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Intro:

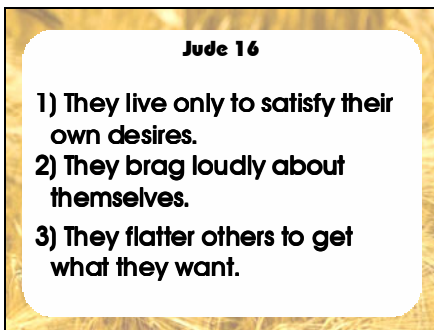
Last week we spoke of a new mission field that exists around us. A phenomenon has been taking place in the church over the past 100 years. It's not new, but it is becoming more evident and dominant in the direction the church takes.

It is the focus of the church on SELF rather than on CHRIST.

Last week we looked at Jude's description of this new mission field. Subtly they enter into the church and get the church to change its attention away from the Lord and on to themselves.

In verses 1-19, Jude described their self-focus, and their self-inspiration and then their self-destructiveness.

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Verse 16 was the crux of the problem. Their only interest was SELF.

- 1) They live only to satisfy their own desires.
- 2) They brag loudly about themselves.
- 3) They flatter others to get what they want.

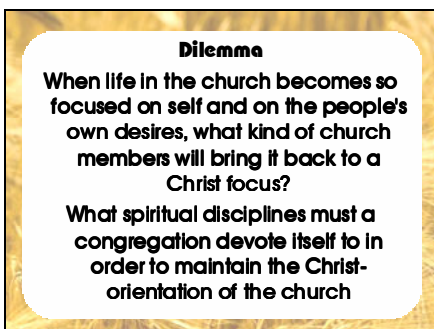
When a congregation begins to manifest these traits, what is the church leadership supposed to do?

In verse 17, there is a definite shift in the way Jude addresses the audience he was writing to. Before verse 16, he described only the problem of SELF and what it looked like in the church.

In verse 17, as well, he discusses the action that church leaders must take AND the support church members must give if they are to save the Christ-orientation of the church and the people who have become wayward by their misguided and sinful desires.

Human Dilemma/Challenge:

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When life in the church becomes so focused on self and on the people's own desires, what kind of church members will bring it back to a Christ focus? OR let me state the dilemma in another way: What spiritual disciplines must a congregation devote itself to in order to maintain the Christ-orientation of the church (and thereby steering the self-focused people to a Saviour rather than to their selfish desires? and releasing them from their enslavement to self)

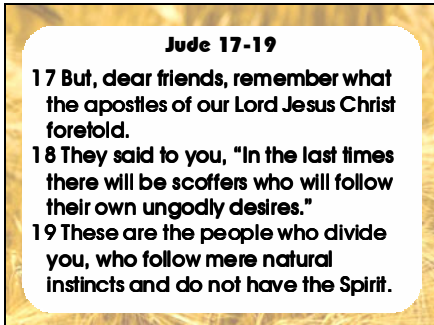
The new mission field - self-focused believers in the church - is reached when Christ-oriented believers govern their lives

around specific disciplines.

God's Revelation:

Turn in your Bibles to Jude 17. Let us look at what effect selfish leaders and selfish desires will have on a church.

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Jude 17-19

17 But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold.

18 They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires."

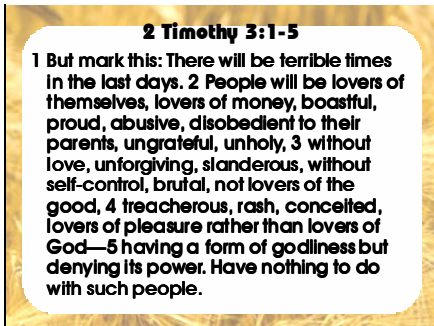
19 These are the people who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.

Three effects of selfish people getting their own way in the church are mentioned here.

(1) Those faithful to the Lord will feel inferior and ridiculed.

In the last times there will be scoffers ...

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2 Timothy 3:1-5 describe for us the attitude of such scoffers.

2 Timothy 3:1-5

1 But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days.

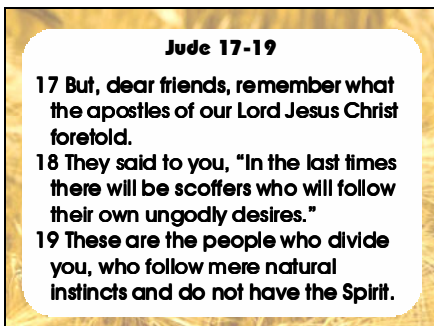
2 People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, **3** without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good,

4 treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—

5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.

The people who put Christ first will be mocked or "poked fun of." They will be scorned for their faithfulness; they will become the target of lies and hostilities. Human arrogance and contempt will make the faithful feel stupid and useless.

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(2) The more these scoffers worm their way into positions of authority, the more the faithful will be divided.

The idea behind "divide" is to sever. They will sever you from your real task which is to train others - to help others to be successful in their spiritual walk with God.

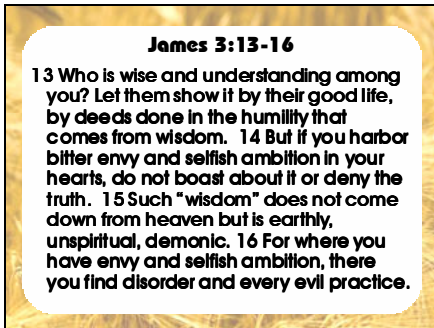
We are not called of God to have our own "needs" met. We are called to be servants and to serve the needs of others - to build

them up.

(3) The more that self drives the agenda of the congregation, the less the Spirit will be active in its midst.

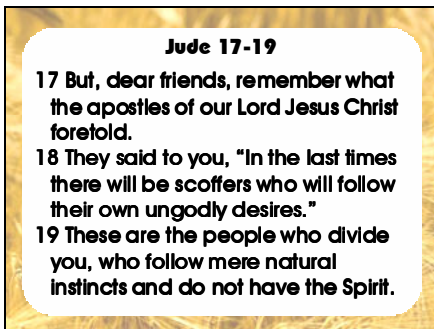
The Spirit does not cater to OUR desires. The more self dictates the agenda, the more Satan is involved.

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James 3:13-16 says: **13** Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. **14** But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. **15** Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. **16** For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

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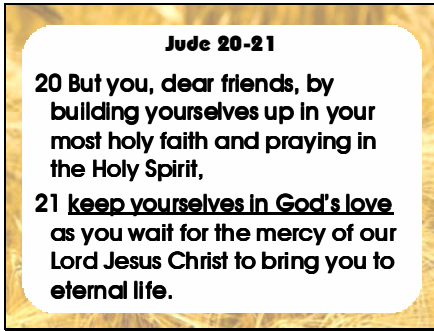
The introduction of our own ungodly desires will mean our ministry is led by our natural instincts which is another way of saying: "You do not have the Spirit."

To avoid this scenario, Jude issues this command: *Remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold.*

In essence, Jude is saying, "Don't ever think that old truth has no ability to solve today's problems. Recall the words of the apostles of Jesus." They serve as a warning about trouble and as a guide toward Christ-orientation of your life. The "sayings" passed on by the Lord's apostles should condemn some of our current thinking, correct it and chart a course for our future. This is why we so readily turn back to the Bible. It offers us the purest form of the teachings of Jesus unmixed by centuries of corruption by man. We must not ignore history, but when it leads us to contradict the Christ-orientation of the disciples and apostles, the words of Scripture are the means that Christ uses to reclaim his lordship.

So the first discipline that will bring about a Christ-orientation in the congregation is - the constant return to the Bible to counteract the self-focus of our culture.

There is a second action Jude recommends to maintain Christ-orientation in the midst of a generation taught to focus only on self.



Jude 20–21

20 But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit,

21 keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

The main verb - the command that Jude issues to his readers is . . . Keep yourselves in God's love.

The command "to keep yourselves in God's love" is not an expression open to interpretation. It is the main phrase in the sentence, but 3 participial phrases describe how a believer is to do this.

How do you keep yourselves in the love of God?

3 means of keeping oneself in the love of is described in these verses:

Means #1: By building yourselves up in your most holy faith

Means #2: By praying in the Holy Spirit

Means #3: By receiving the mercy of Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

"Keep yourself in the love of God" means to preserve or to treasure the love that comes from God. This is the only way to ward off the self-interest and selfish ambition if you do not treasure God's love.

Treasuring or 'keeping yourself in the love of God' requires more than discipline and willpower. It takes, as Jude points out here, the work of the Trinity - God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

The Trinity preserves or guards you from yourself - your selfish ambitions and your self-interests.

The Father is your first bodyguard. It is his love that is highlighted. God's love is evident in His promises revealed to believers in our holy faith. He is the architect or designer of the plan that reaches past our sin to meet our need. He reveals to us what to expect.

The second bodyguard preserving us in God's love is the Holy Spirit. He is available to hear our petitions.

The third bodyguard, protecting us in God's love is Jesus. He is inviting us to receive mercy when the journey feels hopeless or

when God's love seems like a fantasy rather than reality.

The Trinity keep us in the love of God. They supply all that we need.

So what do they offer us that willpower or discipline cannot provide?

God offers faith to entice us to treasure Him. Faith is confidence in his promises - not in our feelings or present circumstances.

The Holy Spirit offers his help and his power to us. It is not our desires and appetites for God that will get us through. It is soliciting the Spirit's help that will guard our hearts and minds.

Jesus extends mercy. The one who knows what it is like to be a human being, knows that failure and frustration are realities for us when it comes to confidence in God's love. We are prone to give up or to rely on our own strength and ambition.

We have all the resources of the Trinity available to us, BUT the temptation is to look elsewhere and to leave God out of the picture.

The help of the Trinity is absolutely indispensable. There is no way that we fight off self-interest and the pressures of those who are driven by selfish ambition without God taking control of our lives. BUT that does not release of any responsibility. This passage points to the activity God will inspire us to be involved in.

There are three actions that Jude calls for.

Action #1: Building yourselves up (training)

Action #2: Praying (ie. asking)

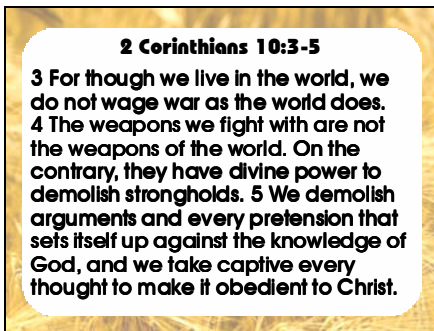
Action #3: Taking/receiving

The idea of building yourselves up on God's promises - another way of saying your holy faith - describes the process of building a house. The believer is to pay attention to building God's house and the foundation is the "holy faith." It does not speak only of your personal faith, but building the house of God as a community. While those with selfish ambitions are tearing down the community of God's house, the true believers are building it up. Their confidence is being strengthened by God's promises and they invest that strength in helping others become confident in God. There is no better way of contending for the faith (v.3) than building others up in the faith.

The second activity is praying. This means calling on God. It recognizes God as a higher power than self; One who can provide when self is unable. Attached to this praying is the phrase "in the Holy Spirit." This phrase alludes to one's dependency upon God. It is not crying out to God in order to get your own way, but praying with the will of the Spirit in mind - petitions prompted/inspired by God's Spirit. In the context of contending for the faith, we see the kind of spiritual praying required in 1 Corinthians 10:3-5.

"Keeping yourselves in God's love" is a very broad statement to make. How do you do that?

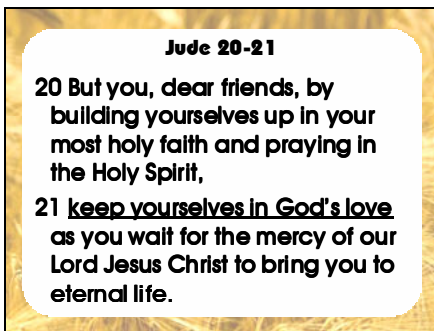
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2 Corinthians 10:3-5

3 For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does.
4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.
5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

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The third action participle is "receiving" the mercy of Jesus. Mercy is not needed only to be saved, but everyday. Notice that the verb suggests that it is being offered. It is there for the taking. Jesus is not stingy in offering it. It is our conceitedness that tells Jesus "no thanks, I can do this by myself." We must receive His mercy and kindness. We only lack it when we do not take it. It is his mercy that will lead us to fully engage in a life that can be called eternal life.

Why do we need mercy?

I think we need mercy in a culture that is focused on self because our natural instincts cry out for the same things they want, but we know that those things are not in Christ's best interests. Otherwise, if we were left to follow our own hearts, we would be no different from the culture around us. Jesus invites us to receive his mercy so that we can say "no" to self and "no" to our strong selfish desires and say "yes" to patience and suffering while we wait for Jesus to fully provide the eternal life he has promised to us.



Wrong Response:

As the prominence of self dominates in our culture, it will continue to be a greater issue for the church. Whatever trends happen in the culture, eventually becomes a trend in the church. You could keep the people away from the church, but except in extreme cases, that has never been the practice of Christians.

Right Response:

The practice that Jude recommends is that, no matter what the trends in the culture are, the people who want to keep the church Christ-oriented must, first and foremost, maintain a Christ-orientation themselves. They maintain that Christ-orientation by devoting themselves to Scripture, to prayer (or God-dependency) and mercy

Christ-orientation is the greatest need of the church. The church itself is one of the largest mission fields today because those who go to church are using the church to serve self rather than using self to serve Christ.

In order to have an impact on those who are consumed with self, those who belong to Christ must keep themselves in God's love. God's love must be the source that motivates all that we do in life. To maintain our focus on God's love and to rescue others, whose primary focus is self, we do well to devote ourselves to Scripture and its teachings, to show our dependency upon God through prayer and, because we are prone to wander, to draw on the mercy Jesus offers to us each day.