

TRUE LIBERATION

Jude 3-7

(NASB) "Beloved, while I was making every effort to write 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. ⁴For 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. ⁵Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe. ⁶And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day, ⁷just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire."

INTRODUCTION

How do react to people who think the rules don't apply to them due to their position, power, wealth, or privilege? This often stems from sheer arrogance. Or it's due to impatience or stupidity, like drivers who pass four-five vehicles at a time on Houghton Road south of I-10 even if everyone ahead of them is already driving at or above the speed limit! A woman recently fumed after pushing her cart into her grocery store's express lane. The woman just ahead of her completely ignored the item limit posted for this express lane. Her cart was piled high with groceries. The woman reporting this incident said, "Imagine my delight when the cashier beckoned the woman to come forward, looked into the cart and asked sweetly, 'So, which six items would you like to buy?'" Today's sermon deals with this very issue of those who believe, for some reason or another, the rules don't apply to them, even when they are *God's rules*. Our two Outline points are Liberation That Will Surely Ruin Us and Liberation That Will Surely Release Us.

I. LIBERATION THAT WILL SURELY RUIN US

When we began our study of **Jude**, we learned its author, **Jesus'** half-brother, felt compelled to sound the alarm about "ungodly" professed Christians who were having a destructive influence upon our Christian faith from *within* the Church. "Ungodly" or "godless" (NIV) translates a Greek word meaning "destitute of reverential awe towards God." Regardless of the religious label we place upon ourselves, we are "ungodly" when we act at times as though God really isn't both our loving Creator and our Holy Judge, as He claims to be. In other words, when we live as though we think His rules don't apply to us as they do to others.

Genesis 1:26-27 reveals, "God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness'" (with the capacity to resemble God morally and spiritually). John Piper, pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church of Minneapolis, explains, "The point of an image is to image. . . . to display the original. Point to the original. Glorify the original. God made humans in His image so that the world would be filled with reflectors of God. . . . Nobody (unless they were stone blind) could miss the point of humanity, namely, God. Knowing, loving, showing God." Because God created us to mirror His character, He invested us with His authority to "rule over," all other creatures on Earth and to "cultivate," "and watch over" every part of His earthly creation as His Divine agents (**Genesis 1:26; 2:15**, NASB; **Genesis 2:15**, HCSB). If God created us with such special privileges, as the Bible surely teaches, do you believe He also wants us to enjoy the happiest and most satisfying life possible? Or, do you think He created us to stifle, limit, or deny us the best life experiences for reasons that make no sense at all? These are the most crucial questions each of us must ask ourselves. How we answer them will determine the entire course of the rest of our lives.

The essence of sin, of rejecting God's guidelines for how He designed us to gain lasting happiness and fulfillment, is that we believe we'll be better off if we are free to do what *we want* to do, regardless of what *God wants*. We confuse doing what we *want* to do with being liberated, as if freedom from God's restraints

will make us happier. Colorado's Royal Gorge is spanned by one of the worlds' highest suspension bridges. It hangs nearly 1,000 above the Arkansas River. A small boy, awed by his view of the gorge at the end of the bridge, exclaimed, "Wow, Daddy. If you fell off here it'd kill you constantly!" The two-lane road across the bridge is typical of such roads: not much shoulder on either side. If you were about to cross this bridge and discovered there were no guard rails, where would you be most comfortable driving over the yawning gorge beneath you? Right down the middle of the road. Because there are guard rails, however, this frees drivers to stay in their appropriate lane and proceed with little fear of falling to their doom. God's laws serve like guard rails, giving us greater freedom and security as we navigate through life.

The particular moral issue focused upon in today's text is improper sexual conduct. As we are painfully aware, this issue has been the downfall of even a number of highly respected Christian leaders. We can best summarize the wisdom of God's standards for our sexual conduct by answering the following question. What is the single greatest factor locking Americans into poverty: Education Level, Race, Substance Abuse, or Sexual Conduct. It's Sexual Conduct. Only 8% of those who finish high school, and wait until they are at least 20 years old and are married before having children, currently live in poverty in our nation.

If sexual activity were limited to the safe, love-enriching environment of marriage between a man and woman, as God designed, how many of the 58 million abortions performed since the 1973 Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision would have even been attempted? How many fewer broken homes would we have, how many less cases of child abuse, how many less fatherless children (the single greatest factor behind crime and addiction rates in our country), and how many fewer sexually transmitted diseases would be ravaging our population if we still adhered to Biblical morality as we much as we once did? In 1960, only about 7% of American teenagers were sexually active. Today, nearly half are. The Center for Disease Control reported in October of 2014 that 110 million Americans have at least one of 27 different sexually transmitted diseases on any given day, with 20 million new infections annually; half among youth ages 15-24. Even more alarming: one-in-5 Americans now live with an incurable sexually transmitted disease. Would you believe that a study reported in the *Journal of Family Psychology* in 2011 verified God's sexual guidelines have our satisfaction in mind? Couples who wait until marriage before sexual union report they are much more satisfied with the quality of their marriage and their sexual relations, and enjoy greater marital stability, than couples who don't wait. Imagine that. The Bible sure makes many so-called social experts today look foolish!

With such vivid confirmations of the blessings we enjoy by following our Creator's moral standards, how tragic is it if leaders who are professed Christians undermine God's guidelines for our sexual safety and satisfaction by what they say or what they do? **II Peter** was written about the same time as **Jude**, and Peter raised many of the same concerns as Jude. Listen, please, to the NCV translation of **II Peter 2:1, 3, 14, 18-20**, "[Y]ou will have some false teachers in your group. . . . Their judgment . . . is . . . coming, and their ruin is certain. . . . Every time they look at a woman they want her, and their desire for sin is never satisfied. . . . By their evil desires they lead people into the trap of sin—people who are just beginning to escape from others who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are not free. They are slaves of things that will be destroyed. For people are slaves of anything that controls them. They were made free from the evil in the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But if they return to evil things and those things control them, then it is worse for them than it was before."

If an Arizona State Legislator is pulled over for a routine traffic violation, do local or state police often exempt them from any fine? Yes. Many state politicians lawmakers (lawgivers) come to believe over time that the laws of our State don't apply to them as they do to the common people. Yet, shouldn't they be the finest examples of law-abiding citizens? Ministers are also often tempted, as proclaimers of God's law, to think they are somehow exempted from the need to follow God's law as closely as common Christians. This suggestion does not come from the Lord but from the Devil who is eager to feed such lusts.

There are two main points made in **Jude 6-7**. First, none are so high or mighty that God's standards of conduct don't apply just as much to them as they do to everyone else. Secondly, the ruinous consequences upon all who persistently indulge in behavior that God despises will be both devastating and unending [Reread **Jude 6**]. In this verse, Jude describes angels who'd been entrusted with positions of heavenly power and ministry ("their own domain"; "positions of authority," NIV). But, they "abandoned their proper abode." Even some angels were seduced into believing liberation from God's standards for their joy and prosperity would gain them happiness they would otherwise miss. When they did not keep faith with God, they lost their privileges and freedom and have been "kept in eternal bonds," a place of close confinement, until they are sentenced on Judgment Day. Their "liberation" from God's will brought them total ruin.

Jude 7 explains why God judged these angels harshly [read]. Somehow, they "indulged in gross" sexual "immorality and went after strange flesh," which was as detestable to God as the sexual perversions of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Jude had **Genesis 6:1-7** in mind. **Hosea 12:3-4** states the "man" who wrestled with Jacob in **Genesis 31:24-30** was really an "angel," proving angels can assume very human form, at times. **Genesis 6:1-7** attributes much of the general godless evil that soon overran the human race in the centuries before the Flood to the influence of these unholy angels upon the human race.

Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by the Lord about 1900 years before the birth of **Jesus**. The cataclysmic ruin of these towns, as sweeping as if a nuclear bomb had been dropped upon them, was proverbial in Jude's day as an enduring warning of the consequences of persistent, gross immorality and sexual perversion. Philo (20 B.C.-50 A.D.), a Jewish philosopher and scholar born in Alexandria, Egypt, wrote, "Even to this day there are seen . . . monuments of the unprecedented destruction that fell upon them, in the ruins, and ashes, and sulphur, and smoke, and the dusky flame which still is sent up from the ground as of a fire smoldering beneath." This is why Jude used the present tense when speaking of Sodom and Gomorrah, stating they "*are* exhibited as an example" (as a sample of the judgment that persistent, unrepentant sinners can expect to receive) "in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire." By breaking free of the protection of God's moral standards and betraying God's trust, angels embracing godless immorality hurtled to their lasting doom as surely as did the godlessly sexual deviates of Sodom and Gomorrah, and as surely as anyone today, professed non-Christians, Christians, or Christian leaders, who betray God's trust and defiantly embrace immorality God condemns!

II. LIBERATION THAT WILL SURELY RELEASE US

The moral standards set forth in the Bible are not old fashioned or out-of-date, but current and up-to-date. God's will for us is not limiting but liberating. As **Jesus** reminds us in **John 8:34-36** (NLT), "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. A slave is not a permanent member of the family, but a son is part of a family forever. So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free." All that we really miss out upon by living by God's moral guidelines are the bad consequences of being deceived by poor decisions, or being enslaved to destructive behavior. How blind can we be to our harmful choices? One day a senior citizen drove along Highway 401 near Toronto, Canada; the busiest freeway in North America. His cell phone rang, his wife answered, and she became very excited. "Herman," she warned urgently, "I was just told the scary news of a car going the wrong way on Highway 401. Please watch out for it and be careful!" "It's not just one car," said Herman, "There are hundreds of them and they're all headed right towards us!"

CONCLUSION

Richard Jackson became Pastor of North Phoenix Baptist Church in the mid-1960s. In his 25 years as Pastor, over 20,000 people were baptized, the majority of whom were adults at the time they professed their commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. As someone used mightily of the Lord, Richard Jackson became a mighty big target of Satan. I heard him as he addressed a college group of young men preparing to be ministers. Richard Jackson had been a star football player in college and was a strappingly handsome man. One day a woman came to his church office for counseling. He told us if there'd ever been a woman

put together right by God, it was her. She confessed to problems in her marriage and indicated her husband no longer had physical relations with her. This drop-dead gorgeous woman then looked Richard Jackson in the eye and asked him, "Can you help me?" He knew she was offering herself to him physically and he confessed that she stirred within him at that moment all the physical desires for a woman a man could have.

About this same time, a pastor here in Tucson also led a church to its greatest growth and ministry. But within a few years, he was forced to resign. This pastor had come to believe God's moral rules did not apply to him as they did to everyone else in the church. When women sought his counsel, he betrayed God's trust by taking advantage of their emotional and spiritual vulnerability to him as their Pastor and engaged in adulterous relations with a number of them. This ruined his ministry and his marriage, and it had a confusing and disturbing impact upon the lives of many young Christians who had looked up to him. To this day, this pastor's name is mentioned with contempt by those who knew him.

Richard Jackson, thankfully, recognized this woman's offer for what it was and pointed her back to her husband. He also recognized this situation as a temptation that gave him the opportunity to demonstrate how much he loved the Lord and his wife more than he desired the fleeting and deceiving pleasures of lust. He never met with this woman again, inside or outside his office. This August, he and his wife Wanda will celebrate 59 years of marriage, and he continues to enjoy a respected and effective ministry as God's servant. He remains a shining example of the benefits of being liberated by **Jesus**, rather than the sinful example of the Tucson pastor who foolishly sought liberation from **Jesus**!