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COURAGEOUS FOLLOWERSHIP ACCORDING TO THE EPISTLE OF JUDE

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The epistle of Jude is often an overlooked book of Scripture with only 25 verses but offers important instructions for early and modern Christians who are threatened by false teachers. This epistle also includes several Old Testament references to address a very specific crisis facing early Christians (deSilva, 2004). To make accurate interpretations of this text, this paper follows Osborne's (2006) method of genre analysis to help draw out the meaning for followers of Christ. Chaleff's (2009) five dimensions of courageous followership: the courage to assume responsibility, the courage to serve, the courage to challenge, the courage to participate in transformation, and the courage to take moral action, are then examined in relation to this epistle. As a result, Jude's epistle highlights the importance of Christians being courageous followers, protecting themselves and their fellow Christians from those who would pollute them or lead them astray. It is evident that Christians must be courageous followers of Christ and contend for the faith since Jesus and the apostles gave Christians all the tools and resources, needed to live a Godly life. Moreover, followers should monitor and correct errors made by leaders, showing courage to make a stand when needed (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2015).

I. INTRODUCTION

The Holy Scriptures are a manual for the church, giving followers of Christ an "identity, vision, mission and hope" while connecting people to their past, present and future (deSilva, 2004, p. 29). The New Testament consists of 27 books that offer Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, Epistles, and Revelation. One epistle that is often overlooked because of its brevity and location at the end of Scripture is Jude (Kovalishyn, 2014). While this particular epistle may only be 25 verses, "the entire story from Genesis to Revelation is all there" (Kovalishyn, 2014, p. 13). Moreover, deSilva

(2004) stated that this epistle demonstrates the diversity of traditions and voices that helped shape early Christian discourse. Jude is also the only text in the New Testament almost wholly devoted to criticizing certain people who threaten the message of salvation (Trompf, 2010). As such, this letter is meant to warn fellow Christians about the dangers posed by the ungodly false teachers, why this is so important, and how Christians can persevere through such threats (Engelbrecht, 2009). Therefore, to more closely examine this text, this paper follows Osborne's (2006) method for genre analysis to help draw out the meaning for followers of Christ. Then Chaleff's (2009) model of courageous followership is examined in relation to this epistle, encouraging Christians to protect themselves and their fellow Christians from those who would pollute them. This pericope highlights the importance of followers of Christ to embrace and become courageous as their very salvation is at stake.

II. EXEGESIS OF JUDE

Jude is an epistle, a formal letter from one person to another (Osborne, 2006), although it was likely "delivered orally at the point of destination" which was common during the time (Witherington, 2007, p. 560). In the New Testament there are three common types of epistles: the private letter, the public epistle and the treatise (Osborne, 2006). While Jude is considered a general, or public epistle, instead of addressing a variety of challenges like many other public epistles, Jude addresses a very specific crisis facing early Christians by a particular group of teachers (deSilva, 2004; Witherington, 2007). New Testament epistles follow the typical structure of a greeting, body, and conclusion (Stowers, 1986). Similar to other New Testament epistles, the greeting of Jude's letter includes a clear identification of himself as the author (v. 1); however, there is a lack of concluding greetings common to other epistles (deSilva, 2014). This genre has much to offer readers as epistles make up most of New Testament texts.

Osborne (2006) illustrated the importance of genre analysis as it "functions as a valuable link between the text and the reader" (p. 182). As such, Osborne (2006) outlined three hermeneutical principles that help contemporary Christians interpret epistles. First, readers should note the development of arguments (Osborne, 2006). Osborne (2006) noted that in some epistles this can be a more challenging task than others. Second, the situation behind the epistles should also be examined (Osborne, 2006). This is where Osborne (2006) argued that many Christians can extend the application of Scripture too far if they do not know the historical circumstances for readers. Third, the various sub-genres employed such as hymns, creeds, proverbs, and apocalyptic should be noted (Osborne, 2006). Therefore, by working through these principles, readers can have a better understanding of epistles, such as Jude, and make more accurate interpretations.

Development of the Arguments

The framing of Jude's letter is important to the logical developments of the arguments. Specifically, Jude offers affirmation and reassurance for readers that

Christians are kept safe by God in both the opening verse (kept for Jesus Christ) and in the doxology (Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling). The middle of the letter is where readers are reminded that “every choice we make must be based in our assurance that he is sufficient to hold us, to guard us, while we navigate our complex world,” making it clear that faith should ultimately be put in God (Kovalishyn, 2014, p. 14).

After the greeting, the first argument presented is for God’s called people to “contend for the faith” and be aware of those who are perverting the grace of God (v. 3). According to Banstra (1997), this argument is a call to arms for Christians to defend themselves against ungodly people. Kovalishyn (2014) contended that this verse alludes to notion that God has entrusted many people throughout Scripture with faith and “sometimes they got it right, and sometimes they got it wrong, and sometimes they got it spectacularly wrong, but God kept entrusting his plans to the people he called. God hasn’t changed his nature” (p. 15). To illustrate this point and explain why it is important to contend for the faith, the next section of verses describe several of God’s ungodly people throughout Scripture (Bandstra, 1997).

Jude cites nine different examples of God’s judgement from the Old Testament and 1 Enoch. For instance, versus 5 is a reference to Exodus (15:22-17:7; 32:1-33:6) and God delivering his people out of Egypt but a reminder that the unfaithful did not reach the promised land (Engelbrecht, 2009). Verse 7 is a reminder of the destruction of the cities Sodom and Gomorrah for their sexual immorality (Genesis 18:16-19:29). In verse 11 readers are reminded of Cain, who attacked and murdered his own brother (Genesis 4:1-16). According to Engelbrecht (2009) this passage provides a lasting example of those who profess care for others but harbor hatred and deception. Jude 14-16 uses the one and only direct quotation which comes from 1 Enoch 1:9 but changes “Enoch’s judgment on “all flesh” to judgment on only the ungodly” (Witherington, 2007, p. 623). While Enoch is not considered Scripture, it was a popular text among the Jewish people during the time of this epistle and therefore provided authority to Jude’s argument (Witherington, 2007). These passages are just a few examples from Jude to remind readers that God protects those who are faithful, and destroys those who are not (Engelbrecht, 2009).

Once it is clearly established why it is important to remain faithful, Jude then makes the argument for how followers should fight for the faith using the Lord’s methods, not human methods (Bandstra, 1997). Verses 17-19 argue for followers to stay alert by remembering and properly identifying those who are the enemy (Bandstra, 1997). Verses 20-21 urges readers to remain faithful in the love of God (Bandstra, 1997). According to Kovalishyn (2014), followers should do this by looking forward to the mercy of Jesus Christ who gives eternal life (v. 21). Lastly, verses 22-23 describe how Christians should show mercy mixed with fear to doubters (Bandstra, 1997). Since all Christians are sinners, correcting each other should be done in fear (v. 23). Brown (2016) stated that while it is important to show mercy to those who have been led astray, Jude is clear that people should hate their corruption. Overall, to contend for the faith means “reminding one another of who we are in Christ, mercifully, and gently encouraging one another in faithfulness” (Kovalishyn, 2014, p. 16). As such, Christians must ban together because they have a shared salvation (v. 3).

The overall argument of Jude is to be aware of false teachers and to stay true to Scripture and the resources already provided by God through Jesus and the apostles (Engelbrecht, 2009). In addition, “Jude’s discourse has depended on both emotion and argument” (Witherington, 2007, p. 625). These arguments presented create a stark polarization between God’s true followers and these false teachers threatening Christians’ true faith through language of holiness and pollution (Charles, 1990; deSilva, 2004). Jude argues that believers must remember that God alone should receive all the “glory, majesty, power and authority” (ver. 25).

Situation

This letter is presented as a product of Jude, “a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James” (Jude 1). Although there is some debate about who Jude actually was, many agree that he was one of Jesus’ younger half-brothers (Brown, 2016; deSilva, 2004; Joseph, 2013; Kovalishyn, 2014; Wiersbe, 1992). According to Kovalishyn (2014), this is significant because it was written by someone who knew Jesus intimately. It was also common during this time that the first apostles, and then their family members, were leaders of many of the early churches (Brown, 2016). Regardless, the author identifies himself as a servant to Christ, showing his humility and where he has placed authority (Green, 2009). Besides authorship, the context and audience are also important to understand.

The context and timing of the letter have also been debated. According to Easton (2015), while there is nothing definite to determine the time and place at which it was written, it was likely written in the “later period of the apostolic age, for when it was written there were persons still alive who had heard the apostles preach (ver. 17)” (p. 1893). Therefore, many believe it was written about the years 66 to 70 in Palestine (Easton, 2015). This is further corroborated by deSilva (2004) who noted that this letter is not from a period later than 80 C.E. and has deep roots in Palestinian Jewish traditions. For instance, Jude 12 echoes Proverbs 25:14 and Jude 13 speaks of the “wild waves,” similar to Isaiah 57:20 (deSilva, 2004). Regardless of the exact time period in which this was written, deSilva (2004) claims the apostles’ converts are the intended audience for the letter based on the poignant message delivered.

The first verse of Jude announces that this letter is written to those who have been called. For the audience to be considered “called” people means those elected by God to faith and service (Engelbrecht, 2009). According to Green (2009), this demonstrates how privileged the position of a Christian is. The congregations Jude is addressing have encountered teachers claiming to be Christian sharing a message he views as “incompatible with the apostolic gospel” (deSilva, 2004, p. 867). These false teachers deny the authority of the law of Moses (v. 8–10) and Christ himself (v. 4, 8), and as a consequence they are immoral and ungodly (Watson, 2014). As such, Jude is writing to these early Christians to convince them that these people threaten their very salvation and are actually enemies of the church (Watson, 2014). Also, deSilva (2004) noted that false prophets were a common phenomenon in the early church and this letter is meant to intervene in the discernment of these false teachings from Scriptural truth. One of the main problems related to this was related to upholding both Jewish and Christian traditions (deSilva, 2004). This is further demonstrated in Jude’s citation of 1

Enoch 1:9 which was an influential Jewish writing at the time, but Jude is clear that Jesus is God and thus encourages readers to follow Him (Heiser, 2015). Therefore, Jude sought to demonstrate how ungodly these false teachers were and bring focus back to Christians' shared salvation in Christ Jesus (deSilva, 2004).

Subgenres in Jude

The epistle of Jude also contains apocalyptic content. According to deSilva (2004), "Jude is thoroughly apocalyptic and steeped in the apocalyptic traditions of early Judaism" which is seen in verses 14-15, 21, and 24 (p. 866). Specifically, verses 14-16 reference the Old Testament figure Enoch to further illustrate the harsh judgement of false teachers (Witherington, 2007). Verses 21 and 24 remind the early Christians they have security in Christ if they keep to him (Wiersbe, 1992). In addition, it was also common for apocalyptic literature to include specific names, such as Moses and Cain mentioned by Jude (Charles, 1990). Moreover, Bautch (2014) stated that end-time speculation was important to early Christians and their communities. As such, "divine intervention, judgement, and deliverance" were all essential aspects of apocalyptic imagination and essential to this epistle and others (Bautch, 2014, p. 82).

Exegetical Summary

Overall, the epistle of Jude offers important instructions for early and contemporary followers of Christ that false teachers will always be a threat. As such, Jude helps readers to distinguish between false teachers who are leading people to sin for profit and are doomed to destruction, and believers who may be struggling with doubt and need fellow Christians to encourage them (Engelbrecht, 2009). Jude makes it clear that it is the responsibility of the followers, not the leaders, to remain true to the teachings of Christ and the apostles and not be misguided by those with ulterior motives (deSilva, 2004). Overall, followers must show courage to help themselves and their fellow Christians who may have been led astray because ultimately it is a matter of life and death (deSilva, 2004).

III. FOLLOWERSHIP THEORY

While several contemporary theories can relate to this text, Jude's epistle aligns well with the tenants of courageous followership. Chaleff (2009) proposed that there are five dimensions of courageous followership: the courage to assume responsibility, the courage to serve, the courage to challenge, the courage to participate in transformation, and the courage to take moral action. The courage to assume responsibility helps followers to develop a partnership with the leader and build a sense of community (Chaleff, 2009). The courage to serve involves showing care and concern for the leader as a person, which will build trust and goodwill (Chaleff, 2009). According to Chaleff (2009), the courage to challenge leaders is important for the organization's purpose and goals. Moreover, Chaleff (2009) states:

Devoted leaders and followers enter a type of sacred contract to pursue their common purpose. They both are guardians of that purpose. Part of the

courageous follower's role is to help the leader honor this contract. If we do not challenge a leader about dysfunctional behavior, the contract is slowly shredded before our eyes. (p. 77)

In addition, the courage to participate in transformation involves reaching out to leaders and helping them transform damaging behaviors that may harm the organization (Chaleff, 2009). For instance, in many circumstances where leaders are caught in a scandal, many followers mention they saw signs of the destructive behavior but did nothing to stop it (Chaleff, 2009). Lastly, the courage to take moral action involves followers clarifying their own values and grappling with the tension between what they feel is right and opportunities for personal gain or loss (Chaleff, 2009). For instance, if a leader asks a subordinate to do something unethical, the follower should have the courage to take action (Chaleff, 2009).

IV. APPLICATION

The epistle of Jude offers several new insights that enhance courageous followership as outlined by Chaleff (2009). The courage to assume responsibility involves building a strong Christian community that has a shared salvation in the body of Christ (v. 1 and 3). When Jude urges Christians to remember they are kept in Christ, he is reminding them to serve their one true leader, God (v. 25). According to Jude, followers should also have the courage to challenge these false teachers and prophets who pervert this grace (v. 4). As Chaleff (2009) states, leaders and followers have a sacred contract to pursue their common purpose, just as Christians have a sacred contract to follow God who holds all power and authority (v. 25). As such, this epistle demonstrates "a serious problem has arisen and a change in behavior and approach of the audience to these persons is required" (Witherington, 2007, p. 596). The courage to participate in transformation is the ability for followers of Christ to transform the damaging behaviors of these false teachers that are harming the early church. To do so, Jude urges followers to build themselves up in the holy faith (v. 20), which is what sets Christians apart from those without faith (Engelbrecht, 2009). Christians are "to be soldiers who hold the fort at any cost" (Wiersbe, 1992, p. 784). Lastly, the courage to take moral action is where Jude encourages followers to save fellow Christians and then show them mercy and fear. According to Wiersbe (1992), "some we might be able to save; others we can only pity" (p. 787).

Followers of Christ should also reclaim their fellow brothers and sisters "with the love that manifests itself in the investment of time that dialogue requires, in the boldness that dares to go into uncomfortable areas, and in the wary caution that keeps a vigilant watch over our own passions and weaknesses" (deSilva, 2004, p. 875). As previously stated, this letter makes no appeal to church leaders to deal with the false teachers polluting early Christians, but instead appeals directly to God's called followers to be courageous enough to do so (deSilva, 2004). As such, "Jude shows us what it means to walk by the Spirit amid our differences" (Kovalishyn, 2014, p. 13). This reinforces the notion by Chaleff (2009) that followership is not passive. The followership of Jude's community should help modern Christians realize how crucial it is to defend themselves and others from those who want to lead them off course. For secular organizations, this pressure can involve superiors asking followers to do things unethical or unlawful. For

Christians, false teachers can challenge their salvation, making this literally a matter of life and death. Therefore, followers have a responsibility to monitor and correct errors made by leaders and others and must be courageous enough to make a stand (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2015).

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Jude offers further insight into followership theory and what it means to be a courageous follower of Christ, especially in the midst of false teachers leading God's called people astray. The next steps in research would be to examine the epistle through socio-rhetorical criticism, in particular social and cultural texture as outlined by Robbins (1996), to offer further insight into "living a committed religious life in the world" (p. 71). As Osborne (2006) warns, the situation behind epistles is not always easy to detect, therefore it is essential to use exegesis to gain further insight into the life situations of the biblical times to ensure it still has applicability for modern Christians. Examining the text through a social and cultural lens would further help to enhance courageous followership in relation to this text. Future research should also explore the false teachers described in the epistle of Jude in relation to pseudo-transformational leadership to further help Christians beware of how they can be manipulated by those who claim to be Christian leaders but have ulterior motives.

Overall, this text offers clear arguments for why and how Christians should contend for the faith and remain true to Scripture and the resources that were given through Jesus Christ and the apostles (deSilva, 2004). Although it is often overlooked and seen as a negative text because it demonstrates God's wrath throughout the Old Testament, Jude offers sound advice on how to respond to dangers as Christians began to divide from within (Brown, 2016). Thus, followers of Christ must be courageous to stand up to false teachers and help their fellow Christians do the same, when possible, because in the end, it is God alone that keeps followers in the one true faith and grants salvation (Wiersbe, 1992).

About the Author

Kellie Playter currently teaches and serves as the internship director in the School of Business and Economics at Concordia University Irvine. Kellie has worked in higher education for over 12 years and enjoys helping prepare students for their future vocations. Kellie is a second-year PhD student in the Organizational Leadership program at Regent University. She lives in California with her husband and two children.

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