



2023 Weekly Devotions

Week of: Aug 28th - Sept 3rd

Sermon: August 27th



August 28

Matthew 7:15-16

From our text Sunday, Jude wrote that the false teachers had crept in unnoticed. You might ask yourself how they could creep in unnoticed. There had to be some form of deception or disguise to cause the church members to literally not recognize the danger in their midst. We do not have to wonder about how this happens or even that it did happen. Jesus Christ, in His fantastic “sermon on the mount”, warned us of this possibility (Matt. 7:15-16). His exact words were, “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.” The point is that those who come in among us who aim to tear down, mislead, and do great harm to the church and the advancement of the gospel, look like us.

There is actually reason to believe that the reference to “sheep’s clothing” elevates the perpetrator to the status of a prophet. It was common for Old Testament prophets to wear outer garments made from sheep wool. What you have then is someone who enters into the fold who not only appears to be one of us, but he even presents himself as one who is knowledgeable or gifted. He may be charismatic, smooth, and winsome. He could be a person who can influence others, draw a crowd, and garner a following. The fact is that this person that Jesus describes is not intending to look like a regular sheep but as a prophet, a leader.

The frightening reality is that they are actually, as Jesus says, “ravenous wolves.” Brothers and sisters, a ravenous wolf is not a creature that we want to play with or even be near. His intent, like the “father of lies”, is to kill, steal, and destroy” (John 10:10). How do they do it? They pervert biblical teaching and, in its place, introduce false teaching that leads people astray. So, when you think about Jude warning the churches of false teachers creeping in unnoticed, you should connect that to what Jesus said and understand how it happens. This must also prompt us to be aware and on guard in our own context.

Friends, it is imperative that we all understand why Pastor Aaron and I take church membership so seriously. The reason we “interview” all of our prospective members, put them through a four-week new member’s class, and take our time leading the congregation to approve them for membership is because of realities like this. As Jesus continued His message in the seventh chapter of Matthew, He said, “You will know them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:16a). Consider the fact that it generally takes months for the fruit of a plant or tree to ripen. It is only over an extended period of time that we can determine the condition of the fruit. We must learn to take our time in entrusting a person to a position of leadership or influence. We must learn to guard the position of the teacher within our church so that we can guard the doctrine that is being taught. This is why we invest a tremendous amount of time in training our teachers before we allow them to teach.

Through the years, we have had people come and go in our congregation who wanted to teach but we knew their doctrine was not biblically sound, that their motives were in many ways self-serving, and that their beliefs would have been detrimental and harmful to you. Without fail, these people end up leaving our church because they are not given access to you. The warnings from Jude give us cause to be concerned, we do not have to be afraid. We simply need to be vigilant in our defense of truth and in our processes. If we operate in accordance with biblical methods, admonitions, and clear teaching we will be just fine.

August 29

Galatians 5:19-21

Yesterday I concluded the point to ponder writing briefly about the need to observe the fruit of a person's life. Jesus said in Matthew 7, "Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles. So, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit" (v. 16b-17). Bad fruit, good fruit, who decides? As always, the Bible gives us the answer. Today we will take a look at what Paul wrote in the book of Galatians regarding "bad" fruit and "good" fruit.

Let's begin with the bad fruit which Paul calls the fruit (deeds) of the flesh. He writes that the deeds of the flesh are evident and then lists them as immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, anger, strife, jealousy, enmity, disputes, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing and the like (Gal. 5:19-21). These traits can be seen in Jude's description of the apostates who have gone the way of Cain, who have sinned like Balaam, and who have perished in rebellion like Korah (Jude 11). Within what Jude wrote is the understanding that the ungodly, false teaching, apostates are ungodly in character, are perverters of God's grace, and are those who deny the person and work of Christ (Jude 4, 11). So, whether it is what Jesus said, Paul wrote, or Jude wrote, the point is the same. The fruit of a false teacher's life is that of ungodliness on many levels.

The characteristics listed by Paul in Galatians 5 are indicative of those people who do not know Jesus. They may claim to know Him. In fact, they will definitely claim to know Him as part of their initial deception. The proof will be in their lifestyles. These are people who play at religion but have no love for God or worship of God. John MacArthur once said, "False spirituality cannot restrain the flesh." That is what inevitably happens in the lives of those who are fakes. Friends, it is good for you to know that if a person is not truly saved, even if they try to act like a Christian, the day will come when their false spirituality will not keep their flesh in check. It is then that you begin to see the fruit of the flesh produced in them which will reveal the true nature of their heart.

Now, in contrast to the bad fruit produced by the flesh of those who are not truly followers of Christ, we have the fruit produced in genuine believers by the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5:22 and 23. There Paul lists love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These are fruits that the flesh cannot consistently muster up. At some point, as I mentioned above, the flesh will show itself and false spirituality will not hold it back. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit, who is God Himself, can both hold back the flesh and produce Christlike character in His children. By their fruit we will know them and by our fruit we should know ourselves.

Keep in mind folks that this is all written in the context of recognizing and warding off false teachers and unbiblical doctrines. The obvious point is that when we take our time and recognize the fruit of a person's life, which we should, then we make the decision to embrace them or expose them and drive them out of our pasture. The same principle is true in who we choose to be friends with or who a person chooses to date. Take your time dear ones and observe the fruit of another person's life before you decide to saddle up with them on any level. Remember why Jesus said that we would know them by their fruit and that a good tree doesn't bear bad fruit and a bad tree doesn't bear good fruit. When a person shows you their true colors, believe them. They are what they consistently produce, and we must guard ourselves, our children, and others from those who could lead them or us astray.

August 30

Hebrews 12:12-14

I want to deviate just a little today from the focus on false teachers and their horrible impact on the life of others. Today, I want us to spend our time focusing on the reality that the way we live, or carry ourselves, matters tremendously to those who come behind us. Now, I am motivated to write on this subject because it is related to the theme of this week's message. The choices that we make are, like it or not, based on what we honestly believe. Our convictions show up in our decisions. I say that because I want you to connect some dots today.

Just as false teachers can lead others astray, our actions and reactions to life's circumstances leave tracks in which others will walk. False teachers lead people astray but our choices can too. The passage that I chose for today is from Hebrews 12:12-13. It is written, "Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather healed." As always, the word "therefore" at the beginning of verse 12 tells us that this action is to be based on the beautiful divine truths laid out in the passages that preceded this one. In other words, it is like saying, "Based on what you just read and learned, live this way."

The author of Hebrews once again reverts back to the race metaphor that he used at the beginning of chapter 12. The runner, the follower of Christ, is encouraged to be strengthened in the truth of the Lord and His Word. As the individual runner is strengthened and his arms brought back into place, his knees and legs quit shaking in fatigue, and his pace and form corrected, he will make "straight paths." All of this is to be done so that, "The limb which is lame may not be put out of joint but healed." There are two layers to what this means.

First, the runner himself is strengthened, his form improved, and his steps sure so that he himself will not suffer injury. Second, those who run behind him are able to follow in his straight and safe steps and themselves healed. I appreciate both of those applications and see spiritual significance in each. Church family, people are watching us, your children and grandchildren are watching you. When they see you, one who claims to know the Lord Jesus, looking like you are about to give up, they are discouraged. In verse 14 of our text for today, God says, "Pursue peace and sanctification **without which no one will see the Lord.**" Friends, we are the "body of Christ" and if we are not representing Him well or reflecting His image, others may never see Him. It is true that we all grow weary sometimes. We have all seen runners who are so worn out that they cannot make it to the finish line. That must not be us! We must figure out how to keep going strong.

How are we to strengthen our hands, knees, and feet? The Bible tells us so many wonderful truths in this marvelous book entitled Hebrews. We learn of the preeminence of Christ. (Ch. 1 & 2) We learn that He is seated at the right hand of the Father where He intercedes for us as our Great High Priest (7:25). This book is filled with precious promises that we are supposed to hold on to for strength, encouragement, and hope. In short, we are strengthened for the race by focusing on the One who ran it in front of us faithfully to the end. My hope today is that we will consider two things. First, we must learn how to dig in to find the ability to run the race set before us with strength and endurance so that those behind us will have straight and safe paths in which to walk. Second, we do this by learning and obeying true biblical doctrines. We must avoid false teaching and focus on God's Truth.

August 31

Hebrews 3:7-12

Yesterday's admonition included knowing and obeying the Word of God so that we will be strengthened for the challenges in our lives. Today I want to warn you, as Jude does, of the dire consequences if you do not. It is true that a poor witness on our part will adversely affect those who follow us, but it is equally true, and every bit as frightening, that the judgment levied against the one who rejects Christ and His Word are eternally damning. Please consider the warnings in Scripture as means of God's grace. If I can keep someone from hurting themselves by telling them the truth of the blessings related to good choices and the awful consequences associated with poor choices, then I am being gracious to them. In this case, God is extending grace to us by warning us in advance.

Jude 5 begins with a reminder of what happens to those who live ungodly lives. Those who would ignore the teachings of Christ and reject Him as Lord are "marked" for condemnation. Now, let me explain what that means. You might be tempted to think that God simply willed that they be apostates. In the context of verse 4, Jude is describing what was written long ago in the Old Testament in regard to the judgment that would befall those who rebelled against God. For example, Hosea wrote what would happen to the false prophet in Hosea 9:7-9. Likewise, Isaiah wrote of their fate in chapters 8:19-22, 9:8ff, and 47. Jeremiah wrote prophetically of what would happen by God's judgment to those who were apostates and false teachers. The Old Testament is replete with verses pertaining to God's judgment on those who rebel and who will not trust Him. The point that Jude is making is that what God said back then would still be true in his day as it is in ours.

He uses example beginning in verse 5. The people that he was writing to were intimately familiar with the stories of Israel. So, Jude reminds them of the exodus from Egypt and the subsequent judgment in the desert brought on by their unbelief and rebellion against God and His chosen leaders. The end result of those who chose not to believe and obey was death in the desert rather than life and peace in the promised land. Jude then uses the fate of the fallen angels to remind us of what happens to those who ultimately rebel against God. They are kept in bonds for eternal judgment that is yet to come. There is the mention of Sodom and Gomorrah who were destroyed because of immorality and sensuality. All of this is intended as a warning and as a means of grace to keep us on the good path.

The writer of Hebrews is intent on accomplishing the same goal when he reminds the reader of what happened to those who rebelled against God in the wilderness after the exodus. The warning there is every bit as relevant for us as it was then. We are encouraged to respond to and obey the voice of God TODAY! While we have the chance we must pursue Him, follow Him, and walk in His ways. We must guard against rebellious hearts, pride, arrogance, and unbelief. To be guilty of those things is to stir up the anger of God against oneself. God said in Hebrews 3:11, "I swear they shall not enter into My rest." Friends we are warned to "take care that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God." Folks, I hope and pray that you see why it is of the utmost importance that we do not allow false teachers to get a foothold in our church. Life can be hard in itself. We do not need to be around those who add to it by causing us to doubt and even deny God because we are duped by a false teacher.

September 1

Matthew 13:24-30; Ephesians 6:10-12

Let's ponder once more the presence of the ungodly among us in the life of the church. As I wrote for Monday's devotion, I mentioned that Jude had written that false teachers came into the church "unnoticed." We have already covered the Lord's teaching concerning sheep in wolves clothing so we will not spend our time there today. Instead, I want to emphasize the role that Satan plays in this whole battle for Truth.

Jesus utilizes another parable recorded in Matthew 13:24-30 to teach us about how Satan infiltrates the church. Our tendency is to direct all of our anger against the false teacher among us and fail to see the greater evil in the one behind him or her. Jesus teaches us that it is Satan who plants tares (weeds) among the good seed of God's people (Matt. 13:39). Understand that these tares that Satan planted will in many ways look like the good plant that Christ planted. Remember the connection between this parable and the one Jesus shared from Matthew 7 about ravenous wolves looking like prophets among the sheep. It is hard to tell the difference - for a while.

The tares are thought to be a weed called dandelion which is barely distinguishable from wheat until the grain matures. As a matter of fact, in this parable, Jesus tells His followers not to try to separate the wheat and the tares at first because we would do more damage than good at the outset. We are told to allow the Lord the time to separate the two when it is time for judgment. Now, dear ones, please know this does not mean we are not to deal with apostasy and obvious sin in our midst when it arises. There are ample passages of Scripture that instruct the church on how to handle immorality and false teaching in the church body.

In this particular parable, we must understand that there will be a time of coexisting with the tares which is why we must know the Bible well. We must be filled with the Holy Spirit and led by Him and His Word so that we walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. Never use that copout about not judging people as a spineless way of not dealing with egregious sin. God has provided clear instructions for how we are to organize and operate His church. The truth remains however that the evil one plants weeds among us to create havoc in the church, to create dissension, and to destroy God's people from the inside out.

I hope that you see that through the centuries, Satan moved his attack against the church from the outside to the inside. In the early years of the New Testament church, the external threats and pressures were intense. It appeared that the harder the world pressed in on the church, the stronger she grew. At some point, Satan decided that it would be a better approach to infiltrate the church and come alongside her. History tells us that the inside approach has been far more insidious and effective in weakening and even destroying many congregations than the outside attacks. Even today, our greatest threats are not from the world around us, but the unbiblical doctrines espoused by the false teachers of our day.

I close today by reminding you of Paul's letter to the Ephesian church. In Ephesians 6:10-12, we are told that we must put on the full armor of God "so that ***we can stand firm*** against the schemes of the devil" (v.11). Then Paul tells us that our battle is not against flesh and blood. That means that our real enemies are not the people walking around causing the trouble. Yes, they are to be held accountable and dealt with, but we must look beyond them. They are lost and deceived but there is an enemy behind them pushing the buttons and pulling the strings. We fight against the spiritual forces of wickedness which means we need the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for this war.

September 2

Romans 1:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12

The wrath of God is misunderstood, maligned, ignored, and as Paul wrote to the believers in Rome, revealed. As we look today at Romans 1:18, I want to begin by noting that it is important that we do not make this verse too small. By that I mean that we don't point to politicians and stop there. This text is about humanity as a whole. Before you begin to point the finger at the "bad" people all around us, remember what Paul wrote in Romans 3:9-10. There it says, "Both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, 'there is none righteous, not even one.'" All of us have sinned and stand in need of the Lord Jesus as Savior.

As Jude wrote about the wrath of God marked out from long ago against apostates and false teachers (v.4), we must rightly understand the wrath of God. Romans 1:18 says, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." The truth that we suppress, apart from God's grace in our lives, is that there is a God. He is the Creator of all things and so not a god but *the* God. He is powerful — more powerful than all else — because He made all else. He is eternal because there was nothing outside Him that could bring Him into being. Therefore, we must exist to display His glory and not to compete with Him for glory. We must exist in absolute dependence on Him. We do not supply Him, He supplies us. Therefore, we are to live in constant gratitude. That is the truth that we suppress in unrighteousness.

This is confirmed in verses 25 and 28. Verse 25: "For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie." Notice, the truth that is being exchanged, gotten rid of, or suppressed is truth about God, and [they] worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator. This is the same as saying, "They did not glorify Him as God or give thanks to Him, but instead glorified the creature and took credit for what was due only to God." They exchanged God-worship for self-worship. They suppressed the truth that God is infinitely glorious and that we are totally dependent on Him. How does a person suppress the truth in unrighteousness? There are several places where we see how it works. Let's take one from Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians.

In 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul is describing the end of the age and the great apostasy and deception that will come on the world in those days. He says that the lawless one will come "with all the deception of unrighteousness for those who perish" (2 Thess. 2:10). Please note that unrighteousness deceives; it suppresses the truth. He continues that they are perishing "because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved." Those who are deceived in unrighteousness do not receive the love of the truth. They suppress the truth and evade it. They don't love it. Why? He continues in verses 11–12: "For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth but took pleasure in unrighteousness." Friends, people like this do not love the truth. They love their unrighteous acts far more.

Why did they reject the truth, suppress the truth and not love the truth? Because they "took pleasure in unrighteousness." When you love sin, you cannot love the truth. The truth is too threatening. It threatens to take away your illicit pleasures. I would venture to say that virtually all falsehood comes from this: a stronger affection for the pleasures of sin. That is what unrighteousness is: loving sin more than loving God and His truth. Would you not agree that this deserves the wrath of God? More tomorrow.

September 3

Romans 12:19

When we think about the wrath of God it is far too often downplayed. People want to believe that the words of Scripture are exaggerated because a loving God could not possibly be like what is often described in the Bible. Some are guilty of teaching that the symbols in the Bible describing the wrath of God are just that – symbols. The problem with that is that if it is true, it really does not improve a rebellious person's situation. You see, we (human beings) grasp for symbols of devastation or beauty when the reality we are trying to describe is worse (or better) than what we can put into words.

John Piper said it this way, "If I say, 'My wife is the diamond of my life,' I don't want you to say, 'Oh, he used a symbol of something valuable; it's only a symbol. So, his wife must not be as valuable as a diamond.' No. I used the symbol of the most valuable jewel I could think of because my wife is far more precious than jewels. Honest symbols are not used because they go beyond reality, but because reality goes beyond words."

So, when the Bible speaks of hell fire, woe to us if we say, "It's only a symbol." If it is a symbol at all, it means the reality is worse than fire, not better. The word "fire" is used not to make the easy sound terrible, but to make the exceedingly terrible sound something like what it really is. Paul says in Romans 12:19, "Leave room for the wrath of God." Then, the wrath of God is defined further as God's vengeance, "Vengeance is mine." His wrath is connected with His response to something that deserves vengeance. And then it says, "I will repay." So, God's wrath is treated as a repayment to man for something man has done. God pours out wrath because it is deserved.

Again, Piper defined God's wrath like this: the wrath of God is God's *settled anger toward sin expressed in the repayment of suitable vengeance on the guilty sinner*. John MacArthur said, "God's wrath is not an impulsive outburst of anger aimed capriciously at people whom God does not like." God's wrath is a settled, determined response against sin. It is not an outburst of anger, but it is anger, nonetheless. The wrath of God is never less than a perfect, justifiable decree, but is always more than a perfect, justifiable decree because it is always full of right and fitting anger. Paul wrote in Romans 2:8, "But to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, *there will be wrath and indignation (anger).*"

Friends, I simply want you to know today that the wrath of God is as much a part of His nature and character as His love. The wrath of God is not to be taken lightly or trifled with. It is real and it is coming on all who ultimately reject Christ. Here are a few closing characteristics about the nature of God's wrath. It is ultimately and finally eternal (2 Thess 1:7-9). His wrath will be the source of indescribable pain. Matthew records the words of Christ as He taught about hell. The symbols for hell that Jesus chose to use included a furnace of fire where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. His wrath poured out will be totally just and right (Romans 2:5) and it is important to know that His wrath could have been escapable. Paul writes that Christ's sacrificial death on the cross was God's way of redeeming us from the curse of the Law (Gal. 3:13). The book of Jude is meant to warn us to guard against and contend against false teachers and to be vigilant about defending the Truth. I hope you see that there is so much at stake.