

The Epistle of Jude

How Religion Goes Wrong

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Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the English Revised Version of the Holy Bible (1885) or are Dr Gooding's own translations or paraphrases.

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[Introduction to Jude](#)

When I was invited to present this series, it was suggested to me that one of the things that would be of interest would be 'signs of the last times.' Having only three sessions following this introduction, my mind went to the Epistle by Jude, one of the last writings of the New Testament and, in particular, to one of the features that not only marked his own day but would come to mark the end times, very especially. That is the infiltration into Christendom, and into the church, of false heretical teachings. So let's turn now to the Epistle by Jude and read some of its verses, beginning at verse 1.

Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to them that are called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ: Mercy unto you and peace and love be multiplied. Beloved, while I was giving all diligence to write unto you of our common salvation, I was constrained to write unto you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in privily, even they who were of old set forth unto this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. (vv. 1-4)

Woe unto them! for they went in the way of Cain, and ran riotously in the error of Balaam for hire, and perished in the gainsaying of Korah. (v. 11)

But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And on some have mercy, who are in doubt; and some save, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. Now unto him that is able to guard you from stumbling, and to set you before the presence of his glory without blemish in exceeding joy, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and power, before all time, and now, and for evermore. Amen. (vv. 20-25)

And may God give us good understanding of his holy word.

Facing heresy in the church

There is no denying the fact, I suppose, that a great deal of Jude forms a very solemn Epistle indeed. And as I begin to address you on the topics that he raises, the coward in me would apologize and seek to remind you that if you find this Epistle very gloomy, I didn't write it.

So then it's not my fault that it is gloomy and you will have mercy upon me. But of course I mustn't do that because we deal here with the inspired word of God and what an impertinence it would be on my part if I dare apologize for the holy word of God.

This book is of course gloomy. Jude tells us that he sat down originally to write to us about our common salvation. When he started to write, who knows what it was that intervened, but something or other constrained him. Perhaps it was some news that he received from Christian visitors from other parts, bringing news of sad things that were happening in some of the churches. Or perhaps it was the direct voice of the Holy Spirit that constrained him. However it was, he was constrained, and instead of talking to us about our common salvation, he exhorts us to contend for the faith earnestly, the faith that was once and for all delivered to the saints. There are some people who wish he hadn't been constrained, for they say, 'If only he had talked about salvation, what a glorious topic would have been expounded to us by a brother of the Lord Jesus himself; all the marvellous glories of our common salvation that would have lifted us in spirit to the very pinnacle of heaven. Oh, what a pity he didn't carry on with his original intention, but instead of that he turned aside to talk about these gloomy things of heresy in the church.'

Well, I take their point, but of course there are times in life when we must face gloomy things. In the world outside, it is very distressing and gloomy to read about the disease called AIDS, is it not? It is very gloomy to think about and to see pictures of young people injecting themselves with dirty needles and life-killing drugs; very gloomy indeed. However, we should be less than realists and less than adults, shouldn't we, if, because it was gloomy, we decided to shut our eyes to the realities of life and concentrate merely on the pleasant things? Perhaps by looking for a time at gloomy things, who knows, we might be able all the more efficiently to have influence with our young people and save them from these modern plagues that haunt our schools and universities.

And so it is, of course, with things spiritual. It is nice to concentrate on the glories of salvation, but sometimes we must face the gloomy things, to open our eyes to what is going on in Christendom and what could invade churches as we have known them. For we are solemnly told by Jude, and not only by Jude, but by other New Testament writers, that in the last days we shall find the times marked by this, amongst other things: an eruption of false teachers and false doctrines. We must expect in the last days that opposition to the faith will come not merely from the outside world, from the atheist and the agnostic; we must expect that opposition to the true faith and to the gospel will come from *within* Christianity, from men who would call themselves Christian teachers and teachers of Christian theology. That is something we are straightforwardly told by Jude, amongst other people.

Therefore, if we in our day feel secure and that it's not necessary to think about those things for ourselves, yet there is growing up around us a new generation of young people, we are surely to be concerned for them; that we might have properly trained them in the wholesome things of the faith and get into their systems antidotes against the false teaching that holy Scripture tells us will arise in the last times. So then we must gird ourselves with all the courage we possess to face these gloomy things about false doctrines in the last days. Well, we mustn't get too gloomy because when Jude turned from talking about our common salvation to exalting us to contend for the faith, he wasn't talking about two altogether

different things. You see, it isn't a question of our great common salvation being one thing over here, and these false doctrines being other things completely over there and having nothing to do with our common salvation, is it? The fact is that these false doctrines will overthrow the very foundations of our salvation if we let them, and therefore, of course, as much as we prize our common salvation, so we must be concerned to have the answer to the false doctrines that will undermine people's faith in salvation.

And secondly, gloomy though these things may be, and distressing, if we discover in our own generation evidences of the widespread false doctrine of the last times, it nonetheless carries a glorious note of happiness with it because false doctrine marks the end times, and you begin to see around you such specimens spreading and increasing. My brother, my sister, lift up your hearts and rejoice! Lift up your head for your salvation draws near (Luke 21:28). It has been one of the signs of the end times and the signs are around us. I repeat, here is cause in our heart of hearts for rejoicing—the Lord is coming and we wait impatiently for him so to do.

Marks of false teachers

So now we come to the description of the false teachers according to Jude. He gives us in verse 4 what you might say is a general description of these false teachers. 'There are,' says he, 'certain men crept in privily, even they who were of old set forth unto this condemnation, ungodly men.' That is the first thing that marks them, *ungodliness*. The word in Greek means someone who has lost reverence. It can be used in all sorts of contexts. People who no longer have any reverence for their parents, for instance; but it's commonly used of people who have lost reverence for God. Ungodly, therefore, in that sense.

You mustn't suppose that the word 'ungodly' here is describing men that would be seen on a Saturday night rolling homewards from the pub; worldly, godless men. No, these men could in fact be theologians in a faculty of theology. There is one such famous theologian in the University of Cambridge. He is, I repeat, a theologian, and he teaches the nation as he teaches his pupils that there is no God. How he manages to be a theologian, a thinker who studies God, when his conclusion and his teachings are that there is no God, I don't know; and how he manages to get paid for it into the bargain, well, I wonder that the Trade Descriptions Act people haven't caught up with him. But there he is, and the BBC rejoices from time to time to give him ample coverage of his views as, in the name of theology, he tells the world at large there is no God. A man who has lost, not only respect for, but even faith in God, teaching theology.

And the second point is this. Some of these people are marked by ungodliness, therefore, and lack of reverence for God. Some of them (and I say that because presumably not all of them are tarred with exactly the same brush, so we are told) turn the grace of our God into lasciviousness. That is, they take the lovely doctrines of the love and grace of God, who will tell sinners that they may be saved utterly by his grace—the grace of God who would stand incarnate before the woman taken in adultery and say, 'Neither do I condemn you' (John 8:11)—and turn it into an excuse; indeed, into an advocacy of permissive immorality.

I was listening to radio the other week; I don't know what programme it was being aired once more by the BBC, and some good lady, if good she was, came on and gave an exposition of the story of the woman in Simon's house. The woman was a notorious character according to the standards of the time, she said, 'But our Lord Jesus had no patience with these pharisaical times. He welcomed everybody and when she came in, a virtual prostitute off the street, he gave a huge grin and indicated that he approved of this. Who would condemn them anyway? This is a part of life and the love and grace of God includes everybody.'

That is an example of what precisely Jude is saying here. Taking the grace of God that gives repentant and believing sinners complete pardon, the grace of God that will go out and seek the lost, the grace of God that will send the Saviour to eat at the same table with publicans and sinners; but the grace of God when it's true, will call those sinners to repentance and faith, and only grant them forgiveness when they have believed, and will demand that they be born again, encouraging them with the thought that they can be born again, and must be born again. That's a very different thing from its perversion, that says, 'It doesn't matter, carry on living in your sinfulness and immorality, and God is so loving and kind that he wouldn't judge anybody.' This, of course, has been an age-old heresy. It will come to the fore in later times, says Jude. Twenty years ago, it made a stir in America and in the United Kingdom with the writings of people like the late Bishop of Woolwich,¹ who taught his pupils that even fornication could be right and a beautiful thing, if only it is performed in a way motivated by love—and that was said by a bishop of the church.

You will have read, or heard, that last year there came a motion before the synod of the Anglican Church in England—I am not telling tales out of school—when one good evangelical and faithful man put a motion before the synod, very carefully worded, to the effect that the practice of adultery and homosexuality is always sinful. Deliberately thus phrased; not saying homosexuality itself is sinful, but saying the *practice* of homosexuality and adultery is always sinful. But the synod wouldn't pass the motion thus put and substituted for it a motion that says that the practice of these things falls short of the ideal. So, I suppose, next murder will be regarded as not necessarily sinful, but falling short of the ideal. And child abuse won't be sinful any more; it will be falling short of the ideal. Oh, my brothers, lift up your heads, my sisters, lift up your hearts, the Lord comes.

'These are signs,' says Jude, 'of the last times; perversions of the gospel, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness and then denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ' (1:4). 'Lord and Master' because he has crown rights, and the rights of redemption upon everybody that professes his name, to exercise his lordship, not merely over our behaviour, but over our thinking. He expects us to be not only morally loyal to him but intellectually loyal to him. And yet, in the name of Christ himself, generations now of young students in universities and colleges have been taught that Jesus Christ is not always right, and sometimes he's positively wrong. So young students have been taught that when it comes to what our Lord said about the second coming, he made a mistake, because he didn't know any better. He said that he would return very shortly and, of course, he didn't return shortly, and they say, 'There you are, you see, he got it all wrong.'

¹ John A. T. Robinson was Bishop of Woolwich from 1959 to 1969, and wrote books such as *Honest to God*, London: SCM Press, 1963.

Some years ago (I suppose it was twenty years ago at least) I was invited to a teacher training college in Belfast. In that teacher training college there was a department of Scripture where young people could be taught how to teach Scripture in school and thus fulfil the government requirement that religious education shall be taught and, of course, there were many young Christian men and women that took advantage of that. They went and they studied and got their certificate, so now they could go into the schools and teach the children Bible and Scripture; and we who live in this much favoured province may thank God for this. If you were an Englishman living in England and you saw how many multitudes of schools there are with not one Christian in the whole school, you would thank God for schools in Ulster where, not only are there often many believing children, but on the staff there are real, genuine believing teachers. What a great blessing that has been to generations of people.

On this particular occasion, the students in this training college had asked the head of department if he would put on a seminar and get a Roman Catholic teacher and a Protestant teacher to come along and have each one spend five or ten minutes giving what they believed to be the teaching of holy Scripture on what happens after death. And, would you believe it, I was the 'Protestant' that was pitched to come and talk upon this matter in this learned institution. So I went along. My dear Roman Catholic friend turned out to be a lady who taught in one of the leading teacher training colleges in the city. She was in fact head of teaching the Bible to schoolteachers. She was the lady that taught them how to teach the Bible in schools. She said to me, 'Now, I'd like you to go first, because I myself don't want to be held down to any particular point of view.'

So I went first and said what you would have said, the simple things from the New Testament about what happens first to a believer after death and then to an unbeliever after death. I didn't lose the opportunity to point out in that kind of context that for a believer to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8), without any purgatory in between. And when I had finished and had my five minutes then she began to have her five. She spent the first five minutes telling everybody what the traditional doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church was and after that she said, 'And now we know that it's all wrong anyway and we don't believe a word of it.' We all pricked up our ears and listened as, for the next twenty-five minutes, she went on to tell us why they didn't believe it anymore, or at least why she didn't. She said, 'Actually, we know nothing about what happens after death because, yes, the Lord Jesus did talk about these things, and his apostles talked about these things, but they lived in a pre-scientific world where people believed that this universe is in three decks, so to speak. There's heaven above, earth in the middle and hell below. And so, according to her, the apostles talked about the Lord Jesus coming down from the top deck, heaven, to our world, then dying and going down underneath and coming back again and then going back to heaven.'

And she continued, 'You know, that was what they thought in those pre-scientific days. Nowadays we know that it isn't true. So nothing that the Lord Jesus or his apostles said on this matter is of any use. We know nothing as to what happens after death, and what a marvellous thing it is to know that we know nothing.'

And she was in charge of teaching the students how to teach the Bible in the schools of this province! Denying the Lord and Master in this sense. Though doubtless she would have

professed allegiance to him and said she believed in him, when it came to what he taught there were points when she was prepared to deny his authority and to say that what he said was completely mistaken. Of course, when one hears senior ecclesiastics like the Bishop of Durham telling the nation that he cannot believe in a bodily resurrection,² you have but a tip of an enormous iceberg, for over these last fifty years generations of theological students have, in many places, been taught the same notions as that teacher training college lecturer was trying to put across to us on that morning twenty years ago.

This then is the general description that Jude gives in these verses.

Examples of God's judgment

Now let's cast our eye down the Epistle to see how Jude musters his arguments. In verse 5, he says, 'I desire to put you in remembrance, though you know all things once for all, how that the Lord . . .', and then he gives three examples from Old Testament history of the severe and cataclysmic judgments of God.

Warnings from various periods of history

First of all he mentions the people that the Lord saved 'out of the land of Egypt' and then 'afterward destroyed them that believed not.' For the fact is that though multitudes came out of Egypt, the vast majority of them turned out, in the course of their journey, never to have been true believers at all. They were professing to be the people of God, but they were not believers and, therefore, the Lord eventually destroyed them (Exod 12:38; Num 14; 1 Cor 10:1-11; Heb 3:15-19). This is Jude's number one example of the judgments of God.

His number two example is in verse 6, 'And angels which kept not their own principality, but left their proper habitation, he hath kept in everlasting bonds under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.' Here is another Old Testament example that bids us to think back into the book of Genesis and to the eruption into our world of these evil angels that kept not their 'proper habitations', that is to say, the kind of body that is given to angels to have. They kept not those habitations but came down and, by their interminglings, brought our human race to the verge of perversion and irreparable harm. So God himself was obliged to intervene to save the human race by blotting out the vast majority of its gene pool and taking a man who was perfect in his generation and from him making a new start for the human race; without which judgment the human race might have been condemned to the end of its times to the unphysical enfeeblements and perversions that these dark spirits had instituted (Gen 6-9).

Then the third judgment comes: 'Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them, having in like manner with these given themselves over to fornication, and gone after strange flesh' (v. 7). It is another example, as you will see, of perversion. To profess to be one of the people of God and to be an unbeliever, that is a perversion. In the angels and their

² David Jenkins was Bishop of Durham from 1984 to 1994, and held heterodox beliefs, particularly regarding the virgin birth and the bodily resurrection of Christ.

tampering with the human race there was yet another perversion of a different kind. A similar perversion, though not exactly the same thing, was to be found in Sodom and Gomorrah, and Jude reminds us that God intervened to destroy those cities (Gen 18–19). Three examples then are given from the Old Testament of God’s catastrophic intervention in judgment on our planet.

In spite of these warnings

Jude tells us in verse 8 that, in spite of knowing these things, these false teachers both do themselves and teach people to do the very things that these ancient people were judged for. They perpetuate them in spite of these historical warnings of God’s judgment in olden times. And if you ask me why these people have the nerve to do the very things for which these ancient civilisations were judged, I would probably hazard the guess that they do it because, if you were to put in front of them these stories from the Old Testament, they would dismiss them as legend with a superior smile upon their faces.

In verse 11 Jude turns to another citation from the Old Testament and now we see not merely three examples of God’s judgment on perversions and perverse doctrines, but three actual examples of men who, in their different ways, were false in the area of religion. There was Cain, there was Balaam, and there was Korah—three actual examples of false people in religion from the ancient world—and Jude is going to argue with us that they have counterparts even to this present day. There are people that still take the same attitude as Korah and Balaam, who still do the very same things as Cain, and from verse 12 onward he says as much. Here then are these three examples from the Old Testament.

Now Jude reminds us that in his own day there were already false teachers who carried on these same attitudes and in verses 12–13 he gives us a whole series of metaphors so that we shall feel in our very hearts the evil of these systems of false doctrines by the metaphorical descriptions he gives of them.

Take just one of them. You’re out on Lough Neagh one beautiful afternoon; there isn’t a whisper of breeze anywhere. The face of the lake is like the most polished mirror that a woman ever had in her boudoir. You are going along in your little rowboat, so calm and contented, thinking all is safe, when the bottom of the boat is ripped out by a hidden rock underneath the water and you come to see that not only are you in mortal danger, but you realise what a hideous danger this was, lurking in such a sinister fashion under the deceptive calm and apparent beauty and purity of the mirror-like surface of the lough. If you can feel the deceit in it, then you’re beginning to feel something of how we ought to feel about perversions of the gospel that are dressed up to look so nice and appear to be talking about lovely things such as the grace of God.

But to move on as quickly as we can, come down if you would please to verse 14. And now, for a third time, Jude quotes the Old Testament, ‘And to these also Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied’—and Enoch prophesied of the coming of the Lord; the coming of the Lord in power and great glory—‘with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon ungodly men.’ So here, way back in the Old Testament, are not only examples of God’s

judgment, not only examples of religious frauds, but there was an actual prophecy of the coming of the Lord to deal with such perversions of the truth. And yet in verse 16, says Jude, these false teachers persist in doing the very things that the Bible has announced the Lord Jesus will judge when he comes again. And if once more you should ask, 'But why have they the courage to do the things that the Bible says the Lord Jesus will judge when he comes?' the answer, you will discover, is they don't believe he's coming anyway. They dismiss that as a legend too.

But you, beloved, remember the words which have been spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; how that they said to you, In the last time there shall be mockers, walking after their own ungodly lusts. (vv. 17–18)

So we have had three things from the Old Testament and now Jude turns to one from the New, the words of the apostles of the Lord Jesus. He puts them in the same rank as the inspired holy Scripture, because, in Jude's time, the writings and speeches of the apostles were regarded already as inspired Scripture on a level of authority with the sacred writings of the Old Testament. He reminds his fellow believers and calls on them to remember the words of the apostles of the Lord Jesus. They said in the last times that there shall come these mockers and, says Jude in verse 19, 'here they are!' 'These are they who . . .'. And if they were already beginning to creep into the churches in that day, how much more must we expect them in our time?

God is able to keep you

'Gloomy,' you say; and yet it would be a bad job in one sense if it didn't happen, wouldn't it? Because the Bible, the apostles, said it would happen, and if things went swimmingly until the Lord comes, then the apostles would be wrong, wouldn't they? They said it would happen. If it is happening, well it's the last times. My brothers, my sisters, lift up your heads, your redemption draws near! Oh, what a wonderful comfort it is, against the background of these gloomy perversions, to embrace the beginning and the end of Jude's Epistle. Each one of you, if you are believers in the Lord Jesus, are not only saved but personally and individually called. Oh, what a magnificent thing it is!

Ponder it again this evening in these quiet moments as you sit before the Lord. And if you're a believer in the Lord Jesus, know this: that you only became a believer because the transcendent Lord of heaven and earth bowed down to you and personally caused you to hear his voice, like little Samuel in the temple, and called you by name. You are known to God himself, personally and individually called by God himself. And he shall keep you: 'Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy' (Jude 24 KJV).

I love those words that our Lord uttered in his prayer before the shades of Gethsemane closed in upon them. Reviewing his life's ministry and the handful of men that were around him, he said to his Father, 'Of all you have given me, I have lost not one, save the son of perdition; that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But of all those that were genuine believers, I have lost not one.' And then with very deep poignancy he turns to his Father and says, 'But

now I'm no longer in the world, and I must hand to you the task of keeping them. Now I come to thee, holy Father, keep them—you keep them' (see John 17:11–12).

And I say to myself, 'I say, my good man, ponder a moment; if the Lord Jesus in his ministry could say, "I have kept them and not one of them is lost", shall the Father do less than the Son, and shall the Father not keep them with all that same devotion and with all that same effectiveness and success as the blessed Lord Jesus kept them in the days of his flesh?' Ah, he shall indeed, and he shall present you before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy! And the time draws near.

The Lord grant us strength from that prospect so that as realists now we may face the solemn lessons of his word. And, if we feel that we do not need them ourselves, God give us sight to see there are many young folks around us who desperately need it and who need to be prepared before they go out into this godless and perverse world at large.

Korah: A Humanist Cleric

In verse 11 of his Epistle, Jude brings before us three personages from the Old Testament that in those far-off days were examples of the wrong kind of teaching, such as Jude said we may expect to exist in the end times as well. He mentions Cain, and says, 'Woe unto them! for they went in the way of Cain.' Then he mentions Balaam, saying, 'And [they] ran riotously in the error of Balaam for hire.' Finally he mentions Korah, and says, 'They perished in the gainsaying of Korah.'

We notice at once that all these three men meet us in the Old Testament in the context of religion. We meet Cain in Genesis 4 when he was approaching God with a sacrifice in his hand; and it was because of a very serious disagreement between him and God over the nature of that sacrifice that Cain eventually slew Abel, his brother, and went out from the presence of the Lord. This is 'the way of Cain'. We meet Balaam in the book of Numbers as he visits his high place and prepares his sacrifices with the help of Balak, king of Moab. He was a prophet and also a priest, a religious gentleman, but a religious gentleman that knew the size of a half-crown and felt that the more half-crowns there were, the better the religion was (Num 22–24). Finally, there was Korah (Num 16). These three men are put before us in an ascending scale of wickedness.

Cain was bad enough, but he was what you might call a layman. Balaam was worse, because he was a prophet. A false prophet, of course, but a prophet nonetheless. He did profess to know about religion. Korah was worst of all, because whereas Balaam was a prophet, Balaam was a *pagan* prophet. Korah was not only a Hebrew and an Israelite, he was in 'holy orders', as we should say today. He was a minor cleric in holy orders; he was a Levite, serving with the Levites under the priests, the sons of Aaron. His sin therefore stands out as the most terrible of all the three, because of the position of privilege that he held and then abused. I beg your leave in this series to consider these three men, and your leave again to treat them back to front. We'll take Korah first, Balaam next, and Cain last of all.

The gainsaying of Korah

What then was wrong with Korah, and how does he in particular stand to us as a beacon light of false religion? You will notice the special term to begin with: these false teachers, says Jude, 'perished in the gainsaying of Korah' (v. 11), so that what we have to fix our attention upon now in Korah's rebellion is his gainsaying.

Gainsaying is old English for 'to say against, to argue against'. In the Hebrew, it also carries ideas of 'very rebellious saying against', that is 'arguing and rebelling against'. The

word 'gainsaying' is used elsewhere in holy Scripture. Let us think of the passage, because we know it well. Hebrews 12 exhorts us as follows, 'For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself' (v. 3 KJV). The word there translated 'contradiction' is the exact same word as in Jude 11, translated 'gainsaying', and if we think for a moment, that will put the whole thing into context for us and show us how serious this matter of gainsaying is.

The issue at stake

I was talking with a gentleman one day, and it was appropriate to ask him what he felt the example of Korah taught us. He said that it teaches us the serious matter of disagreeing with the pastor of your church. I said, 'I think, my friend, it's more serious than that.' The gainsaying that Korah was engaged in was of the same order and quality as that which was done by the leaders of Israel's nation when they took our blessed Lord Jesus Christ and nailed him to Golgotha's tree. Consider him, 'who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising shame' (Heb 2:2). Consider him who in those moments endured this great gainsaying, this contradiction of sinners against himself.

You see, what they contradicted was this: the blessed Lord Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, God's Son incarnate. When he stood finally before the high priest in the high priest's court and the priests asked him straitly and directly, 'Tell us now, exactly', they put him on oath, and he said, 'You shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power', thereby claiming equality with God. Said the high priest as he saw the point of it, 'Are you then claiming to be the Son of God?' Our Lord Jesus replied, 'Yes.' But they denied the holy and the just (Matt 26:63-64). They disputed his claim, they contradicted his assertion that he had come from God.

Denying the apostle of their confession

Nothing less fundamental than this great fact is brought before us by the histories of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. And so I'm going to ask you to cast the eye of your memory back to your Old Testament. If you want to keep your eye upon the text, the story comes in the book of Numbers from chapter 16 onwards. This story is given to us in some detail so that we shall be able to analyse what was an issue when Korah, the literal, historical Korah, rose up and contradicted Moses and was engaged in 'the gainsaying of Korah.'

They assembled themselves [Korah and 250 princes of the congregation] together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, 'You take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift you up yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?' (Num 16:3)

Korah and his associates (many of them Levites in holy orders, others princes of the congregation) came to Moses, and they denied Moses as being the apostle of their confession (see Heb 3:1). They said to Moses and Aaron, 'You take too much upon yourselves. Who do you think you are? Parading yourselves with such airs and graces and coming to us and saying, "Thus said the Lord." We're just as good as you are. Who do you think you are, putting on this whole pretence that you are the ones sent to us from God? And we have to

listen to everything you say Moses because you say you were up on Mount Sinai and you stood between us and God, and you brought us the tables of the stones and you were the inspired prophet. Get this into your head, Moses, we don't accept your claim to be special. Everybody in the congregation is holy. Just as holy as you are!

You must excuse my warmth, because things got very warm with Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, I tell you. They had irked for months against the authority of Moses. His claim to be God's very mouthpiece to Israel—that, they refused. He was the apostle of their profession and they would not have it. And is Korah a warning to us? Yes, because as we remarked in an earlier session, there have been many who have taught legions of undergraduates and theologians and the general public that Jesus Christ—well, that not all that he says is authoritative.

In some circles young folks are taught that the Old Testament is a great deal of myth. And if you say to them, 'But our Lord Jesus believed it and taught it as the word of God,' they will say, 'Well of course he did, but what did he know? He was a man of his own time and didn't realize it was only myth; but of course we can see it's merely myth and not the word of God at all. Jesus Christ was mistaken and you don't have to listen to what he says.' And with this they dispute the unique authority of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Denying the high priest of their profession

They rejected Moses. They spoke against Moses and the special position that he took as the one that brought to Israel God's authoritative revelation. They spoke against Aaron: 'You take too much upon yourself!' Said they to Aaron, 'All the people of God are holy, and then there's you, Aaron, and you tell us that you're the only one that has the right to take the sacrifice and go into the holiest of all, as though you were somehow special to us and that we need an intermediary; that we need a mediator like you to get in there and meet God on our behalf. We're telling you straight, Aaron, we don't accept that you're special. We're just as holy as you are. We don't need you as a mediator to make peace with God.' They denied not only the apostle of their profession, they denied the high priest of their profession (see Heb 3:1). Has that a warning to us, too? Of course it has.

The Bible says, 'There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, Who gave himself a ransom for all' (1 Tim 2:5–6 KJV). But that whole doctrine of a ransom implies that we are all sinners and we need a mediator to act as a ransom, as our substitute ransom, to come between us and God. And it's not telling secrets out of school to say that in wide areas of Christendom people will talk about the love of God to sinners and how God is prepared to forgive sinners, but if you should say, 'On what ground?' they will deny that Jesus died as a substitute, as an atoning sacrifice for sin. They will say, 'God would not punish anybody. We don't need anybody in that sense to come as a mediator between us and God; for God is so loving he would never punish anybody.' They deny the need for a special mediator who can atone and offer a ransom in the stead of guilty men and women. So too did Korah. Oh, but he did more than that, didn't he? Or at least his friends did.

Denying the reality of the world to come

Let's scan down the page a little bit further in Numbers:

Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab: and they said, We will not come up: is it a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, but thou must needs make thyself also a prince over us? Moreover thou hast not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us inheritance of fields and vineyards. (16:12–14)

And if you think I have read that verse wrong, then wipe your glasses and clear the mist off and look at it again, for it is what they said. Did you pick it up? Verse 13, ‘Is it a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey?’ You say, ‘No, no, no, no, you mean, “You haven’t yet brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey.” What do you mean, “You have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey”? You came from Egypt, gentlemen—that wasn’t a land flowing with milk and honey, was it? The land flowing with milk and honey is Canaan along the road there, not Egypt.’ Ah, that’s what you think, but that’s not what they thought.

Listen to them. Korah is wearing his Levitical garb. He’s in holy orders, but his companions with whom he associates and the men that support him, they’re not in holy garb. And they say to Moses, ‘Look here, Moses. You know what? You’ve jolly well spoilt life for us, you know. There we were in the land flowing with milk and honey and you ruined it by your teaching. We might have been enjoying Egypt with all its loveliness and its milk and its honey. You, by your narrow-minded teaching and your ideas of redemption, have encouraged the people to leave a land flowing with milk and honey and bring them out into this abominable wilderness.’

What would you say about men that talk like that? Do you suppose they’ve been redeemed? It was their idea that Egypt was the land flowing with milk and honey. ‘What is more,’ they said, ‘you and all your promises, Moses, that one day you’re going to bring us into an inheritance and another land flowing with milk and honey, you’ve not done it, Moses, have you?’ No, these were men that didn’t believe in the inheritance out there in the future. To them, the land of milk and honey was this present Egypt. They were worldly men, of course, and Korah claimed to be a cleric and that’s why I call him a *humanist cleric*.

Of course, Paul already had to lament such people in his own day, did he not? He said, ‘My brethren, I want you to press on; even I do not regard myself as having yet attained. I press towards the mark of the calling on high in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (see Phil 3:12–14). Oh, that glorious destiny that lies ahead, that God has put before every pilgrim on the way, the glorious inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fades not away. The blessed sight of the Saviour that one day shall greet us and we shall be like him and fully conformed to him! Why of course, we’re not there yet; this isn’t the inheritance incorruptible and undefiled. Who said it was? But we’re on the way there. ‘Follow me,’ says Paul. ‘But I have to tell you, and I tell you it with tears in my eyes; there are some who are not interested in that goal. Their heaven is this earth. Their minds are on earthly things’ (see Phil 3:17–19).

During the 1960s there was a rage in America and it penetrated a little bit of the UK. I don’t know if it came to Mullafernaghan.³ It was called ‘Secular Christianity’, advocated by

³ The name refers to Mullafernaghan Gospel Hall, the venue for these talks.

people like Paul van Buren and others.⁴ They said, 'We must give up all these ideas of heaven. They are but myths. The real thing is now.'

How many there are who would talk about the grace of God; they might even talk about salvation and the love of God. But it's not any heaven they're after; it's merely trying to improve a society now. This world is the only world they really believe in, and it annoys them to see people who profess to be pilgrims, unsatisfied with this world and bearing their testimony that our joys lie beyond.

Denying the wonder of God's word

Then they went further, didn't they? Look at their last remark in verse 14, 'Will you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up.' In other words, they charged Moses and Aaron with obscurantism and intellectual tyranny—putting out the eyes. 'With all your authoritative teaching and making out it's the inspired word of God and stopping people from thinking, you are putting their eyes out so that they have no mind of their own and can't have their own opinions. They've got to accept what you say and we're fed up with it,' they told Moses. 'We're not going to submit to it any longer!'

That also is an accusation we should be careful to understand, and be sure that we don't deserve. For when the world and the religious world says that because we believe in the Bible we are putting people's eyes out and intellectually tyrannizing over people, well let's make sure we're not. Make sure it is the word of God and not some mere tradition that's grown up without any biblical authority, because tradition in whatever quarters does have that effect sometimes, namely of stopping people thinking.

Ours is a Bible that says we're to love the Lord our God with all our minds; we are to think with every fibre of our intelligence that God has given us. And not to do it is sin, isn't it? We are to love him with our minds. The difference is our starting point. We must think, yes, but it's got to be a mind that is submitted to God's holy, revealed, inspired word. Because it is the word of the Creator it will not restrict your thinking; it will enlarge your mind with thoughts as big as God himself, as big as eternity.

This then is the challenge we face with 'the gainsaying of Korah'. God, give us help for the older among us to help our younger people. They must go out into a world to meet not merely the atheist but the liberal who wants to tell them that their belief in the inspiration of Scripture is intellectually confining. Oh, God, help us before the young folks get out there that we shall have taught them God's word and taught them to think, so that it is not just second-hand tradition, but that it is personal experience of the wonder of God's inspired word.

God's response to Korah and company

How would God deal with these men? Well the first thing he did was alarming. He told them all to collect everybody that agreed with Korah, Dathan and Abiram. Says Moses, 'And I want you to get them all together, and make sure that, if you don't believe what these men

⁴ Paul Van Buren was one of several American theologians identified with the 'Death of God' movement based on a secularizing concept introduced earlier by German philosophers such as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Friedrich Nietzsche that 'God is dead'.

stand for, you get away' (see Num 16:16–26). 'For you see,' says Moses, 'if these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the LORD hath not sent me' (v. 29).

In other words, Moses is saying this: 'Get clear of these men, for now God will visit them with such catastrophic judgment. And if he doesn't, then I'm no prophet.' Here is Moses staking his whole career, his whole claim to be a prophet of God, on this—that God is about to judge these evil men. 'So, you stand clear of them.' That day, God himself intervened in human history and the earth opened her mouth and they went down alive into the pit (vv. 31–33).

The reality of hell

God's answer to this kind of gainsaying is to say, 'Gentlemen, remember there is a hell.' It is not everywhere, is it, in Scripture that our Lord emphasizes the fact of hell? It is an important study, it seems to me, that we take careful notice of what those contexts were, what those situations were, as recorded in the Gospels, where our Lord Jesus chose to talk about hell. He didn't blazon it out at every street corner, but he did believe it, didn't he? And that very text that sums up the glories of God's love and the gift of his great salvation is a verse that at its heart reminds us there is a hell: 'For God so loved . . . that he gave . . . that whosoever believeth in him should not perish' (John 3:16).

You say, 'What has the fact of hell got to do with these intellectual arguments?'

Well, everything. I don't know where you place yourself, but I tell you where I stand. I start with this, that I am a sinner. God's word tells me so. My conscience says it is so. I need a saviour, for without a saviour I too must descend to the pit. And I tell you, I need a saviour who knows what he's talking about, a saviour who I can believe and stake my whole eternity upon. If you're not a sinner and you don't fear hell, well perhaps then you don't need Christ. If there's a hell and you can save yourself, you don't need Christ. Say about him what you will, but you will find out there is a hell and you cannot save yourself. I need a saviour who is utterly special. I need the one who said to Nicodemus, 'I came down from heaven'—God's apostle of our profession (see John 3:13; Heb 3:1). And if I stake upon him my whole eternity, I believe everything he ever said.

Memorial to the rebellion

When it was over God told Moses to take the censers that those men had used, beat them out and nail them to the altar so that thereafter, all down the centuries, when men came to offer their sacrifice on that altar, they saw the memorial of that tremendous rebellion. So it is still, isn't it, at a high level? Tomorrow, if the Lord has not come, you will come around a table on which stand bread and wine, and you will remember the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ our Lord; how that he died for our sins that we might be forgiven and, as you remember it, you will be told to consider him that endured such contradictions of sinners.

'Oh, Calvary, dark Calvary . . .'⁵—what does it tell me? It tells me this, that there is nestling in the human heart nothing less than downright rebellion against the Most High,

⁵ W. McK. Darwood (1835–1914), 'On Calvary's brow my Saviour died'.

and the biggest rebellion is not to be seen in a poor benighted cannibal. The biggest rebellion was to be seen at Calvary, when the best religion the world had ever known and the highest religious leaders in the land (priests upon whose bonnet the very name Jehovah was written), took God's Son, denied his claims and nailed him to a tree. Oh, alas for the human heart! How sin abounded at Calvary in the rebellion of religion against her God. And as tomorrow we sit around the emblems of bread and wine, it won't be so much the Jews we're thinking of, will it? We shall discover our own hearts again and be reminded that we too were rebels and that Jesus died for us.

A further answer to rebellion

Two other things they did. The next morning after the judgment the people came round to Moses and they said, 'You have killed the people of the Lord' (Num 16:41). What sentimental twaddle it was, wasn't it? 'People of the Lord', really! But that's how the unregenerate religious person thinks, doesn't he? He thinks it doesn't matter what you believe about doctrine.

Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, 'the people of the Lord', when they in fact were arch rebels against God. At that moment the plague broke out upon the people and, at the command of Moses, Aaron took his censer and went in and interceded for the transgression and stayed the judgment of God.

Ah, yes, this is God's answer. There is a hell; there was a Calvary where God met the rebellion of sinful men and women. We have our choice—we can reject him and go down to the pit. Yet, praise God, for all who will have it, the very one whom we have rebelled against, he'll stand up like Aaron as our Saviour to save us from the very wrath of God.

And finally, the dispute was brought to an end when God told Moses to tell the leaders of every tribe, the heads of the tribes, to take their rods; and they brought them twelve sticks, nicely carved and beautifully polished, but as dead as Scrooge's doornail!⁶ They got these rods, these maces if you like, and they laid them out before the Lord, and when they came in the morning, rod number one was still as dead as it always had been, as they all were, right up to number eleven. But what of number twelve, which was Aaron's? Ah, it sprouted with new life—blossoms and buds, twigs and fruit! It was life out of death and God's vindication of the claims of Aaron.

Thus it is when God silences men's arguments. How? By raising his Son from the dead. Listen to Peter talking to the priests in Jerusalem: 'I will tell you, gentleman,' he says, 'if you want to know in what name we have done this thing, it's in the name of Jesus, whom you crucified, whom God has raised from the dead and exalted to his right hand to be a prince and a Saviour, and that eternally' (see Acts 4:10; 5:31).

How did Korah ever get to that state of affairs when he would thus rebel against God? I cannot tell you; but this I know, the man was a Levite. Allow me two minutes and I will tell you a story about Levites.

⁶ The phrase 'as dead as Scrooge's doornail' refers to a twice-repeated line at the beginning of Charles Dickens's classic *A Christmas Carol* (1843), whose author mused on the phrase used with reference to Ebenezer Scrooge's former business partner, Jacob Marley: 'Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail,' meaning he was quite dead.

A story about Levites

Levites, says the early chapter of the book of Numbers, were taken in the place of the firstborn (Num 3:12–13). The firstborn had been redeemed; they had been spared. And because they had been bought by the blood of the redeeming lamb, God claimed the firstborn to himself by the rights of redemption. Later, he substituted the Levites for the firstborn; the claim of redemption was that they belonged to God. Then we are told that the Levites were given the charge of the house of the Lord. They carried the tabernacle and its furniture; they dismantled it when they were on their journeys and they put it together at the end of the day. They bore the hard work of the tabernacle.

I suspect it was very exciting when they first put the tabernacle up. Wouldn't you think so? It was all sparkling new; the gold shimmered, the silver was polished and the beautiful curtains were there on the gold-covered frames. Oh, what a magnificent thing it was, and I suspect many a Levite put his chest out a little bit. He'd chosen to put up this beautiful sacred dwelling place of God for God's people to worship in, and God's presence to be present in. I'll tell you something, when you have taken the tabernacle down 10,561 times and you've got to put it up the 10,562nd time, it gets a little bit samey, you know.

Of course, you wouldn't know anything about that, would you? I'm sure you always come to serve the Lord with great delight of heart, as though it were the first day you got converted. Well, perhaps you don't; it can get a little bit samey, can't it? And God, who foresaw it and knew the human heart, arranged that before they began their ministry these Levites had to be taken and offered as a wave offering before God—offered before God as a living sacrifice. And the echoes come to us still today, don't they? Are we genuinely redeemed? Then redemption claims us, and the mercies of God call us to offer ourselves like those Levites, as a living sacrifice.

How shall they do it? Says the Book of Numbers, just before they were offered as a living sacrifice, God ordered Moses to have another ceremony. It was a most unusual ceremony—the only time it happened in Moses' day. They took the altar, which was then brand new, and they assembled the nation around it. Then Moses called upon the princes to bring their gifts to the dedication of the altar so that they, in front of all the people, would show to the nation how they valued that altar.

I think I see the scene. There's the nation, there are the children watching, and at last comes the prince of the first tribe. 'Oh, look at the silver, look at the wealth. Look at that fine flour, look at that goblet, look at that spoon—what wealth!' What a thing it must have been to see the prince bow before that altar and, expressing his heart's appreciation and valuation of the altar, he lays those sacred gifts at its foot. Where did they get the wealth from, he and all his fellow princes? They got it through redemption when they came out of Egypt. Now they were given the chance to show before the nation what the altar meant to them, and to show it before the Levites; that the Levites might find help and motivation to offer themselves as a living sacrifice.

My brothers, God willing, I shall be with you tomorrow morning. I need your help. I'm a kind of a New Testament Levite; I'm meant to offer myself a living sacrifice, to offer my body, to offer my brain, to offer my mind. How shall I get the strength to offer myself a living sacrifice? Oh, my brothers, when you get the chance tomorrow, help me, won't you? For I

shall be listening to you as you rise to lead our praise and I see you with life's experience, leaders amongst God's people, approach the Father and tell him what Calvary means to you. And I shall say, 'There's that man and I know what he's suffered in life. I know what pains and difficulty he has borne; but listen to him, how does it come that Calvary means so much to him?' And, perceiving that, I shall say to myself, If there's that much in God that can compel that man's adoration and devotion, then I want to give myself likewise to that same Lord and say with the hymn writer,

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an offering far too small,
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.⁷

And if you'll do that for me tomorrow, you will have added to God's grace to keep me from ever disputing the intellectual and moral claims of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ.

⁷ Isaac Watts (1674–1748), 'When I Survey the Wondrous Cross'.

Balaam: An Advocate of Permissiveness

Woe unto them! for they went in the way of Cain, and ran riotously in the error of Balaam for hire, and perished in the gainsaying of Korah. (Jude 11)

We are currently studying together the little Epistle by Jude, with particular interest to see what he has to tell us about signs of the last days. Jude, among the Epistles of the New Testament, concentrates on this: that in the last days, before the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ for his people, there will arise false teachers among the people of God, introducing into the churches of Christ doctrines that are perversive of the very fundamentals of the Christian faith. Very often it happens that, when false doctrines are introduced in Christian circles, they who promote these false doctrines represent that they are moving with the times; they are learning to keep pace with the progress in the world outside. They tell us that they would move beyond the simplicities and the crudities of ancient beliefs. Passing from medieval superstitions they are bringing us into the so-called modern world of light and reasonableness. The very opposite, of course, is the case, as Jude makes clear in this small Epistle. He tells us that even in his own days, there were false teachers already beginning to penetrate the original Christian assemblies.

Jude writes towards the end of the apostolic age, when the apostles such as Paul and Peter in their second Epistles bear witness to this, that the great flood tide of the early-period evangelism was beginning to abate and there were problems in the church, not least amongst which was the entrance of false teachers. Says Jude, 'Certain men have crept in unawares' (v. 4), and you can see from the very verb he uses that these people were not true believers. I don't know how you got into the church of which you are a member but I am sure—I think as sure as anyone can be—that you didn't creep in. You came in with colours flying; or at least I hope you did. These men didn't. If the believers had really known what was in the heart of these people, of course they never would have been accepted in the Christian church. But they managed to creep in, and the very manner of their access to the church shows us that they were not genuine believers. No genuine believer has any reason to creep into a Christian church.

Moreover Jude, when he sets himself to describe to us the false teachings that these men brought with them, finds it convenient to mention in verse 11 three Old Testament characters. He says, as we have read, that these modern teachers between them have gone 'in the way of Cain'. Or, if they haven't done that, they have run riotously 'in the error of Balaam for hire'. Or, if they haven't done either of those two, then they have done the third: they have perished 'in the gainsaying of Korah.'

So now, far from these teachers being modern in their ideas, they're not modern in the year we're in now. They weren't modern in the year that Jude wrote, for the doctrines they taught and the attitudes to religion that they maintained have long since been exemplified in centuries far past, in such characters as Cain and Balaam and Korah. Ladies and gentlemen, sin is very monotonous and it's very boring in the end. Sin finds it difficult to be original; the new-fashion doctrines turn out generally in the end to be old-fashioned lies.

Previously, we considered together the Old Testament example of Korah and dubbed him 'a humanist cleric' and saw what he stood for: anticipations of modern people who belong to the so-called secular wing of Christianity, preach a secular 'gospel', and deny the authority of our blessed Lord, both as their apostle and as their high priest. Next, we come to Balaam. As you will perceive, I have not lived here for thirty years without learning the skills of the Irish, and I'm taking things upside down, inside out, and back to front. But never mind, I'm one of you! We started at the end with Korah, we're going backwards and have arrived now with Balaam.

The error of Balaam

What did Balaam stand for, what were the peculiar marks of the false doctrine that he brought into Israel, and what did his successors bring into the Christian churches? Well, the first thing stares us in the face in verse 11: what Balaam did was to 'go astray'. You'll notice that his word is not 'gainsaying' or 'rebellion' as you might translate it, such as marked Korah, but it is an 'error', it is a going astray. Alas, he wasn't content merely to go astray, but he 'ran riotously', says Jude. Like a pent-up animal, when the door is opened and it escapes the kennel and goes running for all its worth down the road, Balaam ran riotously in his error, and he did it because of the attraction of financial gain; he did it 'for hire'. He is one of the early examples of men who have looked upon religion as a way of making money. Now this, you will remember, is a thing that angered our blessed Lord Jesus on two occasions when he was here on earth. According to John, it occurred at the beginning of his ministry; and according to Matthew, Mark and Luke, again at the end of his ministry, when he had occasion to visit the temple at Jerusalem. He was outraged in his spirit when on those two occasions he saw people in the temple selling oxen and doves and changing money, and representing salvation as a marketable commodity—a thing that could be sold for money, on the proceeds of which men might make themselves wealthy.

Prosperity and the gospel

On the first occasion, according to John 2, our Lord made himself a whip of cords and drove them out of the temple courts. 'Don't you make my Father's house a house of merchandise' (see vv. 15–16). It wasn't the ordinary people; it was the religious leaders of the time that had allowed the temple thus to be perverted. Of course, you can argue if you like that the Jews, according to God's own word, had to offer sacrifices and, if you had to offer a lamb or a bullock or a turtledove, you had to buy them somewhere if you were a pilgrim to Jerusalem. Yes, very good, but let them buy those things in the shops. Don't sell them in the very temple

of God, 'For if you sell in the temple,' says our Lord, in effect, 'you run the desperate danger of giving people the impression that salvation is a something to be bought, that religion is a gigantic institution that deals in making money.' It angered our Lord Jesus that the masses of the people should be given the impression that God was a God who sells salvation, whose forgiveness, whose pardon, whose peace, whose very heaven can be and must be bought with money.

That is a misconception that very much troubled medieval Christendom, didn't it? When Johann Tetzel the friar went around telling the people that if only they put their money in the collecting box, as soon as their coin hit the bottom of the box a soul would be released from purgatory, it made vast sums of money.

Our Lord was outraged by it because, as John tells us, he had come to bring men the very opposite message. As Son of the Father, the Lord Jesus was coming to tell out the Father. Hear his glad message again! Jesus told of a God whose presence was in that temple, a God who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son (John 3:16). And he said presently to the woman at Samaria, recorded in the next chapter of that Gospel, 'If only you knew the gift of God and who it is that is speaking with you, you would have asked of him and he would have given you living water' (see 4:10). To represent salvation as a marketable commodity, to run religion so it appears to the world that it is a moneymaking concern, is serious because it flies in the face of the very character of God. What shall evangelicals say when on their TV sets and in the world's press, we find arraigned before public opinion professed evangelicals who make millions and live in luxury, as a result of their television programmes?

Paul, in his first Letter to Timothy, chapter 6, also talks of perverse teachers. They were telling the people such things as gave Paul to think that these men imagined that godliness is a way of making money (v. 5). Now our beloved King James Version in that particular verse got things (like I do) back to front, and reads, 'supposing that gain is godliness.' Well, I suppose there are people around who might fall into that elementary mistake of thinking that if they make a lot of money, they must be godly. But what Paul says was the other way round really. 'These teachers,' he says, 'give the impression that godliness is a way of making money.' And of course it isn't.

Health, wealth and prosperity

But that brings us to another modern phenomenon, which is widespread throughout the Far East, and it hasn't been unknown here in our own beloved province. Teachers have risen up to say that if you only believe, you could be wealthy: 'God wants his people to prosper. Learn to believe God, ask him for big things. If only you are a believer, ask him for health and you'll be given health. Do you want a motorcar? Well specify it in your prayers then. Don't be vague and say, "I'd like a motorcar." What kind of motorcar would you like? "Mercedes." Well, picture a Mercedes and you can claim a Mercedes from God, for he wants you to be wealthy; not only saved, nor only heaven aloft, but heaven here as well. Be bold, believe. You want a wife? Well don't just ask for a wife, picture the dear wife. Picture what she looks like. Is yours a choice of brunette and medium height, and slim? Well ask for a brunette, medium

height, and slim, and God will give you what you ask for. It is his will that his people be prosperous!' And thousands come to believe it, don't they?

It's quite false. Of that Paul warned us in the verse that I have just quoted. These men imagined that godliness is a way of providing for yourself in life, a way of making gain. Whereas, he says, 'Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we shall take nothing out. And having food and clothing,' says Paul, 'let us be therewith content' (1 Tim 6:6–8). Paul is not preaching that if God prospers us in business, in daily life, that is a bad thing. But what he is saying is that godliness is not a scheme that God has devised by which we can make ourselves rich.

That then was the first mistake on Balaam's part, according to Jude. He did what he did for the sake of making money and did it with his eyes open, for God had spoken to him and he knew it was wrong. He knew it was a perversion of the truth. But the chance of promotion to high office in the religious establishment of the kingdom of Moab drove him on, career man to the last, dazzled by the hope of moving with kings and nobility. Being the acknowledged leading prophet in the land, he sided knowingly with error and, as presently we shall see, did worse and corrupted the people of God. He stands as a beacon light: all of us must take notice of him. Not only Jude, but the great Apostle Peter himself also, in language very similar to that which Jude uses, has occasion to talk of Balaam. He mentions him in his second Epistle, where he cites him as one example of a false teacher, who encouraged the people of God to live morally permissive lives (2:13–15). He thus perverted the doctrine of the grace of God into a doctrine that God is so kind and loving that, when it comes to morality, he is prepared to overlook anything at all and you needn't be too strict.

Going the wrong way

Peter characterizes these false teachers in a phrase that I now bring to your attention. They have forsaken the right way; they have left the way of truth, that is, the true way—'by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of' (2 Pet 2:2). Or again, he says, 'It were better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment delivered unto them' (v. 21).

Let us therefore for a moment concentrate on that little word 'way'. It is a very important word in the vocabulary of the early Christians. In the Acts of the Apostles, one of the ways of describing Christians is this: they were said to be 'of the Way' (Acts 9:2). If you had been wandering about Ephesus or Corinth, and people had got to know you, you could have had the question put to you, 'Do you belong to the Way?' Ultimately, of course, in the New Testament it goes back to our blessed Lord Jesus and his teaching recorded for us in the so-called Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 7, our blessed Lord warned us that there would come false prophets (v. 15), and, to help us see what their evil doctrines would be, he said the following famous words, 'For wide is the gate, and broad is the *way*, that leadeth to destruction, and . . . narrow is the gate, and straight the *way*, that leadeth to life' (Matt 7:13–14). And there, for a moment, we pick up the word on the lips of our blessed Lord Jesus that Christianity is a path, a road—a way.

It was over this that these false teachers like Balaam had made their grievous error, misrepresenting the way of Christianity. Christianity is a way of truth; it is a way of righteousness. Balaam and company had perverted and misrepresented the way.

Of course, that's not the only mistake you can make, is it? For you notice from our Lord Jesus that Christianity is not one thing. It's not just a way, it is also a gate. In fact, it's got to be two things. It's first got to be a gate and then it is a way. It is not a gate without a way, nor is it a way without a gate. Truly to be Christian, one needs to be able to say, 'Yes, I have entered the true, the narrow gateway.' Secondly, 'I am walking the narrow path and road.' We need two things if we are to be authentic Christians.

A narrow and a broad gate

Some people make a mistake over the gateway, don't they? In ordinary language, they try to live Christian lives without having first entered the true gateway. That can be disastrous. As our blessed Lord Jesus himself reminded us, if we would be in the kingdom of God, then of course we must first come through the gateway. There is only one gateway, and it is a very narrow gateway in the sense that it is very selective. 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God' (John 3:3). Here stands the gate then, and it is a narrow gate. There are some people who, through genuine ignorance of holy Scripture, are trying to make progress along the Christian way of life and to conform to the standards of Christian morality. Sometimes they appear to succeed and sometimes not, but they are genuinely trying to walk the Christian pathway. The trouble is that though they're trying to walk the way, they never really entered the gate, or it may be that they have mistaken the gate. For our blessed Lord, in warning us of false prophets, reminded us that there's an imitation way.

There is an imitation gate, alongside of the narrow gate of authentic Christianity. The narrow gate is the gate of personal repentance and personal faith. False prophets will have wide gates, so wide you can get in without knowing you've got in, if you see what I mean, and only wake up to it afterwards that you're supposed to be in. That's no use, is it? And if we are to be proof against the attractions of false teachers like Balaam in our day and age, it is of exceeding importance that we have come through the narrow gate. Peter tells us in his second Letter how some people had been led astray by these false teachers, and he says it has happened to them like the pig who went to the baths, or like the dog in the proverb, who returned to his vomit (2:22; cf. Prov 26:11). And at that point, Peter took leave to remind his fellow Christians of an ancient Greek fable: the sow that went to the baths.

Have you heard the story of the pig that went to the baths? I hope it doesn't offend your sensibilities. I gather that our German fellow-believers don't like to hear this fable, at least not in public, because its language offends them. I don't think it would offend a genuine Irishman, would it, to hear about the old sow that went to the baths?

You see this sow lived in an ancient Greek city, where people didn't have their own bathrooms in their own houses. If you wanted a bath, once a year or so you went down to the public baths when it was really necessary. And this dear sow had been watching the ladies as they came out of the baths. You should have seen the ladies—face shining, hair done just so, beautiful dress, perhaps a diamond in the ear, strutting up the street in their new pair of

sandals. And the sow thought this was tremendous. She thought indeed she'd like to be like this, too.

So one day she decided that she was going to be different from now on. She would go to the baths herself. So she went to the baths, came out beautifully pink with a curly tail and looked delightful. She put a little jewel in her nose and brushed her hair and had a nice little satin gown on. And then she started to walk up the street on her hind legs like she'd been watching the ladies do, and was making quite a good job of it, when all of a sudden she came across a big puddle of mud and, forgetting all about being a lady, in she went and wallowed in the gorgeous mud—glorious mud! Why? Well, she had had her external moral clean up, but inside she was still an unregenerate sow. No change of nature, no new birth, just an external clean-up. And to transpose the parable to the level of spiritual experience, she was trying to walk the pathway without having come through the necessary initial experience of coming through the gate.

We need to make it clear to our friends in personal work, in our evangelism, that to be an authentic Christian it's not enough to try and walk the Christian pathway. You must first come through the gate, because in fact it is impossible to walk the true Christian pathway unless by God's grace you have been born again and received a new nature and, with it, the new strength and the new power to be able to walk the Christian pathway.

On the other side of the gate

It is important that we do not mistake the gate and to make sure that we have come through the narrow gate; but there is another mistake, isn't there? Sometimes we evangelicals are in danger of making this mistake. We fall to thinking that so long as you come through the gate, then you don't really need to trouble too much after that about the pathway, because we tell ourselves that everybody who's come through the gate is going to be in heaven; and it's right and sure they will. And you say, therefore, 'Well what does it *really* matter how I behave upon the path?' That notion is quite false, isn't it?

Christianity's not just a gate. It is a gate plus a way, and it was the grievous error of people like Balaam to encourage the Lord's people into thinking that the way didn't really matter all that much. Does it matter? Of course it does. It matters in a very positive way, as Peter reminds us in his second Epistle.

'Now that you've been born again,' says he, 'you are partakers of the divine nature. Now, in the power of God's grace, add to yourself the great Christian qualities to your character; make progress along the way, for if you do these things you shall never stumble. For if by God's grace and power you give all diligence to add to your Christian character the qualities of virtue and knowledge and perseverance and self-control and love of the brethren, making progress along the way and developing a Christian character,' he says, 'you will not only get into the eternal kingdom, for all believers get in, but more than that—there shall be ministered to you abundantly that entrance into the eternal kingdom' (see 2 Pet 1:3–11). From which it becomes apparent that while all believers will enter, for entry into the eternal kingdom depends upon the blood of Christ and nothing else, some shall have an *abundant* entrance and some shall just enter.

It does make a difference, for there is the way of truth and there is the way of righteousness. Balaam had taught his generation, the false teachers in Jude's day were telling their generation, and false teachers are telling us in our generation that the Christian standards, the narrow way, can be disregarded as old-fashioned.

I'm going to repeat what I said in my previous talk, that last year the synod in England, being faced with a motion that declared that the practice of fornication and adultery and homosexuality is always sin, declined to pass that motion and substituted for it a motion that read that the practice of these things is falling short of the ideal. That is Balaamism, and my younger friends tell me that such is the temper and the temperature of life in the world at large, that if people have maintained themselves chaste before marriage, they are thought to be psychologically odd. I do not choose to enlarge upon these things. A word to the wise is enough, is it not? Our young people need our constant prayers. They live in a very different world from which we old codgers were brought up. A world where nowadays in many a country and in many levels of society, and sometimes in Christian quarters, premarital chastity is regarded as a sign of psychological oddity. We need therefore to be warned.

Balaam's occult powers

Now we come to the next thing that marked the antics of Balaam. The Old Testament in the book of Numbers tells us that Balaam was summoned by Balak, king of Moab (22:5). Balak had heard that there was coming a great nation out of Egypt, led by their God, Jehovah. The nation was subduing all in its path and Moab, of course, felt itself threatened, and summoned Balaam, the false prophet from the East, to come and use his occult powers in order to curse Israel and thus remove the threat to Moab, its culture and religion.

Israel standing for the one true God

As you read the Old Testament story, you can easily see how Israel would have seemed to the surrounding nations to have been a colossal threat. Not only a military threat that might destroy them and take away their independence, but also a religious threat, because in those days when Israel, fresh from her redemption, came into the land, they not only conquered it, but banished every form of idolatry and therefore posed herself a threat to all the various kinds of religion and their age-old hoary rights, rituals, and ceremonies. And as Balaam himself observed, when he was obliged to under the pressure of God's spirit, 'Israel,' says he, 'is a people that dwells alone.' That is to say, Israel in the ancient world stood out as unique among the nations. That is what caused the nations' wrath more often than not.

Israel in her healthy days (and she had a lot of unhealthy ones) would have no compromise whatsoever with the idolatries of the pagan world. Indeed, she had been chosen by God from Abraham onwards to be God's special testimony in the world and to stand for the truth of the one true God, claiming to all and sundry that there is but one God, and that salvation is in him. In the words of their later prophet, 'Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God and there is none else' (Isa 45:22). Standing, therefore, as an explicit condemnation of all forms of idolatrous religion and all idolatrous interpretations of the universe, Israel got herself disliked, as you may understand, and Balaam was hired by

Balak, king of Moab, to come and use his occult powers to destroy Israel. Balaam was a foolish man. Even his donkey could see better than he could the reality of God and of the angels of God. First then, he tried to destroy them, as I say, by occult means, and found the nature of the true God. Here is a most important lesson for us still in our modern day: the difference between occult religion and the true God of heaven.

The attractions of darkness and power

I was listening just but a few hours ago to a report of an investigation down in Scotland. What a fearfully high proportion of young folks, by the time they leave their schools, have engaged in some form of occult practice. It has a fascination for people, doesn't it? And the fascination lies partly in this: that, though a lot of it is, not all of it is mumbo jumbo. There is a real spirit world out there. It can be contacted and so many people are fascinated by it, are they not?

'Because,' they say, 'it's real, you know. It's real.'

What's real?

'Well, there is a real power there and it works.'

People are fascinated by power, aren't they? They think that power is the ultimate thing in the universe. There's the tragedy. Of course demonism is real; of course it can work. The question is, is it true? That is, is it loyal to the supreme Creator? The ultimate question is not power, ladies and gentlemen; there has never been a question of whether almighty God is all-powerful. The ultimate questions in this universe are moral questions; questions of truth. Thus it was that, when our blessed Lord Jesus stood before Pilate and Pilate said to him, 'Young man, you'd better speak to me; don't you realize I have power?', Christ brushed him aside and said, 'But I have entered this world to bear witness of the truth' (see John 19:10-11; 18:37).

Of course, in the universe there are powers more than human—supernatural powers. Some of them are loyal to God; some are not loyal to God, but our salvation as men and women depends not simply on power. It depends on the character of God and God's almighty truth. Oh, thank God for that great episode when Balaam came with his occult menagerie, trying to influence the God of heaven to turn his back on Israel and to curse them. He was made to confess the very word, 'God is not a man, that he should lie; Neither the son of man, that he should repent: Hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?' (Num 23:19). For God is a God who cannot lie.

Oh, get hold of it, my dear young fellow Christian, before somebody bamboozles you and says, 'But, look here, this occult thing works and it's real.' Of course it's real! The question is, is it true? Is it loyal to God the Creator? Would it be loyal to you either? Real though these things are, they will destroy men—body, soul and spirit. Their concern is to defeat, if they can. If not, then they aim to spoil God's handiwork and thus show their spite against the great Creator.

Balaam was taught his lesson, therefore, that God is not a man that he should lie. In God's character, in his unchanging truth, in his word that cannot be altered, in his promise and oath that will be fulfilled, here lies our salvation.

Balaam's stumbling block

When Balaam found he couldn't curse Israel, then he tried his other method: to compromise them. How cleverly it was done. Our Lord, centuries later, commented upon the tactics. He said, 'Balaam put a stumbling block before the children of Israel and taught them to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication' (Rev 2:14). You know how it was. Israel was encamped by some oasis or other—they couldn't always be on the move on their pilgrimage, could they? The young chaps went out for an afternoon stroll and, behold, all unexpectedly there were some ladies standing at one of the palm trees. Why, they did look different; a little bit different from all the other young ladies that Israel had ever seen in the Israelite camp. The colours they wore were a little bit excessive and the style a little unusual, 'But,' they said, 'marvellously attractive.' They got talking to them, and presently they got asked home. 'Come and meet Mum and Dad and have a meal with us.' So along they went. Nothing wrong, is there, in having a meal with somebody?

When they got inside the young ladies said, 'Now, just before we start, we offer the food to the god.'

The young men looked and there was this old idol in the corner, you see, a god shelf, and they said, 'Oh, but we don't want to do that. No, we shouldn't do that and eat food offered to idols.'

'Oh,' the girls said, 'come off it, things have changed. It's not everybody now that takes notice of Moses like that. Moses had a narrow-minded idea that his God was the only God there is. Of course, it's well known in this modern world that there are many gods and all religions are leading the same way. Oh, grow up and don't let people make you narrow-minded. Learn to see the good in all religions.'

And won over by talk like that, they joined in the worship of the god of Moab. And in the worship of the god of Moab, of course, fornication was not only allowed, it was part of the worship.

You say, 'That's ancient history, isn't it? What could it have to do with us today?'

Our Lord, in two of his letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation, asks us to remember it. He complains against those who hold the doctrine of Balaam and were teaching the early Christians that idolatry and fornication were both permissible to Christians. What do you say was the historical situation? Well, I suspect it was as follows. In the ancient Greek cities, various trades and professions would have had their trade guild (cf. Acts 19:23–40). There would have been the Guild of the Goldsmiths, the Guild of the Silversmiths, the Guild of the Furniture Makers, the Guild of the Bakers, and all the rest of them. If you wanted to be a successful goldsmith, you perhaps would need to be a member of the Goldsmiths' Guild. Why not? If you wanted to be a good doctor, you'd be a member of the Doctors' Guild. So far, so good. Ah, but there was a difficulty with some of these ancient trade guilds, for when the businessmen went to the annual or monthly dinner, up in the corner of the room where they held their dinner would be the statue of the patron deity of the guild. And the food would be first, in token, offered by guild members to the god whose statue stood in the corner. Should you do it? If you didn't do it you could stand to lose in business, and there were some in the churches who taught the believers, 'Look, you cannot muddle up your assembly life and

your business life. Business, after all, is business.' And many have fallen for that argument, haven't they?

Protestant Christianity (not Roman Catholicism so much) is riddled, from the highest down, with Freemasonry, whose practitioners in their secret sessions worship the same old gods as Balaam and the ancient Greeks and the ancient Egyptians. Indeed, they are built upon the very same principle that there is good in all religions. Men of all religions, or none, can mix in their secret sessions, because they worship Jahbulon, a mixture of Jehovah, Baal, and On, and any other gods of any other nations.

My bank manager is a believer. It's nice to have a bank manager that's a Christian. It hasn't swollen my bank account, but he invites me to dinner now and again. He's a very good Christian man and keeps an eye on me, so that I behave. He reported to me at one stage how the principals in his bank were bringing in enormous pressure to bear upon him. He must become a member of the aforesaid Freemasons because, not being a member, he was losing the bank business. 'David,' said he to me, 'what shall I do? What must I do?'

No compromise

Balaam was an advocate of what is technically called *syncretism*, the idea that it doesn't matter much what religion you are, since all religions are aiming at the same thing, and what we ought to be doing is joining all religions together. This is going to become a problem in coming days, where there are cities in England and the schools have a majority of Muslims in them. Voices will be heard more and more and more to be saying, 'Look, you mustn't suppose that Christianity is the only true religion. All religions are in part true.' That is false. That is Balaamism. And it is not narrow-minded exclusivism that makes a stand against such a thing, is it?

Listen to the Apostle Peter: 'There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved' (Acts 4:12). There is only one saviour. That's not a narrow-minded doctrine. Thank God there's only one saviour, because there only needs to be one saviour. The other religions tell you how you should be good, there's not one among them that offers salvation. There is only one saviour, and thank God there need only be one, because his one sacrifice for sin has covered the whole of man's guilt and can bring forgiveness to all who, in true repentance and faith, put their trust in him.

Yes, if Christianity is merely one more way of telling people they ought to be good, well then the serious religions are equal with Christianity. But Christianity is not just a philosophy or a morality, telling people to be good. It's about a saviour. There is one God and one mediator and one saviour. There's no name other than his under heaven, given amongst men, whereby we must be saved.

And at the Greek businessmen's dinner parties there would have been women. They wouldn't have been the businessmen's wives, they would have been provided by the host. Should Christians go to such a party? God give our Christian businessmen, whose business takes them to business conferences away in hotels where, ladies and gentlemen, you know better than I that very often pleasure is laid on for the businessmen in foreign countries. A Christian man or woman has to learn to stand against current practice.

The jealousy of God

The book of Numbers tells us that when Balaam by his craftiness caused Israel to compromise and they joined in the worship of Baal-Peor, then God was jealous (25:3, 11). Now to some people's ears, jealousy sounds a very bad thing, but there's a good type of jealousy as well as a bad type of jealousy, isn't there? And the good type of jealousy is associated with true and genuine love. If your husband loves you, madam, he will not stand by and see someone else tamper with your loyalty. If it happens, if he really loves you, he will become exceedingly jealous, for jealousy is the other side of love (cf. Song 8:6). The husband that could see his wife's loyalty tampered with and think it didn't matter and not get jealous is a man who does not love his wife.

God uses that illustration of a higher relationship between him and his people. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, says, 'You cannot, my dear brethren, go and take part in the rituals of pagan temples and partake at the table of demons and mix Christianity with pagan religion and ceremony. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?' (1 Cor 10:21-22). By his very love for us, if we compromise him, he will be jealous and will stop at nothing to bring us back to complete loyalty to himself. Writing to the Corinthians, Paul says, 'I have espoused you as a chaste virgin to Christ. I fear lest the old serpent should corrupt your thoughts from loyalty to the Lord Jesus' (2 Cor 11:2-3).

It's not merely in the matter of morals. It is also in the matter of intellect that our blessed Lord requires of us to love him—with all our heart, mind, soul and strength (Matt 22:37). Today, through his servant Paul, he appeals to us that we be intellectually loyal to the Lord Jesus. God, give us grace, our young people particularly in their schools and colleges and universities, where so often they are offered theories that deny the truth of God's word and the authority of the Lord Jesus. The places where that will happen more than any are in theological faculties, alas, where theories will be taught that, when carried to their logical conclusion, deny the authority of God's word and the unique authority of our blessed Lord. Here too our Lord calls us to be loyal and intellectually uncompromised, for one day we must meet the blessed Lord. How wonderful it will be, if when we meet him we can say, 'Lord, in many things I came short, but by your grace, morally and intellectually, I tried to be loyal to you.'

The Lord bless his word for his name's sake.

Cain: An Unregenerate Worshipper

To prepare ourselves for our topic in this final talk of the series, we shall read a number of passages, first from the Old Testament and then from the New. The Old Testament passage is to be found in Genesis 4:

And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin coucheth at the door: and unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him. And Cain told Abel his brother. And it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: am I my brother's keeper? And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now cursed art thou from the ground, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; when thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a wanderer shalt thou be in the earth. And Cain said unto the LORD, My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the ground; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that whosoever findeth me shall slay me. And the LORD said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the LORD appointed a sign for Cain, lest any finding him should smite him. (vv. 3–15)

That then is our basic story, and we read now comments made in different parts of the New Testament on this very ancient story, and the first comment comes in the Epistle to the Hebrews:

By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he had witness borne to him that he was righteous, God bearing witness in respect of his gifts: and through it he being dead yet speaketh. (Heb 11:4)

Another comment from the first Epistle by the Apostle John:

My little children, let no man lead you astray: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he [God] is righteous: he that doeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. To this end was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is begotten of God doeth no sin, because his seed abideth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is begotten of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. For this is the message which ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another: not as Cain was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his works were evil, and his brother's [were] righteous. (1 John 3:7-12)

And finally, back to our Epistle by Jude that we have been studying over this weekend.

Woe unto them! for they went in the way of Cain, and ran riotously in the error of Balaam for hire, and perished in the gainsaying of Korah. (Jude 11)

God speak his word in all our hearts.

Beware of false religion

Now I have no idea whatsoever how the elders and deacons of this church advertised the meeting this evening, or whether indeed they advertised it all. But this I know; that if they had only come to think of it themselves, they could have filled this hall to overflowing. Had they put an announcement in the press that a brother of the Lord Jesus was to be here and to preach to us on Sunday night, I guarantee the whole of the countryside, more or less, would have turned out to listen.

'Well,' you say, 'they couldn't do it.' More's the pity, for though we cannot now introduce here in our midst the Lord Jesus, we have the next best thing, surely. For we are to consider together a letter written by a man who was a half-brother of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ.

I don't know how you picture him in your mind's eye, a brother of the Lord Jesus. I picture him as a most delightful person; a personal brother, according to the flesh, of Jesus Christ our Lord. I bid you remember it, if you will, because if it should be that in the course of this meeting you come to think that your present preacher is a little bit gruff, one who's old and crotchety, then pray remember that the basic sentiments you hear are not the sentiments of the preacher before you. Rather, we are to listen to the words of a brother of the Lord Jesus.

As we have been discovering in previous sessions, we find that the burden of the message of this good man to us today is that religion is not always a good thing. In his loving fashion, as the Lord Jesus himself would have told us, there is a thing called true religion. The Bible describes true religion, but the very fact that the Bible has to make the distinction and say, 'Now, true religion is this,' reminds us that there is a thing that is false religion. It is possible to be deceived by false religion, to let religion lull us to sleep, imagining that we are all well with God, when all the time the religious attitude we might be adopting could be false in the extreme. Here, in the centre of his little letter, Jude quotes to us three examples of men from

the ancient world who lived before the time of Christ (v. 11). He mentioned these three men because all of them were, in their different ways, interested in religion.

There was the man, Cain. We meet him early on in the pages of holy Scripture (Gen 4). We meet him as he comes with his beautifully presented offering to give it to God, the very first fruits of his toil. I picture the apples in his basket, all round and beautiful, shiny red, and the oranges and the figs. Oh, what a delightful offering it was. Had you stood by him, you would have seen every mark of devotion and reverence and solemnity as he came with his offering to God. He was exceedingly religious, but his religion was basically flawed.

The second man was called Balaam (Num 22–24). He was religious; in fact more religious even than Cain, for Balaam was a prophet, a professional prophet indeed. Balaam the prophet was so renowned in many a country that the king of Moab no less called him to come and advise him and perform his rituals for him, for the benefit of the State of Moab. Balaam was a world-leading figure of his day in the profession of religion, and he stands as a beacon in the pages of holy Scripture, both Old and New, as a religious professional who was utterly wrong.

The final case quoted to us is that of Korah (Num 16). Korah is perhaps the worst of the three, for whereas Balaam was a prophet, Korah was a minor priest. Balaam was, after all, merely a pagan worshipping his false god. Korah, however, was a minor cleric in holy orders in the Jewish 'church', and the Bible holds him up to us in both the Old and New Testaments. For all the facade of his religion, Korah was a rebel against God, against God's apostle and high priest and in the pages of Scripture he serves to remind us that religion itself can be an expression of the heart's rebellion against God.

The way of Cain

We have been studying these men back to front, and so we come to the third example, the first in Jude's list. It is the story of Cain. Cain came to God with his brother Abel in those far-off days to offer his sacrifice, and his sacrifice was rejected. What, we ask ourselves, was so fundamentally wrong about the sacrifice of Cain that God had to repudiate it to the man's face? Here we shall have to hold ourselves in and make sure we listen to the comments of the New Testament and not run too soon to our own deductions on the matter.

Cain's sacrifice was wrong. Why was it wrong, and why did God accept Abel's sacrifice and reject Cain's? And the answer the New Testament gives in the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle by John is this: Abel's sacrifice was accepted, by which God bore testimony to him that he was righteous, God bearing witness about his works (Heb 11:4). Why was Cain's sacrifice rejected? The Apostle John tells us straight, 'his works were evil' (1 John 3:12). We must grasp that first point in the deficiency of Cain's sacrifice. Cain had fallen into a mistake that multitudes of people have fallen into since his day. He thought that by coming to offer sacrifice to God he was winning God's favour, and that when the sacrifice was over he might continue to live as he always had lived, in his own selfish and sinful way.

It is a mistake that the pagan world falls into very easily, where people don't think of God as being concerned with morality. They think of the gods as powerful beings and you can get them on your side. You can persuade them to help you against your enemy. Never mind how

you're behaving; you might just be the biggest rogue around, the worst businessman in town, cheating the income tax inspector, weighing your thumb on the scales as you sell Mrs Jones her meat and putting the price up conveniently for you. But in the ancient world they thought you could still get the gods on your side if you gave them a decent enough sacrifice. If you'd been making a lot of money, you could afford to give the gods quite a decent sacrifice, and then they would be on your side and they would be against your opponents and enemies—a pagan idea, indeed. Such sacrifice is merely a way of bribing the Almighty.

I wonder why it is that sometimes even in our own day men and women who have no faith at all, whose lives are the standards of the unregenerate, can be moved to give great contributions to churches of various kinds. Let's hope the idea doesn't nestle in their minds that they are putting God on their side. But you know Christendom itself has not been altogether guiltless, has it? In the medieval ages there was widespread throughout Europe the idea that the very sacrifice of Christ itself was a means of saving us so that we could escape the wrath of God, even though we continued to live in sin. People got the idea that the sacrifice is a kind of a fine.

You know how it is—well you surely don't know how it is! I know you've never even thought of it, but there are some people who do. They go into Belfast and they can't find a place to park and here is a double line and they're in a hurry and they want to go into the shop and have a haircut or something. 'Well,' they say, 'what are my chances? Look, I can't see any traffic warden here or there. Let's risk it this time.' And in they go. They do it so many times, and then the last time they come out, there's a traffic warden and there's a piece of paper under the windscreen wiper, and there's the fine. 'Well,' they say, 'you know, it's worth it,' and they pay up. You wouldn't suppose that just because they paid the fine they'll never park on a double line again. If it became necessary, they'd park there again. They'd say, 'It's only going to cost me £10 or £20. I can afford that. It's only a fine.'

As I say, in medieval Europe the idea was widespread. You could talk of what they thought was the sacrifice of Christ; you had not the slightest intention of breaking off your immorality or your sin or your cheating in business or your murderous ideas. This was a kind of a fine you paid to God that then allowed you to carry on and behave as you always behaved. It will not need me to say that such religion is absolutely bogus.

The family of Cain

Why did Cain think that way round about religion? The answer comes once more from the Apostle John. He says, 'The trouble with Cain was that he was of the evil one' (1 John 3:12). Now the third chapter of the first Epistle of John is a delightful chapter. Fit to raise one's heart to glory, for John begins by talking to Christians and saying, 'Oh, my dear brothers and sisters, behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God: and such we really are' (v. 1). This is what lies at the very heart of the Christian gospel, that through faith in the Lord Jesus we can become the very children of God. That very fact now reminds John to remind us that in this world there are two families.

The family likeness

There are two fathers and, because there are two fathers, ultimately there are two families. There are two groups, there are two kinds of people. On the one side is the Father, God. On the other side there is he of whom our Lord said to certain people, 'You are of your father the devil' (John 8:44). There's a group on the one side that John refers to as 'the children of God.' Amongst themselves, he calls them brothers and sisters. They are fellow children, fellow members of the family of God. On the other side there is what John calls 'the world'. 'Marvel not,' says John, 'if the world hates you' (1 John 3:13), for if on the one side there is the family of God, on the other side there is the world.

It seems to me then that, solemn as it is, we must take seriously what this brother of the Lord Jesus now tells us. Cain's mistake sprang from the fundamental flaw of his being. He was of the evil one; he was of his father, the devil. He was 'of the world.' Never, never, never had he crossed over from the one family to the other. Never had he become a child of God.

Now let us take steps not to imagine that we're talking here of something lurid when we say that people are of the devil, and we think of the devil as having horns and hoofs and lurid tails and what have you. The devil, according to holy Scripture, is the highest creature in all God's universe. Sophisticated indeed, and so concerned with religion that the Bible even calls him 'the god of this world' (2 Cor 4:4). It is his objective to blind the eyes of those who believe not and he does it most effectively when he does it with religion and uses religion to blind men's eyes against the reality of their spiritual need and against the great possibilities of God's salvation.

To which family do I belong?

This is so important that we need to stop and ask ourselves some questions. Ladies and gentlemen, if according to holy Scripture there are two families, and one is the family of God and the children of God, and the other is the world and the children of the devil, must I not ask myself tonight, to which family do I belong? To raise that question contradicts the widespread notion that *all* people are the children of God. It is very widespread, isn't it?

I was listening in the early hours one morning to somebody commenting on the BBC and telling us to 'lift up our hearts,' or whatever it is they do, on message for the day.⁸ He was explaining how we ought to love everyone—and, of course, we ought to love everyone; and then he added, 'Because, as our Lord said, "Inasmuch as you have done it to the least of these, my brothers, you have done it unto me"' (Matt 25:40). 'And,' said the learned professor, 'there's our Lord Jesus saying that all men everywhere are his brothers, and if we help any human being anywhere, Christ will count it as though we have done that to him, because all men are his brothers.' Ladies and gentlemen, that is not true. We have it on our Lord's own authority, do we not? There was a time in his ministry when his mother and his brothers thought he was getting beside himself and they sent to call him from the crowds and bring him home, and somebody said to the Lord Jesus, 'Your mother and your brothers are standing outside there. They want to speak to you.' And the evangelist tell us that he rose

⁸ *Lift up Your Hearts* was the name of a daily morning radio broadcast segment featuring religious themes on the BBC Home Service begun in 1939, later succeeded by *Ten to Eight* (1965–1970) on BBC Radio 4, now called *Thought for the Day* on the *Today* programme.

and he said, 'And who is my mother and who are my brothers? These are my brothers. This is my mother. They that hear the word of God and do it' (Mark 3:31–35). It is utterly false; it is sentimentalism of the most dangerous sort to say that every rogue, every murderer, every child abuser, every criminal, every man, woman and child is a brother of the Lord Jesus. It is not true.

Becoming a child of God

It is true that we're all creatures of God. It is true that God loves everyone and, in a fatherly fashion, tends all his creatures (Ps 145:9), and desires not that any should be lost, that all should be safe (2 Pet 3:9). That is perfectly and delightfully true. It is true that God has so loved the whole world that no man, woman or child stands outside the scope of his divine love (John 3:16). It is also written that he would have all men to be saved (1 Tim 2:4). Here is no narrow exclusivism. The same Saviour that taught us this also taught that if we would be children of God then we must *become* children of God, for we are not automatically children of God. We are born into this world *creatures* of God, but holy Scripture puts it this way (notice the verb), if we would '*become* children of God' (John 1:12), then we must go through the process of *becoming* what we never were before. The process is this. When our blessed Lord came to Bethlehem he came to his own, his Jewish nation, and they that were his own did not receive him. But . . . (John 1:11–12). We listen with both ears and are about to hear how to pass out of death to life, how to pass out of the family of Satan into the family of God. Oh, my friend, we listen with both ears, not now merely to a brother of the Lord Jesus, but to the blessed Lord Jesus himself, and he says, '. . . as many as *received* him, to them he gave authority to *become* children of God' (v. 12).

Oh, God, save us from being deceived by the arch enemy of our souls, by sloppy sentimentalism and religion that comforts us with the idea that all men and women are children of God. As you love your soul, refuse to believe that lie and listen rather to the Lord Jesus and his apostles. Yes, it is open to us *all* to become children of God, but we have to *become*; we're not born that way, and we become children of God by receiving personally the blessed Saviour. I borrow the illustration that our Lord Jesus used when he spoke this lesson to the famous Nicodemus. He said, 'Just as Israel were dying in the wilderness, rabbi, and our fathers had to look to the serpent of brass lifted up, and when they personally looked, they that looked were individually saved. "So must the Son of Man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life"' (John 3:14–15). I emphasize these things in my turn, in all friendliness of heart, I trust.

From faith to freedom

It is possible to enrol in a Christian course and never to have been born again, is it not? In John 8, John himself tells us that there were certain Jews who believed on the Lord Jesus and, because they said they believed, the writer of the Gospel takes them at their face value.

So our Lord Jesus said to these Jews who believed on him, 'Now, gentlemen, if you continue in my word, you shall really be my disciples and you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free' (vv. 31–32).

They said, 'Excuse us. What exactly did you mean by "free"? Free from what? We've never been in bondage, as far as we ever knew. What do you mean, "free"?''

Said our blessed Lord, 'I was talking, ladies and gentlemen, about being free from the bondage and slavery to sin. You see everyone who constantly practises sin is a slave of sin, and I was pointing out to you the glory of salvation; that if you continue in my word and you really are my disciples, you shall get to know the truth and the truth shall make you free.'

Their faces fell. They said, 'Who do you think you're talking to? Did we ask you to come and preach in our street? Get you round the corner to those filthy-living people round there, to those abominable Gentiles. Who do you think you're talking to? We are children of Abraham! Coming here insulting us, suggesting that after all these years of sincere religious effort we are children of the devil. Get you going,' they said to Christ, and presently they picked up stones to stone him (see vv. 33-59).

They discovered what their religion amounted to. They would have begun by saying they were believers in the Lord Jesus, but when it came to the realities of being saved and the word of God releasing us progressively from bondage to sin, they were not interested in it.

Ah, what a deceiver sin is. 'You are,' says Christ, 'of your father, the devil.' It is like in the old days when there were gloomy prisons. Imagine, if you can, a prince now incarcerated in a prison ever since he was a little boy. He's never known anything else but the prison. The man who stands at the door is the jailer, but the jailer has convinced the little boy that he's his friend. He brings him his food from time to time and he tells the boy that outside it's a wicked world and there are people seeking his life and his friend's life, and he mustn't ever go outside. And one day comes the great deliverer to deliver him.

He comes right into the prison cell and tells the boy (by now grown up a young man), 'Why not opt for freedom? You are a slave here.'

The boy doesn't know what to believe. He says, 'I'm not a slave. This man here is my protector. He guards me from all the evil things outside.'

Says the deliverer, 'No, the man is a liar. He's not your friend. He's not your guardian. He's your jailer.'

And the lad would have to believe one or the other, wouldn't he?

There's many a man and many a woman who's precisely there. Satan has them in his grip. The pleasures of this world, he has persuaded them, are real, genuine pleasures: 'They are your protectors!' But if they be sinful pleasures, they are not your protector. They are your jailer and the blessed Lord Jesus has come to set us free, to show us the truth and to expose the fact that the very father of lies, who has masqueraded as though he were our friend, is indeed our jailer. But there is freedom; we can walk freely out of prison and be delivered, as the Apostle Paul put it, 'from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son' (Col 1:13).

There are two families then. The reason why God would not accept Cain's sacrifice was, in the first place, because the man's deeds were evil. He had no repentance within him. To him religion was sort of paying the fine, that's all. But in the second place, there was a deeper reason. As we would put it nowadays, the man had never been 'born again'. He was still in the kingdom of darkness. He was still a child of the devil.

The family of Abel

What are we to make of the statement that Abel's sacrifice was accepted, and thereby it was shown that he was righteous, 'God bearing witness of his works' (Heb 11:4)? It would be important to understand exactly what the term 'righteous' is saying, wouldn't it? How and on what grounds can I be accepted? I submit to you that the first thing that we have to notice is this: the Bible says, 'By faith Abel offered his sacrifice,' and that tells us volumes, because when the Bible talks of faith, it isn't simply talking of confidence. A lot of people got on the Pan Am airliner at Heathrow just before the end of the year with absolute confidence and not a flicker of doubt in their minds, but their faith was unjustified. There was a bomb on board. Their faith being misplaced brought them to disaster.⁹

The faith that saves

You see, faith by itself is useless, isn't it? You can believe with all your heart, but if what you believe is wrong, then are you in dire straits. To be any use, faith has to be the kind that the Bible talks of—'faith that comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of the Lord' (Rom 10:17). When the Bible tells us therefore that Abel by faith offered his better sacrifice, we must deduce the obvious fact that since it was by faith that he did it, it was faith in some word of God. You ask me, 'When did God tell them?' I cannot tell you for sure, for the Bible doesn't tell us. I do read that when God Almighty met Adam and Eve in their sin and brought them to repentance and faith, he made a coat of skins for them that would involve the killing of an animal and the shedding of its blood. Whether on that occasion or some other occasion, in those far-off days, he taught them as much as they could bear of the way of salvation I cannot say. Surely he did. But now they were sinners and the way back to God must be through the way of sacrifice and atonement.

Not of our work

Abel offered his better sacrifice by faith. It was Abel's response to an explicit word of God. And that again marks a very big difference between Abel and Cain. You may say that Abel was a keeper of flocks and he naturally brought a little goat for his present to God. Cain, being by profession a farmer, brought of the fruit of the ground. Why wouldn't he? But that is to make a very serious mistake. You know, ladies and gentlemen, you cannot come to God on the grounds of your daily work or your profession. You say, 'Why not? Didn't God make us so that we should work?' Of course he did, but we live in a fallen world, don't we? Is it not so that all of us, when we have done our best at our daily task or any other task, we find we have fallen short? We cannot come to God on the grounds of our profession.

Here's a dear lady. She's a wonderful mother, absolutely devoted to her family. You talk to her about the Lord Jesus and the need to find salvation. 'Oh,' says she, 'but I'm all right. I'm sure I'm all right. I have the faith to feel I'm all right. I'm as good a mother as I can be, and God has put me in this world to be a mother to my children and a wife to my husband, and I honestly do the best I can. Surely God will be pleased with what I do.'

⁹ On 21 December 1988, Pan Am Flight 103 was destroyed by a bomb, killing all 243 passengers and 16 crew, plus killing 11 more people on the ground from debris that fell on to residential areas of Lockerbie, Scotland.

If I speak to one such mother tonight, what tremendous gratitude all of us owe to mothers like you! Yes, I'm sure, in one sense, God is pleased that you love your husband and children; but isn't it true that even you would have to say, 'I've not always been the mother I should'?

And you, sir, in business, and I in things academic, must we not all admit that, when we've done our best, we have fallen short? We cannot come to God on the grounds of being a good doctor or a good cabinetmaker or a good farmer or a good member of the public. We should be all those things, but first we need to be reconciled to God, as God has shown us in his word.

There's a way back to God from the dark paths of sin;
 There's a door that is open and you may go in:
 At Calvary's cross is where you begin,
 When you come as a sinner to Jesus.¹⁰

If the Old Testament doesn't tell us exactly when and what God told Abel, the New Testament speaks clearly enough to us, does it not? It is the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, that cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7). 'We have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins' (Col 1:14). I'm not preaching some curious, narrow-minded little sectarian gospel. Let's hear what the great singers of the church have always said,

Let the water and the blood,
 From Thy riven side which flowed,
 Be of sin the double cure,
 Save me from its guilt and power.¹¹

On what basis do you stand?

Friend, would you let me—no, would you let a brother of the Lord Jesus just gently ask you in this solemn moment now, how have you come to God? On what basis do you stand? All that is needed God has granted, but, you see, there is no way to God save through the sacrifice of his beloved Son. God brings us all there, so that we say, 'Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling.'¹² And if we so come, we may be accepted as Abel was. Yes, it is said that God bore witness by his sacrifice that he was righteous (Heb 11:4). It doesn't mean that Abel was sinlessly perfect, but he was right with God, for that is the glorious gospel. When, in true repentance and faith we put our trust in Christ, God justifies us, and we are right with God.

And it wasn't any pretence either. Abel was not sinlessly perfect throughout his life, but as he lived on his life bore witness that here was a man whom God had redeemed. Salvation was not simply the paying of a fine so that the man might go on and live as he liked thereafter. The man had come to personal faith, repentance and faith, and his life was changed. He bore witness to the fact that salvation is real.

¹⁰ E. H. Swinstead (1882–1950).

¹¹ Augustus Toplady (1784–1872), 'Rock of Ages, cleft for me'.

¹² Augustus Toplady (1784–1872), 'Rock of Ages, cleft for me'.

To which family do you belong?

The final thing that we must notice, surely, is what Jude says of Cain. He says of the false teachers in his day and of false teachers that will arise in ours, 'Woe unto them! For they went in the way of Cain' (v. 11). In our closing moments, we fasten our thoughts on his way. What does it mean by 'the way of Cain'? Perhaps you noticed when we read the passage from Genesis 4 how Cain's way was described: 'And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD' (v. 16). That was his way. Oh, what a way—he went out from the presence of the Lord. He might have been saved, yet he chose to reject it and went out from the presence of the Lord. I read nowhere in Scripture that he ever came back.

I feel sorry in my heart for Cain, don't you? For this is not some mere fairy story. Cain was a man like you, sir. He was a human being like you, madam. He came that day with his sacrifice and was expecting God to be well pleased, to compliment him in fact, and he was met with rebuff. Worse than that, he saw Abel's sacrifice accepted and there rose in that man's heart at that moment, a tremendous feeling of resentment. Can you not understand it? Perhaps you've never felt like that yourself. I think I can understand it. Why, even a dog, if you put your hand right on its nose, resents it, doesn't it? You shame it.

When God accepted Abel and didn't accept Cain, and told Cain to his face that his life was evil and his sacrifice could not be accepted, then Cain found an enormous upsurge of resentment in his heart. And God, in his fatherly kindness, spoke to Cain: 'Cain,' he said, 'Cain, if you don't do well, sin crouches at your door' (v. 7). The ancient Hebrew verb is a very pictureful verb. It pictures sin like a leopard, so to speak, sprung ready to pounce, tense and alert, outside the door, waiting only for Cain to come out to pounce on him. Sin crouches at the door. 'You must rule over it, Cain,' said God. 'You must get the better of it, Cain, or else it will destroy you.' Cain did not manage to overcome his resentment, did he? He let it boil over, and in his resentment he not only killed his brother, but rejected all offers of mercy and went out from the presence of the Lord.

I trust that I have not caused resentment in any heart by my plain speaking. That was not intentional. But if it should be that to you, sir, or you, madam, my insistence, that if you are not born again you are not an authentic Christian, has caused you resentment, what shall I say? I didn't mean to hurt you, but I must tell you that you must control that resentment or it will master you and it will bring you down at last to where salvation can no longer reach you. Oh, if we're feeling sore in our hearts, or resentment, let the very Lord himself, who gave his Son to save us, speak to our hearts!

If tonight you do well, you can be accepted, and to do well all you need to do is to come in genuine repentance that acknowledges that you, like the rest of us, are a bankrupt sinner, and receive the Saviour and his sacrifice that God has supplied for you.

Cain went out from the presence of the Lord. Said he to God, 'I'm afraid that when somebody meets me, they'll kill me.'

'Oh, no they won't,' says God. 'I've put a sign on you. Nobody will ever kill you, Cain' (v. 4).

And Cain lived to discover there are some things worse than death. That is to live in the conscious knowledge that you have rejected God and have passed beyond the bounds of salvation.

Friend, there is a very big eternity ahead, and what shall it be? Those who pass beyond time out into eternity realize they must exist forever, but they've gone out from the presence of the Lord. They've gone in the way of Cain. Oh, friend, it mustn't be, must it? Let's one and all, if never before, rise up tonight and receive the Saviour. Learn to live for him now and to enjoy the prospect that, when he comes, 'we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is' (1 John 3:2).

The Lord bless his word to all our hearts, for his name's sake.

About the Author

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