

Jude 1-4 **Who owns you?**

Introduction:

The most common view of morality today in our culture is probably the one that says we can do pretty much whatever we like as long as we don't hurt anyone else. There is, of course, some truth to this. If you're going to engage in any harmful activity, the rest of us consider it far better that it be harmful to you alone. Just keep us safe, OK?

But is that the whole story? In his classic *Mere Christianity* (probably the most influential book in my life as a new Christian outside the Bible), C.S. Lewis considers this view of morality by drawing an analogy with a fleet of ships. He calls the human race "the human fleet." So let's take, for instance,

"... the man who says that a thing cannot be wrong unless it hurts some other human being. He quite understands that he must not damage the other ships in the convoy, but he honestly thinks that what he does to his own ship is simply his own business. But does it not make a great difference whether his ship is his own property or not? Does it not make a great difference whether I am, so to speak, the landlord of my own mind and body, or only a tenant, responsible to the real landlord? If somebody else made me, for his own purposes, then I shall have a lot of duties which I should not have if I simply belonged to myself..."

That brings us back to today's key question: **Who owns you?**

If we belong to ourselves, then our morality is simply our own business. If we belong to someone else, who made us and designed us for reasons best known to himself, then we had better acknowledge that. And if we rightfully belong to Jesus, because he bought us at the price of his own blood, after we had initially rebelled against our Creator, then the best we can do is submit to that reality ASAP – before it's too late. This will also, however, be the most sensible thing that we could ever do.

Jude's letter is going to be harsh. He's dealing with compromise and corruption within the church. There were a number of false teachers who were sneaking in through the side door rather than the narrow gate out front. The result is that there were influential voices, who did not belong to Jesus Christ at all, swaying whole congregations that rightfully belonged to Jesus.

Back to our question, **"Who owns you?"** If you think you belong to yourself, consider how little control you actually have over the circumstances of your life, much less your eternity. If you do belong to Jesus Christ – well, that's even more reason to submit your life fully to him. We Christians are hesitant to do just that – and the results are consistently detrimental, both to us as individuals and the church as a whole.

“Jude is a tract for times like our own when many conflicting voices plunge the churches into confusion and unrest.” –R.C. Lucas

“Today there are more heretics and apostates than ever before, which makes this little book a relevant and necessary reminder for us to contend for the faith.” – Chuck Smith

There are at least three good reasons for studying Jude in-depth:

1. The letter is a warning against self-delusion, reminding us that the privilege of belonging to the Church that Christ is building brings with it real responsibilities.
2. Jude recognizes the fine but definite line between faithfulness and infidelity, and so Jude calls us to a life of self-scrutiny.
3. Jude reminds us that a life of fidelity requires both the diligent pursuit of truth and radical obedience to it.

Stephen Kraftchick sums it up perfectly:

“Jude is not an epistle one reads for comfort or to ponder esoteric questions about theology; it is a letter of challenge. It is a letter of outrage, and we are unaccustomed to this much passion. The letter’s uncompromising insistence that faith is an ethical entity forces its readers into critical self-examination and causes us to examine our habits of self-deception. Jude calls the readers to the responsibility of their beliefs, and one reads it not to hear about ‘release of the captives,’ but of the responsibilities of being released.”

Outline:

1. Find your identity in Christ.
2. Receive God’s mercy peace and love.
3. Contend earnestly for the faith.
4. Be aware of false apostles.

1. Find your identity in Christ.

1. So who is **Jude**? He is the **brother of James**. If he was going to pick a relative, It would have been more typical for Jude to identify himself by his father, “the son of...” In this case, the brother must have been extremely well-known. In **Galatians 1:19**, Paul mentions that in Jerusalem he met with *“James, the Lord’s brother.”* In both the book of Acts and ancient secular historians, such as Josephus, we learn that James the Lord’s brother was the most prominent leader in the early Jerusalem church. So that would be the obvious James (or literally “Jacob”) to which Jude would attach himself for reference.

Further, the Gospels give us evidence that this James had a brother named Jude – or “Judas.” Our English translators have modified his name, probably to avoid confusion with another less reputable Judas.

Mark 6:3 *Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?” ...*

Jude also identifies himself as a **bondservant** or “slave” of Jesus Christ.

In our culture, the position of a servant or a slave is probably the least desirable place in which might ever find ourselves. But John Wesley said it well when he pointed out that to be a servant of Jesus Christ is *“The highest glory which any, either angel or man, can aspire to.”*

It may be controversial to say it this way in America, but Jesus is our Master. He’s not exactly a slave-driver. He’s far too wise and loving to think of in that way, we but we are in fact his slaves. That’s how all the apostles refer to themselves in their letters. Our translators tend to soften it, when they use words like “servant” or “bondservant,” but the Greek word means simply “slave.” Amazingly James and Jude, the brothers – or more accurately, *half-brothers* – of the Lord call themselves his slaves as well – and this should make us all stop and think.

What does it take for your brother to willingly call himself your “slave” and bear witness to your absolute deity? The sheer unlikeliness of the thing simply screams for an explanation. A personal resurrection appearance would do the job.

Don’t misunderstand this point, people worship other people all the time. People really do seem to worship famous athletes, rock stars, movie stars, celebrities. Some religions instruct people to worship other people, but that’s not exactly what’s happening here.

First, we’re talking about ancient Jews, who were passionately monotheistic. These were not Hindus looking for a guru. In the Bible, people like Mordecai or Daniel’s friends nearly died for refusing to pay homage to other men. The Maccabees fought wars with their Hellenistic rulers in the time between the Testaments over this issue. The Romans ultimately gave the Jews an exemption from paying homage to the emperor.

Second, we’re talking about Jesus’s own brothers. They lived with him. Most people are content to get along with their siblings, but worship? Calling yourself the other’s bondservant or slave? We might have considered it an accomplishment just to stay in touch. No options beyond that are normally even available.

Yet here we are, **Jude a bondservant of Jesus Christ**. Extra-biblical history tells us that James died a martyr in Jerusalem, and while we have no solid record of the death of Jude, two of his grandsons were Christians who died in the reign of the Emperor Trajan, in the early 2nd Century. This is serious commitment to a cause, and again – it screams for an explanation. The genuine deity of Christ and his bodily resurrection would certainly explain it.

Called, sanctified (or “beloved”) and preserved That’s us. Also see **Jude 24-25**.

2. Receive God's mercy peace and love.

2. **mercy, peace and love** These words are not lightly chosen, like "Good luck!" or "Have a nice day!" They are full of spiritual content.

In His **mercy**, God holds back from giving us what we deserve. Instead, He gave our penalty to Jesus Christ on the cross. **Isaiah 53:4-5** says, *"Surely He has borne our griefs, And carried our sorrows; ... But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities..."*

Now, thanks to Christ's sacrifice on the cross, we enjoy **peace**. Paul reminds us that "those who are in the flesh cannot please God." (**Romans 8:8**). We need to make our peace with him – a process which he has already initiated in Christ. Now we are to submit ourselves to him.

Finally, we are on the receiving end of God's **love**. The cross is God's ultimate demonstration of that love, but again we have to receive it intentionally. As we grow in Christ, a greater comprehension of God's love is one of the outcomes. In one of the greatest passages in the NT, Paul describes his prayers for the Ephesian church:

Ephesians 3:14-19 ¹⁴*For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,* ¹⁵*from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,* ¹⁶*that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,* ¹⁷*that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,* ¹⁸*may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—* ¹⁹*to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

3. Contend earnestly for the faith.

3. **Our common salvation** If anyone is going to be saved from sin and death and the punishment that goes with them, it is going to be by faith in Jesus Christ. In this sense our salvation is "common." It is *"the salvation we all share."* (NLT). We have the same salvation that Jude has. The fact that he grew up in the same home with Jesus does not put him at a higher level than we are. We are all saved by grace, through faith, in the saving sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The apostles were saved in the same way as the newest convert today.

Nobody has probably ever said it more clearly than Alexander MacLaren:

"So we are all put upon one level, no matter how different we may be in attainments, in mental capacity – geniuses and blockheads, scholars and ignoramuses, millionaires and paupers, students and savages, we are all on the one level. ... We have all to go in at the strait [or "narrow"] gate.

Contend earnestly for the faith

What does Jude mean by this?

A. Jude sees the faith as “the faith.” In other words, the content is closed. The message of the gospel originated with God. The apostles, the early church leaders, and we, are simply the messengers. We have received a particular message and we are to pass it on. There is no real room for modifying the message. That would lack integrity, like a news reporter making up a story that didn’t actually happen or changing the report to say whatever he wants. (I’m not saying news reporters never do that, just that they lack integrity when they do). This is **the faith** that Jude says **was once for all delivered to the saints**. We are not to make things up.

B. To **contend earnestly** for it means to strive. There is a sense of struggle against a faith that might otherwise lose ground. Matthew Henry reminds us, *“Those who have received the truth must contend for it, as the apostles did; by suffering with patience and courage.”* Christians are not called to passive observation, but to vigilance and watchfulness. The faith is under attack – not by the gospel’s visible enemies – they would be easy enough to spot, but as Jude is dealing with in his letter, by those who would claim to be the gospel’s friends.

4. Be aware of false apostles.

4. **They crept in unnoticed.** *Crept in* is a compound word, *pareisduō*. The first part *para*, means “alongside.” The second part *eis*, means “into.” So together it means something like “sneak in alongside.”

A.T. Robertson, in his classic *Word Pictures in the N.T.*, translates this word as “to slip in secretly as if by a side door.” The *Word Study Dictionary* says, “To enter in craftily, secretly, without notice, like a thief.”

So these deceivers do not really belong in the church at all. They are imposters, wolves in sheep’s clothing. Here I agree with Warren Wiersbe, who elaborates on this a little.

It bears repeating that an apostate is not a true believer who has abandoned his salvation. He is a person who has professed to accept the truth and trust the Saviour, and then turns from “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). ... Peter made it clear that the apostates were not God’s sheep, but were instead pigs and dogs (2 Peter 2:21-22). The sow had been cleaned on the outside, and the dog on the inside, but neither had been given that new nature which is characteristic of God’s true children (2 Peter 1:3-4).

Regarding the false doctrine that was moving into the church in his day, Charles Spurgeon put it like this, *“the new views are not the old truth in a better dress, but deadly errors with which we can have no fellowship.”* He also said, *“I cannot endure false doctrine, however neatly it may be put before me. Would you have me eat poisoned meat because the dish is of the choicest ware?”*

Let’s hear how Paul warned the Corinthians against just such people as these:

2 Corinthians 11:13-15 ¹³For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. ¹⁴And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. ¹⁵Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

Or how about Peter:

2 Peter 2:1-2 ¹But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. ²And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.

Final Focus: On Being a Bondservant of Christ

- Being a bondservant is not such a bad deal, really. Since we have a Master that made us, loves us, and knows beyond all earthly wisdom what exactly we will ever need, there is not much to worry about. The things we need to overcome lie elsewhere.
 - The first obstacle lies in our cultural assumption that being a slave or a servant is bad. When we consider American history, it's easy to see why we have such a negative view of servanthood. We think of captive Africans toiling in cotton fields under a blistering sun and the picture of a bondservant puts us on the plantation with Jesus as the slave driver. But this is seriously inaccurate. Christ is the one who took the beatings and shed his blood in our place. He's now preparing us for heaven, not for a life of bondage.
 - The next obstacle lies in our need to trust Jesus. Most of us have been swindled, abused or mistreated by someone somewhere. This makes us hesitant to give Jesus Christ complete control. We want choices; we want autonomy.
- So let's get the right perspective, even if it all goes against our cultural and personal grain:
 - Remember what John Wesley said, that being a servant of Jesus Christ is *"The highest glory which any, either angel or man, can aspire to."* He was right.
 - We have to be able to trust our Master completely. He is certainly trustworthy. The issue is on our side. Are we willing to trust him enough?
 - It's Christ's gospel we've believed in; it's his faith once for all delivered to the saints. We may be inclined to modify it to suit our preferences, but that lacks integrity.
 - Finally, to think back on C.S. Lewis, "Who owns the ship that you're sailing?" If we created ourselves and had the complete ability to determine our own destiny, we might be able to completely live as we pleased. As it stands, however, we are not the builders and owners of our own ship. Our lives are not our own. Let's acknowledge Christ's ownership. Let's declare Him our Master today and identify ourselves as his slaves.