

The Books of Titus, Philemon, and Jude, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 11: The Character and Doom of False Teachers

Jude 12–16

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

What is at stake in this lesson is discernment between genuine and counterfeit faith, and the certainty of God's judgment on the ungodly. Jude's vivid imagery (reefs, waterless clouds, fruitless trees, wild waves, wandering stars) all converges on one theme: impressive appearance without real substance or fruit. The teacher should help students see that God evaluates the reality beneath the religious surface, and that fruitlessness and self-service are reliable marks of the counterfeit. This reinforces the study's consistent insistence that genuine faith bears fruit and submits to Christ as Lord.

The passage also presents the certainty and universality of coming judgment. Jude cites an ancient prophecy that the Lord will come to execute judgment on all the ungodly for their deeds and their words. The teacher should present the reality of final judgment soberly and clearly, as a truth meant to shape present living, while keeping the tone one of reverent warning rather than morbid fear. The doctrine of judgment is good news for a world groaning under injustice and a serious summons to readiness for everyone.

The formational aim is twofold. First, sharpen students' discernment so they can recognize empty, self-serving religion in their teachers and resist it. Second, and more searchingly, turn Jude's portrait inward, so that students examine their own hearts for the grumbling, discontent, self-indulgence, boasting, and flattery he names. Send them home both more discerning and more honest, pursuing real fruit and genuine submission to Christ in view of the coming day.

Question 1

Student Question:

Jude calls the false teachers "hidden reefs at your love feasts" and "shepherds feeding themselves" (v. 12). What does this teach about the danger of leaders who use their position to serve themselves rather than the flock, and how does this contrast with the model of the Good Shepherd?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the image of "hidden reefs at your love feasts" and "shepherds feeding themselves" (v. 12). The love feasts were the church's fellowship meals, occasions of intimacy and trust. The false teachers were present at them, looking like part of the family, while functioning like submerged reefs, unseen hazards that could wreck those who came near.

Focus on “shepherds feeding themselves.” This is the great inversion of true spiritual leadership. A shepherd exists to feed and protect the flock; these men used the flock to feed themselves. Connect this to Ezekiel 34, where God condemns the shepherds of Israel for feeding themselves rather than the sheep, and pronounces judgment on them.

Contrast this sharply with the Good Shepherd (John 10:11), who lays down His life for the sheep. Jesus is the measure of all spiritual leadership: self-giving, not self-serving. The teacher should help students see that the test of a leader is whether they pour out for the flock or feed off it, and set up the personal application about self-serving faith in the next question.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Self-serving leadership as the inversion of true shepherding (Ezekiel 34:1–10)
- Hidden danger within the fellowship, looking like family
- The Good Shepherd who lays down His life as the measure (John 10:11)
- Leaders who feed off the flock rather than feeding it

Discussion Prompts

- What is the danger of leaders who serve themselves rather than the flock?
- How does Jesus, the Good Shepherd, set the standard for leadership?
- How can a church recognize self-serving leadership?

Question 2

Student Question:

Jude condemns “shepherds feeding themselves” (v. 12), a warning against using spiritual things for selfish ends. Where might you be tempted to make your faith, your service, or your role mostly about yourself, your comfort, recognition, or advantage? How is Christ calling you to a more self-giving love?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes “shepherds feeding themselves” (v. 12) and applies it broadly. The temptation to make spiritual things serve the self is not limited to leaders. Any of us can turn faith, service, or a church role into a vehicle for our own comfort, recognition, or advantage.

Help students examine their motives honestly. Do they serve to be seen and appreciated? Is their involvement mostly about what they get out of it? Has a role become about status rather than service? These questions are uncomfortable but clarifying. Even good activities can be quietly self-centered.

Point to the self-giving love of Christ as both standard and power. We move from self-serving to self-giving not by mere effort but by drawing on the love that poured itself out for us (2

Corinthians 5:14–15, He died that those who live might no longer live for themselves). Ask each student to name one area to reorient from self toward genuine love for others.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The temptation to make faith and service serve the self
- Examining motives for recognition, comfort, or advantage
- Christ's self-giving love as standard and power (2 Corinthians 5:14–15)
- Moving from self-serving to self-giving service

Discussion Prompts

- Where might your faith or service be mostly about you?
- What does honest motive-examination reveal in your case?
- How is Christ calling you to more self-giving love?

Question 3

Student Question:

Jude piles up images of emptiness: “waterless clouds” and “fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted” (v. 12). What do these pictures teach about the nature of false teaching, that it promises much but produces nothing, and why is fruitlessness such a reliable mark of what is spiritually counterfeit?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Examine the images of emptiness in verse 12: “waterless clouds, swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted.” Both pictures share a theme of failed promise. Clouds should bring rain; these bring none. Trees in late autumn should be laden with fruit; these are barren and dead. The false teachers promised spiritual nourishment and life but delivered nothing.

Draw out why fruitlessness is such a reliable mark of the counterfeit. Jesus said we would know false prophets by their fruit (Matthew 7:16–20). Words and appearances can deceive, but the actual effect of a teaching, the lives it produces, the godliness it does or does not foster, exposes its true nature. Empty religion may be impressive in style but barren in result.

Apply the test constructively. Help students learn to ask of any teaching or ministry: what fruit does it actually produce? Does it lead people to love God and neighbor, to holiness, to genuine faith? Or does it produce excitement without transformation, crowds without disciples? Set up the personal application about the gap between appearance and fruit in the next question.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- False teaching as failed promise: much appearance, no substance

- Fruitlessness as a reliable mark of the counterfeit (Matthew 7:16–20)
- Effect, not style, as the test of teaching
- Discerning ministry by the fruit it actually produces

Discussion Prompts

- What do these images teach about the nature of false teaching?
- Why is fruit a more reliable test than appearance?
- How can we evaluate teaching by its actual fruit?

Question 4

Student Question:

Jude pictures clouds that promise rain but deliver none, and trees that should bear fruit but stand bare (v. 12). Where in your life are you promising more than you are delivering, to God or to others? What would it take to close the gap between your appearance and your actual fruit?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question turns the images of failed promise inward. The clouds and trees promised what they did not deliver; we, too, can promise more than we produce, to God in our commitments and to others in our words. The question invites honest reflection on the gap between our appearance and our fruit.

Help students locate the specific gap. Perhaps it is commitments to God made and not kept, a reputation for reliability that outruns reality, words of love not matched by deeds, or an image of spiritual maturity that the private life does not support. Naming the gap is the beginning of closing it.

Move toward integrity. The goal is not to promise less in cynicism but to let our actual fruit catch up with our appearance, to become the person we present ourselves to be. Encourage one concrete step toward closing a specific gap this week, whether keeping a neglected commitment or matching a word with an action.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gap between appearance and actual fruit
- Promising more than we deliver to God and others
- Integrity as appearance and reality brought into agreement
- Letting fruit catch up with reputation

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you promising more than you are delivering?
- What gap between appearance and fruit do you most need to close?

- What concrete step would begin to close it this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Jude reaches back to a prophecy that “the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all” the ungodly (vv. 14–15). What does this passage teach about the certainty and the universality of God’s coming judgment, and how should the reality of that day shape the way we live now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Address the prophecy Jude cites in verses 14 and 15: “the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly.” Jude uses this ancient prophecy to declare the certainty of coming judgment. The Lord will come, and He will judge. This is presented not as speculation but as settled reality.

Draw out the certainty and universality. Judgment is coming “on all,” and it concerns both deeds and words (“all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken”). No one is exempt, and nothing is overlooked, not even words. This soberes everyone and assures those who long for justice that wrong will not have the last word.

Show how this should shape present living. The certainty of judgment is meant to produce readiness, reverence, and holy living (2 Peter 3:11, what sort of people ought you to be?). It is not meant to paralyze believers with dread, for those in Christ face that day in Him, but to keep all of us living in view of accountability to God. Set up the personal application in the next question.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The certainty of the Lord’s coming judgment (vv. 14–15)
- Judgment as universal, including both deeds and words
- Judgment as good news against injustice and a summons to readiness
- The coming day shaping present holiness (2 Peter 3:11)

Discussion Prompts

- What does this passage teach about the certainty of judgment?
- Why is coming judgment both sobering and, for the oppressed, good news?
- How should that day shape the way we live now?

Question 6

Student Question:

Jude says the Lord is coming to call the ungodly to account for their deeds and their harsh words (v. 15). If you knew the Lord would return this week to review your deeds and your words, what would you want to change today? What does your honest answer reveal about where you are not yet ready?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question makes the coming judgment vividly personal. Jude says the Lord will call account for deeds and words. The question asks students to imagine the Lord returning this week to review their deeds and words, and to notice what they would want to change.

Use the exercise to expose unreadiness gently. What we would scramble to change reveals where we have been living carelessly, the habit we have excused, the words we would not want reviewed, the relationship we have neglected. The point is not panic but honest recognition.

Move from exposure to action. The right response to imagining that day is not despair but repentance and realignment now, while there is time. Ask each student to name one thing their honest answer revealed and one step they will take today, living as those who are ready for their Lord's return.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Living in readiness for the Lord's return (Matthew 24:44)
- Honest exposure of careless areas through the thought of that day
- Repentance and realignment in the present
- Accountability for both deeds and words

Discussion Prompts

- If the Lord returned this week, what would you want to change?
- What does your answer reveal about where you are not yet ready?
- What step toward readiness will you take today?

Question 7

Student Question:

Jude exposes the false teachers as those "following their own sinful desires" while putting on a religious front (v. 16). How does Scripture describe the difference between being led by the Spirit and being driven by our own desires, and why is self-will at the root of so much false religion?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Focus on the phrase "following their own sinful desires" (v. 16), which Jude names as the engine driving the false teachers behind all their religious appearance. At root, they were governed not

by God but by their own cravings. Self-will, dressed in spiritual language, is the heart of false religion.

Contrast being driven by desire with being led by the Spirit. Paul sets these against each other in Galatians 5:16–25: the works of the flesh flow from following our own desires; the fruit of the Spirit flows from walking in step with Him. False religion lets self-will rule while keeping a religious veneer; true faith submits self-will to God.

Show why self-will is so central to counterfeit faith. The essence of sin from the beginning has been the assertion of our will over God's ("not your will but mine"). Genuine faith reverses this, praying "not my will but yours." Help students see that the deepest issue is always lordship: who rules, God or self? Set up the personal application about grumbling and discontent next.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Self-will as the engine of false religion (v. 16)
- Being driven by desire versus led by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16–25)
- The veneer of religion over an unsundered will
- Lordship as the deepest issue: God's will or our own

Discussion Prompts

- How does Scripture contrast following our desires with following the Spirit?
- Why is self-will at the root of so much false religion?
- How does genuine faith reverse the assertion of our will over God's?

Question 8

Student Question:

Jude names "grumblers" and "malcontents" who are never satisfied (v. 16). Grumbling can become a quiet habit of the heart. Where has complaint or chronic discontent taken root in you, and how might gratitude and trust in God begin to replace it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes "grumblers, malcontents" (v. 16) and turns it inward. Grumbling is one of the most socially acceptable sins, yet Scripture treats it seriously; Israel's grumbling in the wilderness provoked God repeatedly. Chronic complaint and discontent can quietly take root in any heart.

Help students see grumbling as a spiritual issue, not just a personality trait. At root, grumbling is a quarrel with God's providence, a refusal to trust that what He has allotted is good. It corrodes joy, gratitude, and witness. Philippians 2:14–15 links doing all things without grumbling to shining as lights in the world.

Point to gratitude and trust as the antidote. Discontent shrinks when we deliberately count God's gifts and trust His goodness in what we lack. Encourage students to name where grumbling has taken root and to begin replacing it with concrete thanksgiving and renewed trust. The aim is one area of complaint surrendered to gratitude this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Grumbling as a serious spiritual issue, not a mere trait
- Complaint as a quarrel with God's providence
- Gratitude and trust as the antidote to discontent
- Living without grumbling as shining like lights (Philippians 2:14-15)

Discussion Prompts

- Where has complaint or discontent taken root in you?
- Why does Scripture treat grumbling so seriously?
- How could gratitude and trust begin to replace it?

Question 9

Student Question:

Jude's whole portrait warns that empty, self-serving religion, however impressive its appearance, stands under God's certain judgment, while genuine faith bears real fruit and submits to Christ as Lord. Drawing the threads together, how does this passage help us discern true faith from counterfeit, and why does God care so deeply about the reality beneath our religious appearance?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, drawing the threads together: how to discern true faith from counterfeit, and why God cares so deeply about the reality beneath the appearance. Begin by gathering Jude's portrait. The false teachers looked the part, sat at the love feasts, occupied the role of shepherds, yet were empty, fruitless, self-willed, and headed for judgment. The whole passage insists that appearance is not the test; reality is.

State the principle clearly: God evaluates the heart and the fruit, not the surface. Jesus warned that on the last day many will say "Lord, Lord" and point to impressive works, only to hear "I never knew you" (Matthew 7:21-23). The difference is not religious activity but doing the Father's will, a living, fruitful, submitted faith. Genuine faith bears the fruit of the Spirit and bows to Christ as Lord; counterfeit faith produces words and appearances while the will remains unsundered.

Explain why God cares so deeply about reality beneath appearance. God is not deceived by religious veneer, and He loves people too much to let them rest in a counterfeit that cannot

save. The warnings of this passage are an act of mercy, exposing empty religion so that people will seek the real thing. A faith that is all surface leaves the heart unchanged and stands under judgment; God's concern for the reality is His concern for our souls.

Bring it home with both discernment and self-examination. Outwardly, this equips students to recognize and resist self-serving, fruitless religion in their teachers, testing by fruit and fidelity to Christ. Inwardly, it summons each student to ask whether their own faith is real, fruitful, and submitted, or merely an appearance. Keep the tone hopeful: the same Lord who exposes the counterfeit offers genuine, fruitful life to all who truly come to Him and submit to Him as Lord.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God evaluating heart and fruit, not religious appearance (1 Samuel 16:7)
- "Lord, Lord" versus doing the Father's will (Matthew 7:21–23)
- Genuine faith bearing the Spirit's fruit and submitting to Christ as Lord
- The warnings against empty religion as an act of mercy
- Discernment toward teachers joined to honest self-examination

Discussion Prompts

- How does this passage help us tell true faith from counterfeit?
- Why does God care so much about the reality beneath the appearance?
- How does this passage call you to examine your own faith?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across these verses. Jude has exposed empty religion with vivid honesty, declared the certainty of judgment, and named the heart behind the counterfeit. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through this passage. What is the single truth from Jude 12–16 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers the lesson into one personal takeaway. Encourage students to land on something specific, whether about discernment, readiness for judgment, or a heart issue Jude exposed in them.

Trace the movement of the passage. Jude exposed empty religion with a cascade of vivid images, declared the certainty of judgment, and finally named the grumbling, craving, boasting heart beneath the counterfeit. The whole portrait drives toward a single question: is my faith real and fruitful, or only an appearance?

Close by holding discernment and self-examination together. The same standard by which we test empty religion in others is the standard by which we examine ourselves. Ask each student

to name the one truth from this passage they most need to carry, and one way they will pursue genuine, fruitful faith this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The pursuit of genuine, fruitful faith over mere appearance
- Discernment toward others joined to honest self-examination
- Readiness for the coming day as a motive for present faithfulness
- Carrying one specific, applied truth into the week

Discussion Prompts

- What one truth from this passage do you most need this week?
- How does testing empty religion call you to examine yourself?
- How is Christ forming you through these verses?