



# The Tri-Cities Edifier

Volume 9

October 29, 2023

No. 45

## *Fishing Out False Teachers*

Zac McCray

Do you have a favorite book of the Bible? What about a favorite chapter? Perhaps you're drawn to **Hebrews 11**, a survey of some of the greatest men and women of faith. Or what about **1 Corinthians 13**, a summary of the way of Christian love? Maybe you've got **Psalms 23** memorized or you really like the message and structure of **John 1**.

My favorite book and my favorite chapter—at least at this moment in my life—are one and the same. It's the letter from **Jude**. Now there are other books and chapters that explore many different topics on Christian life. But every time I read Jude's letter, I am blown away by two things: the language used and the relevance of the message today.

The majority of Jude's short book is a warning against false teachers. In it he uses some of the most lyrical metaphors found in the Bible. In **verses 12 and 13** in particular, he uses four different descriptions of false teachers that still apply to our world and culture.

Jude wrote this in a time and place where fishing was a staple of the economy. He may have been a fisherman himself, but definitely several of the people he was writing to would have either been fishers or known fishers closely. And all four of the nautical metaphors in these verses would have spoken profoundly to not just the fishers of men, but especially to the fishers of fish.

**Verse 12** starts: ***"These [the false teachers] are hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear."*** The word "reefs" here is often translated "blemishes" or "spots" to match the same Greek word used in **2 Peter 2.13**. But the ESV translates it "reefs" here, literally "hidden rocks."

Reefs are very hazardous for sailors and fishermen, mainly because they are often not seen until it's too late. What makes the word "reef" so compelling in this context is that it brings to mind—at least to me—a coral reef. A living thing. Coral reefs can bring down an entire ship, but they usually die in the process.

There are false teachers today who patiently hide—sometimes even in our own friend groups, families, and churches—waiting to bring us down unexpectedly. They can get into our heads, clog up our moral rudders, even though they know they're going down with us. What makes these people so dangerous is that they know us and know what we believe, but they have no fear, no respect for it, and they lie in wait until we are most vulnerable to try to sink us.

**Verse 12** continues with a new metaphor, another hazard: ***"waterless clouds, swept along by winds."*** The image of a waterless cloud seems paradoxical, but it reminds me of the old adage ***"water water everywhere, but not a drop to drink."*** The image here isn't of a huge storm cloud, clearly set on capsizing the boat. This cloud is seemingly harmless, only sent to provide a light refreshing rain for the sailors to drink. However, as the sailors continue to follow this cloud, they are led astray, and nothing comes of it.

This metaphor brings to mind the *"whatever feels right"* preachers. These are often TV preachers who, though they think they are preaching truth, have been swept along by the *"winds of the world."* Their message seems beneficial, but there is no substance to it. They might not have the same malicious intent in their heart as the hidden reefs, but these waterless clouds can be just as dangerous.

As can the ***“wild waves of the sea”*** mentioned in **verse 13**. Jude says they cast up the foam of their own shame. This reminds me of the bully phenomenon. A kid feels bad about himself, so he puts others down to try to feel better. This is a unique type of false teacher, but one that I think we all know. Though they may not be trying to convince us to change our ways, they try to convince others that our ways are wrong.

We see this in the media—and on social media—all the time. It seems like rather than trying to get Christians to side with them, many organizations, groups, even individuals, are just trying to set the world against Christians. If we allow ourselves to sail unprepared into the choppy waters, these wild waves can capsize us, often on a public level that is hard to recover from.

The last metaphor Jude uses for false teachers is ***“wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.”***

Sailors in Jude’s day would almost exclusively navigate using the stars. And a wandering star would be detrimental to their journey. But stars are so bright and beautiful, they are nearly impossible not to follow.

On first glance, this metaphor may seem similar to those waterless clouds—something leading us astray from our path. But there’s an important distinction. Clouds come and go as often as the winds change. But stars don’t. They’ve been there far longer than any of us. There is nothing new under the sun, or the stars. These are the temptations of sin that each and every human, alive or dead, has had to face.

There are some times, even as devout Christians, that we are tempted to follow something we know is not right. But it’s so compelling that we follow it any way, even though we know it will lead us where we don’t want to go. Maybe everyone else is following it, too, but Jude is very clear about where those temptations lead: to the gloom of utter darkness that has been reserved forever.

We see clearly that Jude warns us about:

- Hidden influences waiting to secretly turn our hearts over time.
- Unaware influences who think they are teaching us the truth but are really guiding us down the wrong path.
- Shameful influences who don’t care about what we believe, as long as everyone else is against us.
- Enticing influences who use the age-old allures of sin and seduction to tempt us into abandoning our course.
- 

We’re surrounded every day by false teachers. And sometimes, like a ship in a storm, we feel like there is no hope. No land in sight. No safe haven for us. But we do have a hope. A light that guides us back to shore. To safety. In **John 8.12**, Jesus says ***“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”***

He is the way, the truth, and the life. Only by following Him and His word, can we be assured of eternal life in heaven.