

SUNDAY SCHOOL MATERIALS FOR ADULTS

LESSON 12



Contend
for the faith
which was
once delivered
to the saints

Jude 1:3

THREE DEGREES OF APOSTASY

Scripture Text: Jude 22-23

In **verse 21**, Jude told us to be “looking” for opportunities to introduce souls to the mercy of Christ. In the verses for this lesson, he gave the instruction to not just dismiss those on whom apostasy has worked or is working. The lesson shows that not everyone has been affected by apostasy to the same degree. We should not act hastily. In the heat of the moment, it is easy to become reactionary and say that they are all the same. However, Jude has warned us against that type of thinking.

There are actually three distinct categories of people that have been affected by apostasy. In one translation of these verses, these categories are made clear. It reads, “*Some* of them you must argue out of their error, while they are still wavering. *Others*, you must rescue by snatching them out of the fire. *Others*, you must pity and fear at the same time, hating the garment stained by the flesh.” This clearly indicates that everyone is not to be handled the same way.

MEMORY VERSE: *The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise (Proverbs 11:30).*

How to Have Compassion

And of some have compassion, making a difference. In the first category, notice the use of the word *some* and the phrase *making a difference*. We are to treat the people in this category with *compassion*. To understand this, let us consider one translation of **Jude 22**: “Some of them you must argue out of their error, while they are still wavering.” These are the ones most likely to be helped. Their thinking has been tainted by apostasy. Seeds of doubt have been sown in their minds. The time to remove that doubt is before it takes root. These individuals may be honest people who have been thrown into confusion because of something they heard.

How do we *have compassion* toward these people? We show our love to them by “speaking the truth in love” (**Ephesians 4:15**). The Greek word for *compassion* is *eleed*, which means “to show kindness by beneficence or assistance.” In other words, it is love in action. (This word is used many times in relation to mercy. See **Matthew 5:7** and **Romans 12:8**.)

When we are dealing with these people, we should tell them the truth. We should refute their thinking with the facts; but they should be told in a kind, compassionate way. These souls do not possess bad spirits. They are merely confused in their thinking. However, if they are not rescued at this point, they will be “led away with the error of the wicked” (**2 Peter 3:17**) and become possessed by “the spirit of error” (**1 John 4:6**). To win these souls, we must be wise.

James 1:5 teaches us, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally.” To not act in a manner that pushes these wavering souls on into the arms of the apostates requires great discretion and great wisdom. This work should be reserved for “spiritual” people (**Galatians 6:1**). Truly, one must be directed by the Spirit to restore rather than ruin the state of one of these fragile souls.

Others Save With Fear

Pulling them out of the fire. Let us consider the second category: *pulling them out of the fire*. This is a phrase familiar in Hebrew history. The Prophet Amos spoke to old Israel and alluded to how “God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah,” which according to **Jude 7**, was by “the vengeance of eternal fire.” Amos told Israel, “Ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning” (**Amos 4:11**). **Zechariah 3:2** also speaks of “a brand plucked out of the fire.”

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This category is composed of people who have already made the plunge. They have already embraced the lies of apostasy. They are heading for the “eternal fire” as fast as the wheels of time can take them. The truth is that they may still be saved! (2 Peter 3:9 tells us that the Lord is not willing that anyone should perish.) These individuals must be dealt with in a totally different manner. They must be dealt with forcibly. The time for gentle persuasion is over. Jude used the phrase *pulling them out* to mean as when the angels laid hold of Lot and his family and snatched them out before the fires of Sodom and Gomorrah had consumed them (Genesis 19:16).

The ones who deal with these people must have a healthy godly fear themselves, or else they can be affected. This is why Galatians 6:1 says, “considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” Ones dealing with this category of people must be direct and firm. Jesus dealt lovingly and patiently with some people. With others, He used words of sharp rebuke and judgment. Ecclesiastes 3:1 says, “To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” The only way to distinguish the proper season to deal with this type of people is through Holy Ghost discernment. 1 Corinthians 2:15 says, “He that is spiritual judgeth [discerns] all things.”

The Most Difficult Condition

Hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. This last phrase in verse 23 is the most difficult category of all. It alludes to the garments worn by the lepers in Leviticus 13:47-52. These lepers were so infectious that everything they touched became unclean and infected. Their garments had to be discarded and burned.

What is the lesson here? The people in this category are the most dangerous of all. They are to be pitied but feared. They are people so infected with the spirit of apostasy that they “ooze” it everywhere they go—they spread it and work to infect everyone they come in contact with. They are the agents of apostasy. Anyone who comes in contact with them risks becoming infected. These people can only be dealt with in a strong way: *hating even the garment spotted by the flesh*. Do not be sympathetic with this spirit; hate not the person but the garment.

Though these individuals may seem to be unsalvageable, Zechariah 3:1-4 shows that all three categories have had provision made for them by “Joshua the high priest,” who is a picture in type of the “High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus” (Hebrews 3:1). If these apostates are hopeless, it is only because they refuse to admit their need. There is no failure in the Lord’s remedy. The call of the Gospel is to “whosoever will” (Revelation 22:17); but first they must acknowledge the malady and embrace the remedy, then they may be healed.

JUST A THOUGHT

The only time some people’s mouths are empty is when they are changing feet.