He completely cleanses us. This is now the M.O. – *modus operandi*; this is the rule we operate under. But of course, like all of God's miraculous blessings, grace is capable of being abused. And so in several passages in the New Testament you have warnings about this.

We discover concerning grace, thirdly, that the Bible teaches that grace gives us an *education*. It saves, but it also teaches us. **Believers, for their entire Christian lives, will be taught by God's grace.** What does God's grace teach us? Titus tells us that, now being

God's child and under the reign of grace, we would *learn to deny worldly lusts*. This is part of the instruction of God's grace. And a few Sunday mornings ago, we began looking at four lessons grace teaches us about denying ourselves worldly lusts.

The first was from Ephesians 4:17-19 where we are told that sensuality is one of the most conspicuous characteristics of fallen world culture: ¹⁷"This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, ¹⁸Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: ¹⁹Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness."

The second aspect we are taught regarding this is that sensuality is not merely external (what we do), but that it is an *internal* heart problem first of all. Mark 7:20-23 – ²⁰"And he said, 'That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. ²¹For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, ²²Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: ²³All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.'" So, to deal with it in ourselves is a matter of letting God's Holy Spirit deal with our hearts. It is a heart issue.

And the third beautiful lesson that grace teaches us is that **the grace of God is so powerful that it actually is miraculously capable of delivering us from the practice of sensuality!** It *saves* men and women and teenagers from this sin. The Bible is emphatic that you can't live in this and practice this and still have your path eventuate in heaven. Paul says in Galatians 5:19-21 that people who practice this are *not* going to inherit the kingdom of God. ¹⁹"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, ²⁰Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, ²¹Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." He's very emphatic about it there. And folks, it is essential that our message to the world include our understanding of that. If the way we evangelize people leaves them in sensuality, then we have failed to communicate the nature of salvation.

Of course, there are so many really remarkable testimonies of God delivering people from sensuality. If you are here this morning and you are enslaved to the sensuality of our culture, I want to say to you for your encouragement that the blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse you of all that. And the power of God's Spirit can give you victory over all that! Not that your life will be free from temptation; you WILL be assaulted. In a world like ours, you'll be assaulted consistently, and you may lose some battles—particularly concerning your thought

life. But nevertheless, you will be a person who is much different than who you would have been if Jesus Christ did *not* save you.

There is a famous man in church history with a remarkable testimony — Augustine. This man had been living for some 15, 16 years out of wedlock. He was given over to licentious habits, and God began to deal with him in his early 30s about giving his life to Christ. He had a godly mother, Monica, who had been praying unceasingly for him. I want to read to you at the point where he is a very, very disconsolate person:

“I was an unhappy young man—wretched as at the beginning of my adolescence when I used to pray for chastity. I would say to God, ‘Grant me chastity...but not yet.’ I was afraid that You might [...] too rapidly heal me of the disease of lust, which I preferred to satisfy rather than to suppress. My old loves held me back. They tugged at the garment of my flesh, and they whispered, ‘Are you getting rid of us? Then from this moment we will never be with you again—not forever.’ What they were suggesting was filth. What disgraceful things they were suggesting to me. And I was listening to them. They were whispering to me behind my back, tugging at me trying to get me to look back. I hesitated to detach myself and to be rid of them, to make the leap to where I was being called by the Lord. And meanwhile, the overwhelming force of habit was saying to me, ‘Do you really think you can live without us?’”

“My self-examination had dredged up a heap of all my misery and set it in the sight of my heart. And this precipitated a vast storm bearing down [referring to a downpour of tears]. To pour it all out without the accompanying groans, I got up from beside Olympius [a friend of his], and I moved further away to insure that even his presence would put no inhibition on me, and then I threw myself down under a fig tree and let my tears flow freely. For I felt my past to have a grip on me.”

“And as I was weeping in bitter agony of heart, suddenly I heard a voice from a nearby house chanting over and over again, “Pick up and read! Pick up and read!” I checked the flood of tears and stood up, and, seeing no one, I interpreted it solely as a divine command to me to open the book and read the first chapter I might find. So I hurried back to the place where Olympius was sitting, and I picked up the book of the apostle, opened it, and in silence read the first passage on which my eyes lit—‘Not in riots and drunken parties, not in eroticism and sensuality, not in strife and rivalry, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in its lusts.’” (Romans 13:13-14)

“It was as if a light of relief from all my anxiety flooded into my heart, and all the shadows of doubt were dispelled. ‘O Lord, I am your servant; I am your servant and the son of your handmaid. You have snapped my chains. I will sacrifice to you with an offering of praise. Let my heart praise you, and my tongue, and let all my bones say, ‘Lord, who is like You?’ You, Lord, are good and merciful. Your right hand had regard to the depth of my condition, and from the bottom of my heart has drawn out the trough of corruption. O Christ Jesus, my Helper and Redeemer!”

“And suddenly, it all became sweet to me to be without the sweets of folly. What I once feared to lose was now a delight to dismiss. You turned them out and entered to take their place—pleasanter than any pleasure. Already my mind was free of the binding cares of place-seeking, of desire for gain, of wallowing in self-indulgence, and of scratching the itch of lust. And I was now talking with You, Lord my God, my radiance, my wealth, my salvation.”

Isn’t that a marvelous testimony? And that, of course, is the testimony of many in this room—of the great life alteration that Jesus Christ brought to you. And folks, that is what the grace of God is supposed to do.

Grace teaches us certain things—to deny worldly lusts that war against our souls. And, specifically, it teaches that sensuality is what characterizes our culture, that sensuality is a heart issue, that the gospel delivers people from this, and if they’re not delivered from the power of this, then the real question is whether they truly know the Lord, for you cannot practice these things and end up in heaven.

And now in Ephesians 4—¹⁷This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, ¹⁸Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: ¹⁹Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. ²⁰But ye have not so learned Christ...” A life of sensuality is utterly contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The grace of God teaches us this, that sensuality *is contradictory to the salvation you claim to have experienced!* And so, fourthly, **the grace of God teaches us to no longer walk sensually.**

Now, we continue to be tempted by this, don’t we? If you’re not tempted by sensuality, *you’re dead*. But if we are truly righteous people, *we are disturbed by it*. And there are many of the Lord’s people who have put themselves in the position where they are like

Lot. Yes, that's right, Lot. You and I would have never, ever suspected that Lot was a child of God, a righteous man, right? There is nothing in Genesis that would indicate that to us. But when Peter deals with this very subject we are talking about, one thing he does is to encourage God's people who are in a society that is awash with this. He says (in a paraphrase), "God knows how to deliver the godly out of this. And here's an example—he actually delivered righteous Lot, who was vexed with the filthy conversation of the society. Lot was constantly having to see and hear this kind of thing."

Do YOU feel that way? Are you a vexed, oppressed Christian person? That is much different than being a Christian who feeds on this supposedly under a twisted understanding of grace. We are NOT to walk in this, though we are tempted by it. And to escape it, we must learn an entirely different way of thinking and of reacting to temptation — temptation that is all around us in bookstores, on the TV, on the internet. Only a twisted thinking about grace accommodates sensuality. The grace of God teaches us to deny lusts. This is the message of the Bible; this is the untwisted theology of God's grace.

Both Jude and Peter both warn us that there are some who have crept into the church ever since the 1st century and are teaching that the reign of grace accommodates sensuality. In Christian circles, the church is going to be constantly infiltrated by people who teach that the reign of God's grace actually allows for sensuality in our daily lives. Peter writes, "¹⁷These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever. ¹⁸For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. ¹⁹While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage." (II Peter 2:17-19)

II Peter has much the same warning with a lot of same terminology you find in Jude. They are both warning against the same kind of infiltration. But Peter gives us something Jude does not. In these verses, Peter explains how these infiltrators actually come to influence the church of Jesus Christ. In verse 18, they speak "arrogant words of vanity." The idea is that they are very self-confident people, with "Great *swelling* words of vanity." They make confident assertions, but their assertions are empty and vain. Who are these people who speak so confidently and have this kind of influence? Who are these people who speak so confidently when they teach a perverted form of God's grace that accommodates sensuality in the church? *They are teachers!* II Peter 2:1a —"¹But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be **false teachers among you...**" These are not people outside the

church, nor are they just common Christians who haven't been gifted to teach. These are preeminent individuals who are instructors and catechizers of God's people. Some of their teaching is acceptable, or they would never be accepted in the church! But a portion of their teaching is heretical. In 2:1, they secretly "bring in damnable heresies." And the heresies are marked by "even denying the Lord that bought them..."

They speak arrogant words of vanity; they stand up self-confidently, assertively speaking arrogant words of vanity, and secondly in verse 18, they influence the church by enticing with sensuality. "They allure through lusts of the flesh," through ministries, examples, and even doctrinal teaching while they teach and minister among God's people. There is simply something about their ministries that accommodates and promotes sensuality. And inevitably you will see that their own example fleshes it out (i.e., you'll be able to mark it in their own lives). If you will watch, they themselves are very selfish, sensual people. And Peter says that they are highly influential with people who themselves barely escaped being seduced by this kind of thing (i.e. those who are just in the process of God's delivering them from it, who encounter it as a teaching and lifestyle among teachers within the Christian church).

The third mark in terms of these people's influence – besides how they speak great arrogant words and entice to sensuality through their teaching and example – lies in verse 19, *they promise people LIBERTY*. And the promise of liberty masks many a sensual teaching. Of course, what they mean by that liberty is really just 'freedom from moral restraint.' Paul deals with that in Galatians 5 where he says that church needs to be careful lest that wonderful freedom they have in Christ be turned to become an opportunity for the flesh—a liberty for the flesh. Verse 13, "13For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another." These people teach freedom—liberty, but the extension of it is the toleration and accommodation of – and eventually – the practice of sensuality.

Now, understand that people who teach a twisted theology of grace are not all the same. When you read Jude and II Peter, it's apparent that the ones they are talking about are unsaved, lost people. But we need to be aware that there is a wide spectrum of teachers in the church. On one pole there are teachers of straight grace, untwisted grace, while on the other pole there are lost people who've infiltrated and are actually promoting licentiousness, and finally there's also a spectrum all in-between. We need to be aware of this in our own ministry. We need to be careful that we don't allow an atmosphere where a drift to the wrong direction may begin—a drift toward sensuality.

Not all those teachers are LOST; they are not all bent on destroying the church. There may be genuine believers whose teaching has slightly twisted grace as a reaction against legalism, for example. They honestly are seeking the betterment of the church. They are reacting perhaps against ‘externalism’ or hypocrisy of externalism that doesn’t get to the heart of the issue and is *content with mere outward conformity*; they are reacting against the Christianity that tends to evaluate spirituality merely in terms of *appearance*. They may sincerely be reacting too much against that, and so they say things that are quite concerning – but they haven’t gone to the extreme that Peter and Jude warn about. Nevertheless, a proper understanding of God’s grace is ‘alertful’ to those kinds of drifts, and is watchful, and earnestly desires to be careful. And here’s WHY—because of the extent of their influence in verse 2: “²And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.”

Folks, this is a very popular theme. This approach to things will attract people because we ALL have the flesh in us, wherein is sensuality. This accommodating sensuality will fill pews; it will fill huge arenas with people. And while they are being filled, these people *will be talking about Christ, and talking about the gospel*. Many of these people will be utterly sincere and will be the children of God. But this will creep in and will be one of the huge *DRAWS* in a ministry like that.

This is the way it’s always been. It’s marked many churches. I want to give us an illustration. Look at the letter to the church at Pergamos in Revelation 2:12-13 – “¹²And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; ¹³I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.” Christ was saying, “You’ve not denied the faith even in persecution!” Is this commendable or not? YES! Now, look at 2:14 – “¹⁴But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.”

There were people there who were holding the teaching of Balaam—he was teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel. What did he tell them to do? *Entice them to sacrifice to idols and commit acts of immorality*. And the Lord had much to say to this good church—a church known for its martyr, but having stayed true to the Lord in spite of persecution. Yet they retained in their membership those who taught like Balaam, teaching in a way that actually allowed people to commit immorality. This existed in churches after the time of Christ – and certainly exists in churches today!

Look at the next church—Thyatira. Look at 2:19; what do you think? “¹⁹I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.” Love, service, faith. In some respects, this was clearly a church moving in the right direction, right? But in verse 20, “²⁰Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.” Here are contradictions in them! Under the banner of liberty in Christ, these two churches were insisting with great self-confidence that you *can* eat things sacrificed to idols. And in connection with that, people were drawn into immorality, which characterized pagan worship as you probably know.

I offer these two examples so that we may see from God’s Word that it is possible to be a church full of people that Christ really earnestly commends for many good things, great things—and we should do this as well to each other. It is a Christlike thing to acknowledge the good wherever you find it. But it is also Christlike to be aware of the downside wherever you find it, even if you find it in a *good church*. Just as our Lord was intolerant of sin and sensuality—in both cases of Pergamos and Thyatira, He threatened those churches – His threats are quite severe in verses 16, 22-23 – “¹⁶Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. ²²Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. ²³And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.”

Now, this brings me, lastly, to this final point—our *own* contending for the faith against this teaching and tendency to accommodate sensuality in Faith Baptist Church. **How do we defend the faith and the church against sensuality?** For this, I’ve just chosen a few practical points for us because I think they are at the core of what would be most helpful to the church of Jesus Christ today. However, I am *SO* out of time for now that I’ll give our plan of attack tonight.

Remember—we are called to earnestly contend for the faith against those who infiltrate the ministry, and their twisted thinking on God’s grace accommodates sensuality under the banner of liberty in Christ. What is Faith Baptist Church to do?

Note: Remember, this is not an official article by me or to be published by the church. These are simply my preaching notes, cleaned up a good bit.

– Pastor Nason

[The second part of this message is available in audio form online at www.faithbaptistdecatour.org/AudioArchive/11.20.11-PM.mp3.]