

## TRAPS TO TWIST THE TRUTH

### Jude 1-4, 11

(NASB): "Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, To those who are the called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ: <sup>2</sup> May mercy and peace and love be multiplied to you. <sup>3</sup> Beloved, while I was making every effort to write to you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. <sup>4</sup> For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." <sup>11</sup> Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.

### INTRODUCTION

A man named Steven was leaving his office at the National Cancer Institute. He passed a research scientist by the front door puffing away on a cigarette. Steven asked him, "How can you smoke when you, of all people, know the harm caused by cigarettes?" The researcher took another draw on his cigarette, exhaled, and then replied through the smoke, "Because it gives me more motivation to find a cure."

**Jude** will give us insight today into a behavioral pattern that is all too true of too many of us. No matter how much we may believe with our minds some activity is foolishly harmful for us, we still find some way to excuse or convince ourselves it's okay for us to do if we still crave doing it in our hearts. Even if we have a saving relationship with **Jesus Christ**, can we be guilty of rationalizing behavior by claiming God condones or excuses actions that He expressly prohibits in the Bible? Yes! Today we will explore three common "Traps to Twist the Truth" into which even genuine Christians may fall. Jude identifies these traps in **vs. 11**. We will call them Conduct, Cash, and Command.

### I. CONDUCT

Jude was one **Jesus'** half-brothers and an early Christian missionary (**Mark 6:3; I Corinthians 9:5**). We learned last week Jude's purpose in writing this letter was to rally God's people against the proliferation of "ungodly" professed Christians seeking to destroy the Christian Church from within, during the last days prior to **Jesus'** Second Coming. "Ungodly" is Jude's favorite word to describe so-called Christians "who turn the grace of God into licentiousness" ("a license for immorality"-NIV). They pervert what God's "grace" means. They claim the grace God demonstrates toward us because **Jesus** died in our place allows us to believe our sins are forgiven and believe we are in no danger of being judged by God even if we deliberately defy God's commands. They even go so far as to claim they have received a word from God His rules of morality do not apply to them, as **vs. 8** indicates, which we'll explore more in coming weeks.

Jude cites the example of Cain, Adam and Eve's firstborn son, to warn us of the trap of twisting God's truth to excuse Conduct God despises. **Genesis 4:2b-8** (NLT) describes the first murder in history: "When they grew up, Abel [Cain's brother] became a shepherd, while Cain cultivated the ground. <sup>3</sup> When it was time for the harvest, Cain presented some of his crops as a gift to the LORD. <sup>4</sup> Abel also brought a gift—the best portions of the firstborn lambs from his flock. The LORD accepted Abel and his gift, <sup>5</sup> but He did not accept Cain and his gift. This made Cain very angry, and he looked dejected. <sup>6</sup> 'Why are you so angry?' the LORD asked Cain. Why do you look so dejected? <sup>7</sup> You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master.' <sup>8</sup> One day Cain suggested to his brother, 'Let's go out into the fields.' And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother, Abel, and killed him."

Cain tried to get by with an external gift, an offering that hypocritically made it appear he wanted to live pleasing to God while ungodliness still reigned within. **I John 3:12** (NLT) exposes Cain's heart: "We

must not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and killed his brother. And why did he kill him? Because Cain had been doing what was evil, and his brother had been doing what was righteous." **Hebrews 11:4** (NLT) reveals Abel's heart: "It was by faith that Abel brought a more acceptable offering to God than Cain did. Abel's offering gave evidence that he was a righteous man, and God showed His approval of his gifts." Abel, in other words, longed to be pleasing to the Lord in his heart, not just for show. Cain was willing to be outwardly religious, to engage in acts of worship, as long as he could still indulge the sinful cravings of his heart. Cain, therefore, closed his heart to God's warnings. He foolishly believed if goody-goody Abel wasn't around, he wouldn't look so bad. *He refused to believe he might be the problem.* This reminds me of genuine excuses reported by drivers to the Metropolitan Insurance Company about the causes of their accidents: "An invisible car came out of nowhere, struck my car, and vanished." "I pulled away from the side of the road, glanced at my mother-in-law, and headed over the embankment." "The guy was all over the road. I had to swerve a number of times before I hit him." "The indirect cause of this accident was a little guy in a small car with a big mouth." Cain thought he'd come up with the perfect way to deny his own guilt. Cain killed Abel.

When we insist in Christ's name there are standards of conduct our common Creator expects of *all* of us and will judge each of us for violating His code of conduct, regardless of our opinions about what we *think* should be considered right for us to do, we are a testimony to society there are truths that we twist to our peril. People don't like this message today any more than Cain did, and they sometimes react almost as violently. "So don't be surprised, dear brothers and sisters, if the world hates you" (**I John 3:13**, NLT).

In the early 1970s, a well-known professional golfer played in a celebrity tournament with President Gerald Ford, fellow pro Jack Nicklaus, and Billy Graham. When the round was over, another golfer asked his friend, "Hey, what was it like playing with the President and Billy Graham?" This famous golfer said with disgust, "I don't need Billy Graham stuffing religion down my throat!" He then headed for the driving range and pounded out his fury toward Billy Graham on a bucket of golf balls. When he calmed down, his friend asked, "Was Billy a little rough on you out there?" The pro said with embarrassment, "No, he didn't even mention religion." Though Billy Graham said nothing about God, **Jesus**, or religion, the testimony of Billy's Christlike life convicted this famous golfer of God's standards of morality that he wanted to forget.

If we're convicted by the Bible or by the quality of another Christian's life of actions of ours that are displeasing to Christ, we may be tempted to fall into Cain's trap. We may try to twist the truth to convince ourselves God should change what He expects of us, or Christians should change who are overly serious about pleasing **Jesus**. What we need to admit is *we* are the ones who should change.

## II. CASH

What compromise would you be willing to make for \$10,000,000? Of those who responded to this question in the 1980s, 10% said they'd withhold testimony to allow a murderer to go free, 16% said they'd be willing to give up their American citizenship, 16% would leave their spouses, 25% would abandon their entire family, and 25% agreed to renounce their Christian commitment and abandon their church.

Most of what we know about Balaam is shrouded in mystery. Around 1400 B.C., God freed the Israelites from Egyptian slavery to become His special, covenant people. Israel then became poised to overrun the people of Canaan. These Canaanites, as a whole, were steeped in all forms of despicable behavior and had resisted God's efforts for hundreds of years to repent of their sins to avoid the doom that was about to befall them (**Genesis 15:13-16**). However, Balak, a crafty Canaanite king, knew about Balaam. Balaam had a reputation as a fortune-teller with divine authority. Balak said to him in **Numbers 22:6** (NLT), "I know that blessings fall on the people you bless. I also know that the people you curse are doomed." Balak hoped his promise of vast rewards to Balaam could induce this fortune-teller to pronounce a magical curse upon Israel so that Balak might then be able to defeat and drive away the Israelites.

**Numbers 22-24** makes clear that Balaam had some sort of a relationship with the true God. When Balak first offered him a reward to curse Israel, Balaam asked God about it. God told him in no uncertain words the Israelites were His people and Balaam should not curse them. When Balak sent to him a second time offering him an even greater reward, Balaam claimed he already understood that God meant he should not curse Israel for any price. Yet, he asked God a second time what he should do about this offer to curse Israel. What was wrong with this? Balaam professed he must obey God's will alone, but his actions demonstrated Balaam greedily sought a loophole to evade doing what God commanded. **Jude 11** proclaims, "Woe" ["pain and distress"] "to" those who "for pay . . . have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam." This nearly cost Balaam his life because God sent an angel to strike him down because of his hypocrisy. We fall into the trap of twisting God's truth represented by Balaam when we allow our misguided hearts to convince us some opportunity for financial gain or our financial need justifies seeking loopholes to allow us to *claim* we are obeying God's will even while we keep seeking ways to *avoid* doing what God wants.

### III. COMMAND

Jude identifies a third trap of twisting God's truth: our attitude as Christians toward God's authority. **Jesus** asked us in **Luke 6:46**: "Why do you call Me "Lord, Lord," and don't do the things I say?" We can ask ourselves this morning, "Do our actions display that **Jesus** is in charge of our lives as our Master; as our Lord?" A minister in a restaurant one day bowed his head while giving thanks for his food. A waitress (other than his own) came to his table almost immediately. "Pardon me, but you must be a Christian," she said. "I have looked for three months for a Christian to come in here, because I would like to be saved." The minister quickly glanced around and recognized at least 15 professed Christians, some members of his own church, who were already eating their meals. Not one of them took seriously their duty to testify publicly of God's priority in their lives, as **I Corinthians 10:31**(NASB) directs, "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." In Bible times, no devout Jew or Christian would even think of eating without first giving thanks to their Lord, regardless of where they were when they ate!

**Jude 11** tells us people "who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality" (NIV) may display Korah's rebellious attitude toward God's authority. Their pride may propel them into the dangerous opinion that they may pick and choose which of God's commands to obey without consequence. They may also pervert the precious doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, which teaches all Christians have equal *access* to God in **Jesus'** name, into the deception that all Christians have equal *authority* in the ministry of Christ's Church. They may even claim, as Korah did, they are accountable to no one but God.

Korah was descended from Levi, as were Moses and Aaron, but Israel's priests were direct descendants of Aaron. God chose all of Levi's descendants to have the privilege of assisting Israel's priests. But Korah stirred a jealous rebellion among 250 other Levites. They confronted Moses and Aaron with these words from **Numbers 16:3** (NLT): "'You have gone too far! Everyone in Israel has been set apart by the LORD, and He is with all of us. What right do you have to act as though you are greater than anyone else among all these people of the LORD?'"

Moses reminded these grumblers that he and Aaron claimed no special standing among the Israelites. They merely sought to fulfill the *responsibilities* God had assigned to them, as Korah and the Levites should have been content to serve God as He'd assigned *them* to do. The Lord then provided a rather gruesome object lesson to prove Korah's clan was actually rebelling against God's authority, not against Moses and Aaron. The Lord swallowed the rebellion's leaders in an earthquake and consumed their followers by fire! God does not often judge professed Christians today as immediately and drastically as Korah, if they fall into the trap of rebelliously twisting God's truth concerning His authority and His commands as proclaimed in the Bible. But **Jude 11** announces their eventual doom is just as certain.

George Barna's research into American religious trends reveals much about Christianity's role in today's society. Barna identifies "born again Christians" as those who claim to have made a personal commitment to **Jesus** Christ that is still important in their life today and who indicate they believe when they die they will go to Heaven because they have confessed their sins and have accepted **Jesus** Christ as their Savior.

A recent Barna survey of Baby Boomers (1945-64), Baby Busters (1965-1983), and Millennials (1984-2002) revealed these striking findings. Among born-again Americans, 33% of pre-Busters (51 and older) believe cohabitation is morally acceptable for them as Christians. But nearly twice that many (59%) Baby Busters (32-50) do, with even higher percentages among Millennials. This same response pattern was evident when it came to gambling, sexual fantasies, abortion, sex outside of marriage, profanity, pornography, same-sex marriage, and the use of illegal drugs. The obvious conclusion is that the more our American society chooses to ignore or twist Christian standards of morality, the more American Christians believe God's commands denouncing such actions lack His full authority to bind them.

## CONCLUSION

Ted Koppel, age 76, is best known as the anchor for the ABC News program *Nightline* from 1980 until 2005. In 1987, during a commencement address at Duke University in Durham, NC, Koppel made an assertion that seemed so startling for a top journalist to make that it became a national headline. "What Moses brought down from Mt. Sinai," Koppel declared, "were not the Ten Suggestions, they are Commandments."

Ted Koppel's graduation speech focused upon the negative impact made by the American media, especially television, upon our ethical and moral standards. He stated, "[W]e have spent 5,000 years as a race of rational human beings trying to drag ourselves out of the primeval slime by searching for truth and moral absolutes. In the place of Truth we have discovered facts; for moral absolutes we have substituted moral ambiguity. . . . Our society finds Truth too strong a medicine to digest undiluted. In its purest form," Koppel insisted, "Truth is not a polite tap on the shoulder; it is a hallowing [sanctifying] reproach."

It was at this point in his commencement address that Ted Koppel reminded us, "What Moses brought down from Mt. Sinai were not the Ten Suggestions, they are Commandments. Are, not were. The sheer brilliance of the Ten Commandments," Koppel further declared, "is that they codify, in a handful of words, acceptable human behavior. Not just for then or now but for all time."

If we seek to justify twisting the truth and authority of the eternal principles that our Creator set down for our moral standards, due to temptations concerning conduct, financial gain, or prideful rebellion, we have a rotting effect not only upon the Christian Church but also upon our society. God forbid it should ever be said of any of us, "Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah."