

Lesson 13 | May 30, 2021

A Discerning and Persevering People

Study Text: 2 Peter 2:1–9; 3:3–13; Jude 1:3–4, 17–23

Central Truth: Christians must adhere to and defend sound doctrine.

Key Verse: Jude 1:3

Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints (KJV).

Contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Help students affirm that false teachings are just as much of a problem today as they were in the Early Church.
- Impress upon students the key signs of false teachings: They promote greed and spiritual rebellion, and often exalt the teacher even at the expense of sound biblical teaching.
- Challenge students to reject false teaching, choosing instead to live out godly truth as they look forward to the return of Christ.

Introducing the Lesson

Say: Today we look at the remainder of Peter's Second Epistle as well as the short Epistle of Jude. Both instruct God's people on how they should recognize and respond to false teachers, as well as how they can grow in faith and be prepared for Christ's soon return.

Opening Activity—False Teachings

Ask: Can you think of false teachings you have heard during your life? How did you determine that they were false, and what results came of those teachings? (Possible answers include cult leaders who have led people to bondage, or even harm, as well as people who have predicted a specific date for Christ's return, even though doing so is unbiblical.)

Cults: Jim Jones, David Koresh (Waco Tragedy) Joseph Smith (Mormons) Charles Russell (Jehovah's Witnesses). Mahammad founder of Muslim faith

Here are some false beliefs.

There is no hell. God will not send his creation to hell.

What you don't know won't hurt you.

We don't have to suffer persecution.

All true Christians have plenty and have no problems

Whatever you pray for in the Name of Jesus you will get.

Say: Some false teachings are easy to recognize, but others take more discernment. God calls for us to study the Bible diligently so we can recognize and refute false teachings. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

From the earliest years of Church history, some have misused Scripture to deceive others and promote their own agendas. Often, these individuals were successful because they were charismatic, persuasive, and included elements of truth in what they said. Yet none of this changed the reality that these men and women were false teachers.

Through the years, Christian leaders have taken great care to confront false teaching. In doing so, they have followed the instruction of Peter as well as Jude, in urging fellow Christians to **contend for the faith**, even as they stay strong in the face of trials. This lesson examines these critical instructions, in light of the challenges Christians face today.

Part 1—Rejecting False Teaching Deception Is Subtle

2 Peter 2:1–3

[2Pe 2:1-3 KJV] 1 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. 2 And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. 3 And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.

Say: False teaching often does not begin with something that is blatantly wrong. Instead it begins with a concept that has just enough truth to sound right. **A false teacher may even use Scriptures to support the teaching. But the Scripture may be taken out of context or twisted to fit that person’s opinion.** (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Name it claim it. Teaching has a focus on anything other than Jesus. Using half-truths to support actions. Deception. Using logic to explain the Word of God (Jehovah Witnesses). Making up truth (Book of Mormon). Lots of cults and deceived folks.

There is nothing new about false teaching. It goes as far back as the Garden of Eden. There, Satan used deception to twist God’s clear commands and bring temptation (see Genesis 3). **Adam and Eve fell into sin, and the human race has suffered under sin**

ever since. Every generation of God's people face deception in one form or another. False prophets led the people of Israel astray. Similarly, false teachers in the Early Church led people away from the truth of the gospel (2 Peter 2:1).

It is important to acknowledge the power of false teaching and recognize its true danger, so we can properly prepare ourselves to face it. What about the KKK? Peter described the ability of false teachers to lead many people away from the truth (verse 2). When those who once followed the gospel become entangled in the sinful lifestyle encouraged through false teaching, their public example brings disgrace on the way of truth.

Peter identified human greed as the driving force behind false teaching (verse 3). Still today, false teachers often focus on their own gain, and they are willing to deceive and exploit people for their own benefit. A major characteristic of some modern cults is the complete devotion of cult members to a leader. The members use their strength and resources to satisfy the leader's demands. Those leaders misuse Scripture to justify their actions. Yet these dangers can be more subtle than a cult. **Sometimes a popular teacher can appeal to a large audience within the church, even as he or she preaches a message that leads us away from God, His Word, and His plan for our lives.**

Discuss

? What makes people, even some Christians, follow false teachers?

? Why is it important to be able to recognize false teaching when you hear it?

Resource Packet Item 1: Are You Vulnerable?

Distribute the information sheet. Depending on your time schedule and the needs of your class, you may discuss it or just send it home with them.

Judgment Is Promised

2 Peter 2:4–9

[2Pe 2:4-9 KJV] 4 For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast [them] down to hell, and delivered [them] into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; 5 And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth [person], a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; 6 And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned [them] with an overthrow, making [them] an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; 7 And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: 8 (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed [his]

righteous soul from day to day with [their] unlawful deeds;) 9 The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished:

Say: False teachers are popular because their teachings are appealing to many people; however, they will face God's judgment. Peter gave several examples of such judgment, pointing out God's care and protection for those who are true to Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Beginning in 2 Peter 2:4, Peter used several examples of divine judgment to warn against the dangers of false teachers. He wrote about God's judgment of angels (verse 4), perhaps a reference to angels that rebelled with Satan against God before human history began. This particular reference to being "sent . . . to hell" is a Greek word unique to this verse (*tartarotos*). This was a place Greeks regarded to be a kind of subterranean place of special confinement, lower than hades, where the condemned would be held in chains until divine judgment was meted out. And so, Peter's point was that these angels were being held specifically in anticipation of God's judgment upon them. Peter also pointed to the Flood (verse 5) and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (verse 6). Each of these examples painted a picture of extreme rebellion and subsequent judgment.

Peter's examples are not intended to show God as cruel or merciless. Rather, they show God to be consistent and impartial in His judgment of evil. **By referring to Noah and Lot, Peter reminded people that God always saves those who trust in Him even as He judges the wicked** (verses 5,7).

The example of Lot can be particularly encouraging. Lot was not upright in all his ways (verses 7–8), yet God rescued him from the circumstances brought on by his own poor judgment. The brief recording of Lot's life in Genesis is not that of a spiritual giant. His flaws are very obvious, and his most personal sins are recorded in unflinching honesty. Followers of Christ today can believe in the same grace Lot experienced. We struggle at times, but God is gracious.

When it becomes obvious that a poor choice was made, believers can call out for God's help. **That doesn't mean believers can avoid every consequence of a mistake, nor does it mean we should take sin lightly.** Lot lost much and suffered for his choice. God intervened on Lot's behalf while all who clung to their sinful actions perished. **Just as God knows how to preserve the righteous, He knows how to deal with the wicked (verses 9–11).** Peter stated that the wickedness of these false teachers included indulging the sinful nature and despising authority (verse 10). Their arrogance and attachment to fleshly lusts is a clear sign of false teachers.

Christians can avoid being deceived as we focus on a few important principles. **First, we must ask questions.** Godly leaders will not demand blind obedience to their teaching, but respectfully and sincerely explain the biblical basis for their

teaching. **Second, we must look at how leaders are trying to motivate people. Do they appeal to the sinful nature—greed, pleasure, or power—to manipulate? Do they appeal to lofty ideals but try to channel all the giving or activities through their organization?** These can be warning signs. **Third, we must examine where they are leading us. Do they challenge us to yield more fully to the lordship of Christ, or are they building a following for themselves? We don't have to follow false teachers. We can trust the Lord to protect us if we will listen to and obey His voice.**

Discuss

? How can Christians avoid being taken in by false teachers and sharing their judgment?

? How would you explain God's mercy and His judgment to an unbeliever?

Part 2—Living in Light of Christ's Return Don't Be Deceived

2 Peter 3:3–7

[2Pe 3:3-7 KJV] 3 Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, 4 And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as [they were] from the beginning of the creation. 5 For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: 6 Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: 7 But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

Say: Peter warned that, in the last days, people would scoff at Christianity. We need only to turn on the television to hear such scoffing. **Even within the church, some doubt that Jesus will come again as He promised. But God always keeps His promises.** (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In 2 Peter 3:3, Peter continued his warning against false teachers, explaining that false teaching will increase as the end of this world draws near. Peter was not trying to establish a timetable for Christ's return and the events that will occur. Rather, he intended to warn believers to always remain focused on Christ's promised return and avoid the snares of a world that scoffs at or ignores His coming.

There is a sad irony in verses 3–4. **At the very time when world events are headed toward their conclusion, more people will turn against God. These scoffers, blinded to the evidence of God’s actions in human affairs, will claim that world events just repeat themselves. “Life just continues as usual,” they will argue.**

Peter pointed out that God created the earth and then, through the Flood, destroyed all but eight people (verses 5–6). These same heavens and earth still exist, kept in store for God’s future and the final judgment of sinful humanity by fire (verse 7).

Christians must never doubt that God is true to His Word. The Flood proved that God judges humanity for its wickedness and rebellion against Him. His Word declares that He will again judge this world because of the sinfulness of humanity. A world once destroyed by water will one day be consumed by fire. God’s Word also promises a divine victory over all forces of evil for those who trust in Jesus and live for Him. We must remain faithful to God by obeying His Word. We are also to proclaim the gospel to others so they too can be ready when the end comes.

Discuss

? What are some specific ways Peter’s descriptions of scoffers can help us overcome doubt in these troubled last days?

? What signs do you see that indicate that we are living in the last days?

Anticipate Christ’s Return

2 Peter 3:8–13

[2Pe 3:8-13 KJV] 8 But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day [is] with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. 11 [Seeing] then [that] all these things shall be dissolved, what manner [of persons] ought ye to be in [all] holy conversation and godliness, 12 Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? 13

Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Say: We expect the scoffers of the world to deny the coming of Christ and the judgment of the world. However, some in the church have been lulled into the attitude that everything will go on just as it is. **Peter warns us that we must live in expectancy of Christ's return, both in our personal lives and in our responsibility to reach others.** (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Throughout the second and third chapters of this Epistle, Peter wrote about God's coming judgment on false teachers in the Church and His final judgment of the world. He addressed the danger of being lulled into a false sense of security. As noted above, skeptics mockingly declared that it was foolish to believe Christ would return; after all, much time had already passed since He had said He would return. But Peter responded by noting that God is not held to human perceptions of time (2 Peter 3:8–10). In fact, the delay of Christ's return is actually a product of God's grace and mercy, as He desires all people to come to repentance.

Christians, however, also need to remain alert and on guard. **Peter made it clear that sin tempts even people who have risen to positions of authority in the Church. No one is immune to the pull of evil. It's important to remember that no matter how tempting something in this world may be, one day the world will be destroyed. Peter asked a key question in 2 Peter 3:11. Since everything in this world will be destroyed and everything that truly matters will come in the next world, how should Christians live? Some have answered this question by retreating from the world and failing to proclaim and share the gospel because of their singular focus on heaven.**

This was not Peter's intention, however. All of Peter's teaching directs the reader to the responsibility of believers in Christ to carry out God's purpose in this world, while patiently waiting for God's reward in eternity. In verse 14, **Peter again called for believers to be diligent. Followers of Christ can look forward to and can even hasten the day of His return by faithfully proclaiming the gospel to others and being examples before a fallen world** (verse 12).

Finally, there should be a constant association in Christians' minds between the holiness that will fill the new heavens and earth (verse 13) and the believer's commitment to holy living today (verse 14). Peter urged followers of Christ to be ready at any moment to make the transition from this world into the next, being found "spotless, blameless and at peace with him" (verse 14, niv).

Discuss

? How does anticipation of heaven coexist with spiritual responsibility in this world?

? How is God's mercy displayed in what appears to be a delay in the coming of Christ?

Resource Packet Item 2: Right Way/Wrong Way

Distribute the work sheet and discuss responses, either in small groups or as a class.

Part 3—Contending for the Faith

Be Alert

Jude 1:3–4

[Jde 1:3-4 KJV] 3 Beloved, 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. 4 For 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. ...

Say: The Epistle of Jude was likely one of the last New Testament books written, with most scholars dating it at ad 70-80. Many scholars believe Jude was the half-brother of Jesus and James, who had been a prominent leader in the Jerusalem church in the years before this. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Resource Packet Item 3: Who Was Jude?

Distribute the information sheet and highlight portions of it if time allows. Encourage students to study the sheet further during the week.

Jude’s short Epistle focused on exposing false teachers who believed that salvation by grace allowed people to live in sin. Because these false teachings drew people away from the truth of the gospel, Jude urged his readers to “contend for the faith” (Jude 1:3, NIV). False teaching is not always as obvious as a lie, so believers need to make a determined effort to keep focused on the truth of the gospel.

Jude noted several marks of false teachers (verse 4). First, they crept into the church unnoticed. Sometimes believers only gradually become aware of the errors in a false teacher’s message. Jude, however, clearly recognized that the condemnation of ungodly people like these had long ago been announced.

Also, Jude recognized that these false teachers lived ungodly lives. While preaching a message that sounded Christian, they used God’s grace as permission to act out their lusts. If we see leaders who give themselves such a license, we should neither listen to them nor follow them.

Finally, the clearest sign exposing the false teachers was that they did not believe and teach the truth of the gospel. Rather they taught falsehoods about the nature of God, and specifically of Christ.

Discuss

? What are some signs of false teachers today, specifically those who might claim God's grace as an excuse for sin?

? Why is it sometimes difficult to recognize false teachings?

Grow in Faith

Jude 1:17–23

[Jde 1:17-23 KJV] 17 But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; 18 How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. 19 These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit. 20 But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, 21 Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. 22 And of some have compassion, making a difference: 23 And others save with fear, pulling [them] out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

Say: Jude then encouraged his readers in their spiritual growth. Nothing in his message was new to them. They knew the Scriptures and accounts he mentioned. **They knew there is a true faith and there are counterfeits.** Jude reminded his readers to recall what they had learned from the beginning of their Christian walk. **When we hear a teaching that is new to us, we must be sure that teaching agrees with the truth of the Scripture.** (Share your highlights from the following text.)

There have always been people connected with the church who reject godly authority and choose to satisfy their ungodly lusts. By doing this, they cut themselves off from God, for God desires His people to live in a way that contrasts with the lives of such people (Jude 1:18–20). Believers are to focus on growing stronger in the true faith. They must not allow wrong messages to influence belief. Instead, they ought to continue in daily prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to help them become stronger Christians.

Jude further commanded believers to keep themselves in the love of God (verse 21). To do so they must stay focused on Christ, through whom that love is made known. This is

not a passive exercise. **Believers must “keep [themselves] in God’s love as [they] wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring [them] to eternal life”** (verse 21, NIV).

It is critical that we protect ourselves against the inroads of false teaching. In doing so, **we also have a responsibility to help rescue those either tempted by false teaching or caught up in it. Jude urged believers to show compassion to those who were beginning to doubt the truth (verse 22). As for those who may have already succumbed to untruth, we need to make every effort to bring them back to the truth, snatching them, as it were, from the very fires of hell (verse 23). Yet believers must do so with caution, so they do not become deceived themselves.**

Discuss

? What can Christians do to protect themselves from false teachers and doctrines?

? What steps can we take to continue in our spiritual growth?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: God has given us His Word as our authoritative rule of faith and conduct. He calls us to study it diligently so we can understand and share sound doctrine with those around us.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Pray that God will give you discernment so you can recognize false teachings when you hear them.
- Look for opportunities to share the truth of the gospel with others.
- Consider leading a Bible study in your community to teach others the truth of Scripture.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Men of Truth.

Exodus 18:13–26

[Exo 18:13-26 KJV] 13 And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses sat to judge the people: and the people stood by Moses from the morning unto the evening. 14 And when Moses' father in law saw all that he did to the people, he said, What [is] this thing that thou doest to the people? why sittest thou thyself alone, and all the people stand by thee from morning unto even? 15 And Moses said unto his father in law, Because the people come unto me to enquire of God: 16 When they have a matter, they come unto me; and I judge between one and another, and I do make [them] know the statutes of God, and his laws. 17 And

Moses' father in law said unto him, The thing that thou doest [is] not good. 18 Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that [is] with thee: for this thing [is] too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone. 19 Harken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee: Be thou for the people to God-ward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God: 20 And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do. 21 Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place [such] over them, [to be] rulers of thousands, [and] rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: 22 And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, [that] every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear [the burden] with thee. 23 If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee [so], then thou shalt be able to endure, and all this people shall also go to their place in peace. 24 So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father in law, and did all that he had said. 25 And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. 26 And they judged the people at all seasons: the hard causes they brought unto Moses, but every small matter they judged themselves.

Tuesday:

Paths of Truth.

Psalm 25:4–10

[Psa 25:4-10 KJV] 4 Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths. 5 Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou [art] the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day. 6 Remember, O LORD, thy tender mercies and thy lovingkindnesses; for they [have been] ever of old. 7 Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness' sake, O LORD. 8 Good and upright [is] the LORD: therefore will he teach sinners in the way. 9 The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way. 10 All the paths of the LORD [are] mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies.

Wednesday:

Truthful Lips.

Proverbs 12:15–22

[Pro 12:15-22 KJV] 15 The way of a fool [is] right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel [is] wise. 16 A fool's wrath is presently known: but a prudent [man] covereth shame. 17 [He that] speaketh truth sheweth forth righteousness: but a false witness deceit. 18 There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise [is] health. 19 The lip of truth shall be established for ever: but a lying tongue [is] but for a moment. 20 Deceit [is] in the heart of them that imagine evil: but to the counsellors of peace [is] joy.

21 There shall no evil happen to the just: but the wicked shall be filled with mischief. 22 Lying lips [are] abomination to the LORD: but they that deal truly [are] his delight.

Thursday:

The Spirit of Truth.
John 14:15–18

[Jhn 14:15-18 KJV] 15 If ye love me, keep my commandments. 16 And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; 17 [Even] the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. 18 I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

Friday:

Belief in the Truth.
2 Thessalonians 2:9–17

[2Th 2:9-17 KJV] 9 [Even him], whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, 10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: 12 That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. 13 But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: 14 Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle. 16 Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given [us] everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, 17 Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.

Saturday:

Walking in Truth.
2 John 1:1–8

[2Jo 1:1-8 KJV] 1 The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth; 2 For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever. 3 Grace be with you, mercy, [and] peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love. 4 I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father. 5 And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new

commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another. 6 And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it. 7 For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. 8 Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.