



# 2023 Weekly Devotions

Week of: September 4<sup>th</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup>

Sermon: September 3<sup>rd</sup>



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH  
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September 4

### Psalm 1

I've always found the imagery contained in the little book of Jude both provocative and incredibly insightful. Within Jude's little epistle, we are told that false teachers amount to reefs hidden underwater which constitute a grave danger to boats and ships alike! We are told that our job is to "snatch" people from the fire of judgment which is the inevitable consequence of imbibing false teaching. Finally, we are told that false teachers are like "waterless clouds".

This final picture of a waterless cloud is particularly eye catching to me. All of us know what clouds are to represent. When you are outside on a hot summer day and see clouds building, you know that rain is sure to follow. We know what its like to see a dark cloud approaching and we all make the same assumptions and yet, there are rare times when the cloud that looks so foreboding doesn't produce any rain! The pomp and circumstance might be there, the wind might pick up and the thunder roll but, in the end, a waterless cloud is nothing but a mirage.

In the same way, the Bible says that false teachers project a certain substance, but they fail to deliver. While they may promise rain from heaven and water to soothe our thirsty souls, the result is nothing but dry mouth and ruined crops as the seed that they sow fails to produce anything of value. Intuitively, we all know that ministry should result in fruit, that work done on God's behalf should have a refreshing and life-giving effect which means that true ministry, founded on the Word of God, is easily contrasted with false teaching by its enduring and beneficial impact.

Today's text utilizes a similar water-based metaphor as it proclaims to us the joy and worth of Word-based ministry. The Bible promises that those who dedicate themselves to the Scripture will find nourishment for their souls that sustains them, even in the dry seasons of life.

In Psalm 1, the godly man is described as one who "meditates day and night" on God's law. He is immersed in the Scriptures and the result is outlined for us in verse 3 where we learn that his life is akin to the tree who is planted by streams of water. While the inevitable difficult, or dry, season comes, the man or woman of God who looks to the Word of God for truth will find that they are firmly rooted and fruitful as a result of their love and obedience to God as He reveals Himself in the Word.

Folks, the contrast for your pastors couldn't be any more stark. Sometimes we take God's Word in faith that what it promises will materialize and other times we simply see this play itself out repeatedly in the life of the congregation. I could give you numerous names of men and women who have built their lives and testimonies on the bizarre. They are the "dreamers" that Jude talks about in verse 8, as their entire lives are built on their own premonitions and inclinations which are then attributed to Jude. In each case, given enough time, these people make shipwreck of their own lives and the lives of those who are foolish enough to listen to their harebrained schemes. Conversely, I could give an even longer list of mature disciples who have diligently searched the Scriptures and built their lives upon the truth that God has revealed in the pages of His Word. They are immovable, steadfast, fruitful and blessed.

In both cases, the Bible proves to be true and those who seek to contradict its clear teaching are proven foolish and dishonest. May we build our lives on what God has said and refuse to give an ear to those who seek to make their own, bizarre, way.

September 5

**1 Corinthians 1:18**

If a man was going to sit down and concoct a plan to save sinners, it would undoubtedly look quite different than the Gospel of Christ. When one stops to ponder what God has done, the steps He has taken to redeem the world are incredibly... unique. Who would think that God would take on flesh and dwell amongst His created beings? Even more to the point, who would have pegged God to be born in a stable, in a small town, to unassuming and unimportant people? Who would have thought that Jesus would grow up a carpenter and who would have thought that the way to overwhelm death was to die? In all these things, the Gospel of Christ is foolishness to a lost world.

It is bizarre to the spiritually unenlightened mind to worship a suffering servant and yet this suffering servant is the wisdom of God. God's wisdom always contradicts lost man's sensibilities, and this means that there is an inevitable delta between the commands of God and the teaching of the world. The Bible says that self-denial is the way to joy and the world laughs. The Bible says that God opposes the proud and the world says that pride is the means of self-exaltation. Repeatedly, God and lost people are at odds and this truth helps explain Jude 10 and our text for the day.

Verse 10 in the little epistle of Jude says that false teachers "blaspheme all they do not understand". Specifically, the concept at hand is the issue of submission to authority and the wisdom of God's Word over and against our sensibilities. False teachers despise the truth and so they blaspheme the truth. Often this does not mean that they totally deny it, instead it means that they shift and mold the truth into a more palatable but damning alternative.

Why would a false teacher do this? The answer is that they do not, indeed they cannot, understand the truth. To them, the realities that undergird our confession and form the very foundation of our church, as revealed in Scripture, are simply nonsensical. The wisdom of God, as shown to us in the Word of God, is foolishness.

This is what Paul is teaching the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 1. There is a "wisdom" of the world that proves to be deadly and dumb and there is a wisdom of God that is strange to the world but results in salvation.

What is interesting to me as we combine these two texts is that Jude just illuminates the quandary that every lost person lives within. While it is true that they do not want to submit to the truth of God, it is equally true that they simply don't understand what He is saying. They are spiritually blind and, therefore, they can never teach what they don't see. False teachers cannot understand the things of God and, therefore, amount to nothing but the blind leading the blind.

The implication of this line of reasoning is embarrassingly obvious, but it bears mentioning. If it is true that the wisdom of God is foolishness to the perishing and if it is true that the wisdom of God must be taught by our leaders if we are going to enjoy a functional and blessed church, then the first line of questioning should revolve around whether a professing teacher knows Christ! We cannot assume that a charismatic, smooth-talking, gifted communicator knows Jesus, but we can know rather quickly if they believe based on what they say and how they live. The next 5 days will deal with some of the signs that God's wisdom is foolishness to a person based on the fruits that inevitably flow from those who see God's Word as foolish.

September 6

**Galatians 5:19-21**

Yesterday's devotion was dedicated to unpacking what false teachers deny. Specifically, they deny the truth of the Word of God out of ignorance. This is a helpful piece of information; in fact, I have learned that many of life's greatest intellectual topics can be helpfully understood and defined based on what they deny or do not assert. For instance, we can learn a good bit about a faith system, whether it is orthodox or not, based on what it will condemn. If a person denies the existence of more than one God, for instance, we are on a good path to biblical truth.

Nevertheless, denials can only get us so far. We must also understand what characterizes a false teacher if we hope to identify and avoid them. Today's devotion begins a five-day study of some of the fruits, or pieces of evidence, of a false teacher. Simply stated, if a person is not a believer, we will know it by the character of their lifestyle.

Today, I want us to see that all lost people, including false teachers, are idolaters. John Calvin once famously said "man's nature, so to speak, is a perpetual factory of idols." The idea of course is that we are constantly prone to manufacture gods to worship. The reason for this is simple and it is located in the very design of God, God made us to worship, and we WILL worship something. If we do not worship the true God, we will make false gods of all shape and size, to substitute in the true God's place.

Galatians 5 tells us that indeed one of the fruits of the flesh is idolatry. People who refuse to worship God will worship something in His place and this often follows a similar path. In Jude, we see that false teachers worship their own autonomy, wealth, sinful exploits and the like and all these things become idols because they are the objects around which false teachers organize their lives and this denotes worship.

The last point is important as we close today, sometimes people are confused because they have a very narrow, and naïve, definition of idolatry. Certainly, idolatry can manifest itself in the form of graven images and temples, but idolatry looks more organic. We can know an idol by the way we relate to it. Those things that take up our attention, most easily gain our affection and desires and are labeled as "untouchable" in our lives are the things that we worship.

In the case of the false teachers in Jude, these idols are shown in varied ways. For instance, the idol of autonomy unveils itself when a false teacher refuses to submit to the authority of the Word and the authority of Godly leadership in the church. The idol of sexual exploits becomes clear when a person violates the obvious and clear teachings of God's Word regarding the nature and place of sexual intercourse for their own selfish desires. These actions are really fruits, and they say quite a bit about the identity of the ones we see attempting to teach.

September 7

**Galatians 5:19-21**

The overlap between the description of false teachers in Jude and the list of the fruit of the flesh is quite striking. We see, for instance, a connection between false teachers who, according to Jude, “pervert the grace of God into sensuality” and Paul’s description of lost people as those who are guilty of sexual immorality. Jude tells us that these false teachers cause divisions in the body and Paul tells us why they are guilty of envy and jealousy.

The point of course is that there is a deep connection between the fleshly nature of men and their false teaching. People are not false teachers, predominately, because they are trying hard to understand the truth and simply miss the point, people are false teachers because they hate God and desire to be in His position and/or they desire to exalt something else into His deserved spot within the congregation.

Today’s characteristic, or fruit, of the flesh is envy. Idolatry and envy are connected in that idolatry is the replacing of the true God with another god and envy is the emotion that often follows. To be clear, we can be envious of more than God, but envy is often elicited in the hearts of false teachers precisely because the service of God does not result in our own praise but in the adoration and glory of the Lord.

Envy manifests itself in many ways but perhaps most obviously it demonstrates its presence by a desire to be in front. We have encountered many people over the years who have no desire to serve in any “behind the scenes” role even as they clamor for the spotlight. In these situations, they demonstrate their heart in that their obvious concern is not for the glory of God and the good of their brother, it is for their own recognition and glory. These people may try to win you over and even say flattering things in your presence but know that their goal is their own exaltation which means that they will gladly throw you under the bus when necessary. As my grandfather used to say, “if they are quick to talk about others in your presence, they will be just as quick to talk about you when you are not around!”

Obviously, there are other ways we see envy. Envious people are constantly negative and tearing others down, not because they necessarily believe their criticisms but because criticism is the best way to knock others down a peg and exalt self. Envious people are generally miserable as well. Their misery arises from the reality that they are living for their own praise and for the disdain of others which is in direct contradiction to the way in which God created this universe to operate! When we only think of ourselves, our interests, our reputation and our acclaim, misery is sure to follow.

I suppose the admonition for today is rather simple, beware of such people! Those who demonstrate the fruit of envy are not the kinds of people who should be trusted. They are not interested in the truth, and they are not living in a way that commends the Gospel nor does their envy encourage cohesion and joy.

September 8

**Galatians 5:19-21**

I suppose you could summarize the entire biblical storyline as one that revolves around rivalry. Since the Garden of Eden, the world has been engulfed in a battle between good and evil. The term “battle” might seem a bit harsh, but we should realize that this kind of terminology is prevalent in the Scriptures. We are in a “war” between spiritual entities. On the one side stands Satan and his dominion over those who have not been saved and on the other side stands the God of the universe and His disciples.

This battle is a cosmic reality and because it is going on all around us, we shouldn't be surprised when it arises within our congregations when a false teacher shows up. You see, false teachers have a special role within Satan's strategy. They are the plants, the spies, who are sent to infiltrate and weaken the church from within. Their goal is quite different from the desires of true disciples and, given enough time, their presence will show up in a conflict within the body.

The battle between good and evil can take many forms but one of its clearest indications is rivalries within the church. When people show up who don't love God and desire to lead others to abandon Him as well, one of their first acts is to build a group that will rival the truth.

It seems obvious to me, but perhaps this bears mentioning, so many of the unhealthy congregations in our midst are dealing with the fruit of the flesh of rivalry precisely because the congregation is full of lost people who are being led by one, or many, false teachers. How many of you know congregations in this area who are run by people who look far more fleshly than holy? The degree to which you are familiar with those individuals and ministries will be the degree to which you see the wisdom and insight of the warnings of Paul and Jude.

When a false teacher comes into a church and gains a following, rivalry is sure to follow. It shows up when these folks oppose what is clearly biblical. It is clearly seen when churches fire godly pastors. It is apparent when the community begins to realize that quarreling is commonplace, and it ultimately is seen when churches are incapacitated and closed. I wonder if you have that category today. So many seem to want to point to some worldly, secular reason why our churches are not blessed. Perhaps they didn't advertise well, or maybe they just weren't offering the kinds of ministries that the community wanted. While this might make sense to men, the simple truth is that churches close because they have abandoned the truth and, often times, this happens because they have decided to follow one who does not teach the truth and this shows up in endless rivalries and conflicts.

One of the things that Christ bought for His children was reconciliation. First, we are reconciled to God (which is obviously most important) but then we are reconciled to one another. This means that peace with our brothers and sisters in Christ flows from salvation and, therefore, it should be a hallmark sign of an individual and body. Show me a church that is perennially without peace, and I will often be able to show you a false teacher with a great influence within that body.

September 9

**Galatians 5:19-21**

Perhaps the most challenging fruit of the Spirit to me is the fruit of self-control. Self-control is the kind of thing that proves to be difficult for me at times! It is hard to exercise self-control in a world that is full of people who are... trying. The irony is that self-control is difficult to achieve precisely because it cannot be achieved in the flesh. One of the great pieces of evidence that God has redeemed a person is found in that person's ability to walk in obedience and self-control.

While the fruit of the Spirit is obvious, the lack of fruit and the presence of the exact opposite kind of fruit is apparent as well. Today's fruit of the flesh is the opposite of self-control as Paul tells us that those who are walking in the flesh will be prone to "fits of anger". The reasons behind these outbursts are clear as anger arises from not getting one's way.

Think about it for just a moment, when do you get angry? The answer is that anger often arises from things not going to plan, specifically, it arises from things not going to OUR plan. When we live as if we are the captains of our own ship and everything and everyone is supposed to be on our terms, anger typically follows. Anger comes to the surface when people don't listen, when they don't cooperate and when they have the audacity to criticize us.

Now, as we think about the way this connects with false teachers, it becomes clear that false teachers are often angry teachers because they have their own agenda which cannot be violated. When you think about various cult leaders and even abusive "pastors" (and I use that term as loosely as possible), the characteristic of anger is almost always present. These people don't want to be challenged and they do not even consider the possibility that the problem may be with their own heart instead of the hearts and minds of others.

The result of this kind of thinking is seen in fits of anger. They throw temper tantrums and work to harm people because their autonomy and authority has been violated. They are reticent to delegate any authority and when they do, they are quite quick to take back the reigns when things don't go exactly as they had hoped and planned.

Outbursts are the kind of thing that should not be prevalent in church leadership. While it is true that all of us have our "moments", those instances should be few and far between. God has called us to patience, and He has informed us that He is working His plan therefore any offense or act of disobedience is ultimately not an affront to the leader or teacher, it is a direct act of disobedience to our Superior! Those who calmly teach the truth and inform others of what our Lord requires are the ones to follow. Those who throw hissy fits are really telling you that their desire is for everyone to follow their charted course.



September 10

**Galatians 5:19-21**

So, how big of a deal is it that we identify these characteristics and avoid those who demonstrate consistent fruit of the flesh? The answer is found in the end of Paul's list as he tells us that those who are known by these fruits "will not inherit the Kingdom of God". This phrase is often used in the Scripture, and it always refers to those who are not saved. The gravity, therefore, of Paul's words should not escape the reader.

Paul is not saying that those who display the fruits of the flesh are merely misinformed. He isn't saying that they need more attention, he is saying that they are lost! Their lifestyle betrays their ignorance of Christ, and their ignorance and rejection of Christ will result in eternal damnation. Furthermore, the fact that they are lost means that they should not be given a hearing. Why would we not be on guard against such folks if we believe that teaching has such a profound impact on us as believers?

Putting this together, the reason why the Bible spends so much time warning and describing the characteristics of false teachers rests in the fact that false teachers are condemned and those who fall under their influence are on the road to condemnation as well. This is not some perfunctory or miniscule issue; this is the kind of topic that has eternal ramifications.

As we continue in our journey through the book of Jude, know that Jude is not talking about abstract concepts, he was led by the Spirit to warn us about a grave danger. While it is not popular in our relativistic and "tolerant" (I'm not sure who defines that word, but it doesn't mean what the dictionary says it does anymore) world to call out falsehood, the truth is that the Bible has no issue with it at all. Paul does not qualify his statement, and neither should we. Notice he doesn't say "those who practice such things may not enter the Kingdom, but who am I to judge?" Nor does he say, "they get some things right and seem like a good guy", no he simply says that those whose lives manifests such fruits will not inherit the Kingdom.

Folks, your pastors want each of you to know Jesus and, therefore, to inherit His Kingdom. We so desire to see you walk in truth and journey with Christ to eternal glorification and this is why we warn you and work diligently to do what we can to steer you away from error. We really do believe the assertions that we read in Scripture, and this means that there are great dangers lurking in many areas.

Now, as we close, I want to remind you of what Pastor Robert shared a few weeks ago. Remember that Jude is bookended with promises about God's ability to keep us. We believe that those who are truly saved will be guarded and guided by the Lord to eternal joy. We know that Christ can overcome any threat and, therefore, the goal of these warnings is not to scare you into inaction, the goal is to simply know that one of the ways that Christ guards and guides His children is through giving us truth which informs our actions.

So, know that false teachers exist, that they can be known by their fruits, that they are condemned along with those who follow them but also know that our Savior triumphs over all of His enemies and, therefore, those who are truly found in Him should obey His warnings in faith that He will complete what He started (Philippians 1:6).