
Learning Objectives

1. **Analyze** how Jude 16 functions as the concrete embodiment of the ungodliness announced in Jude 14–15.
2. **Evaluate** Jude’s descriptors to distinguish moral failure from entrenched rebellion within the church.
3. **Synthesize** the relationship between doctrine, desire, speech, and manipulation in Jude’s argument.
4. **Defend** why Jude treats speech and motive as evidentiary in God’s judgment rather than secondary matters.
5. **Construct** a text-anchored diagnostic for recognizing manipulative, self-serving influence Jude condemns.

Lesson 09 — The Anatomy of False Teachers (Jude 16)

Text

Verse

Jude 1:16 (NASB 1995) > ¹⁶ These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage.

Big Idea

Jude 16 gives a clear picture of an ungodly person: they complain against God's plan, live only to satisfy their own cravings, brag about

themselves, and flatter people just to get what they want. How they act right now proves they already deserve God's final judgment.

Flow of the Passage, Scriptural Context, and Application

Jude 16 is the peak of his warning against false teachers and the bridge to his final instructions for the church (vv. 17–19). After quoting an ancient prophecy about God judging the wicked (vv. 14–15), Jude applies that judgment directly to the false teachers by pointing out their daily behavior. The prophecy announces their doom, but their conduct proves their identity. What the ancient prophecy declared as a guilty sentence, Jude now shows clearly in the lives of these men. By saying "these are," Jude takes a future judgment and points it directly at the troublemakers sitting right there in the local church.

The letter has moved from historical examples (vv. 5–7), to present behaviors (vv. 8–10), to typological rebels and metaphors (vv. 11–13), to a climactic prophecy (vv. 14–15). Verse 16 turns that verdict into a present-tense profile. These are the same men—baptized believers who have crept inside the assemblies—whose ungodliness has already been named and sentenced. The text destroys any Calvinistic assumption of unconditional security; these men are in the fellowship, yet marked for destruction because they have yielded to their own appetites and abandoned the authority of the word. The verse serves as the bridge: it names the behaviors that prove apostolic warnings true in the present crisis.

To understand the weight of Jude's indictment, we must anchor his accusations in the Old Testament framework he assumes and the New Testament apostolic pattern he echoes.

The Old Testament Foundation: Covenant Treason

Jude's charge of "grumblers, finding fault" is not a critique of personality; it is an accusation of covenant treason.

Numbers 14:27 (NASB 1995) — *"How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who are grumbling against Me? I have heard the complaints of the sons of Israel, which they are making against Me."*

- **Exegesis:** The wilderness generation did not merely complain about the menu or the leadership of Moses; God identifies their grumbling as a direct attack on His authority and providence. Grumbling is the vocabulary of unbelief.
- **Modern Application:** When men in the local church constantly agitate, subvert the eldership, and find fault with the scriptural pattern of work and worship, they are not exercising spiritual discernment. They are reenacting the wilderness rebellion. The autonomous local church must recognize chronic, divisive complaint not as a personality quirk, but as a severe spiritual threat that demands repentance.

Proverbs 29:5 (NASB 1995) — *"A man who flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his steps."*

- **Exegesis:** Flattery ("admiring faces" in Jude 16) is weaponized praise. The proverbs identify it as a trap. It is the language of predators.
- **Modern Application:** False teachers do not usually enter the assembly announcing their errors. They flatter. They build a coalition through strategic praise, targeting influential or wealthy members to secure their own position. Praise from a teacher must be weighed against their adherence to the truth.

The New Testament Apostolic Pattern: Desire, Speech, and Gain

New Testament parallels sharpen Jude's point, proving that false teaching is rarely just an intellectual error; it is almost always driven by moral compromise and a desire for control.

2 Peter 2:18 (NASB 1995) — *"For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error."*

- **Exegesis & Explanation:** Peter and Jude are dealing with the exact same profile. "Arrogant words of vanity" are loud, swelling claims that lack biblical substance. The mechanism of their entrapment is not logic, but "fleshly desires." They promise liberty while serving corruption.
- **Modern Application:** Preaching that minimizes the strict demands of the gospel—such as the necessity of repentance and baptism for the remission of sins—and replaces it with emotionalism or grace-as-license, is enticing the flesh. It draws crowds by removing the cross.

Romans 16:17–18 (NASB 1995) — *"Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting."*

- **Exegesis & Explanation:** Paul commands the church to mark and avoid divisive men. Notice the underlying cause: they are slaves to "their own appetites" (lusts), utilizing "smooth and flattering

speech" (gaining advantage). They do not serve Christ; they serve their bellies.

- **Modern Application:** Congregational autonomy means the local church is entirely responsible for its own purity. We cannot wait for a synod or a denominational headquarters to root out false teachers. When a man uses smooth speech to build a personal following or introduce unauthorized practices into the worship, the command is clear: mark him and turn away.

1 Timothy 6:3–5 (NASB 1995) — *"If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words... he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words... men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain."*

- **Exegesis & Explanation:** Paul exposes the economic motive behind false teaching. They argue over words and reject the "sound words" of Christ because controversy builds their platform, and their platform fills their pockets.
- **Modern Application:** Ministry is not a marketplace. When preachers or influencers manipulate the brethren to buy their materials, fund their unauthorized institutions, or elevate their status, they have turned the kingdom into a cartel.

James 2:1, 9 (NASB 1995) — *"My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism... But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors."*

- **Exegesis & Explanation:** Jude's phrase "flattering people" translates literally as "admiring faces." James condemns this exact

practice in the assembly. To alter your treatment of a man based on his wealth or status is to judge by the flesh.

- **Modern Application:** Just like his brother James, Jude takes a sniper shot at favoritism. A faithful preacher does not soften the gospel for the wealthy, nor does he ignore the poor, because the truth is strictly impartial. Any teacher who flatters the influential is simply proving he values earthly advantage over his neighbor's eternal soul. Jude stands squarely in this apostolic pattern: favoritism isn't just a flaw, it is a tool of the ungodly.

Ed's Gems

Profile

Speech Is Evidence: The Anatomy of a Complainer

Jude treats words as courtroom exhibits. What they say proves who they are. They are putting God on trial for the life He assigned them, making their daily speech courtroom evidence of spiritual treason.

Think of Israel in the wilderness: "We need food, we need water, we need shade, we need meat, we need onions, we need shoes... we want, we hate, we detest." It devolves to the point where they hate that they ever left slavery. They despise the very hand that saved them and is leading them with provision and care to the land that flows with milk and honey. They look at daily, miraculous manna from heaven and say, "Oh, and by the way, would you ask God to put some ketchup on that?"

Desire Drives Doctrine: Theology Bows to Biology

"Following after their own lusts" explains both their complaints and their flattery. It reveals the dark, underlying secret of all false

teaching: appetite always precedes argument. Men rarely abandon the truth because they found a superior intellectual premise; they bend their doctrine to accommodate their desires. Their "theology" is nothing more than a sophisticated, spiritualized justification for their flesh.

Flattery Is a Weapon: The Patronage of Perdition

Praise is not pastoral care here; it is a tool for control and profit. The phrase "flattering people" literally translates to "admiring faces." In the first-century Greco-Roman world, society ran on the "patron-client" system—you ruthlessly stroked the ego of the wealthy elite to secure financial backing, status, and protection. It is mercenary manipulation. They are weaponizing flattery to monetize the brethren.

Exegetical Study

"These are" — Identification, Not Speculation

Jude does not speculate. He points: "These are." The demonstrative ties verse 16 directly to the intruders already described—those who have crept in and feast among the saints. The shift to present descriptors shows continuity with the judgment oracle. The future verdict of verses 14–15 is already warranted by present evidence. Jude's logic is direct: what they are now proves what they will face then.

"Grumblers, Finding Fault" — Rebellion in the Mouth

The verse opens with a paired charge. "Grumblers" names the posture—chronic dissatisfaction with God's ordering of life and the church.

“Finding fault” names the method—constant blame and accusation regarding their allotted portion. In Scripture, grumbling is covenantal rebellion, evoking the wilderness generation's resistance against the Lord's provision and authority. Jude places this trait at the head of the list because it corrodes trust, unity, and submission to rightful authority.

Together, the pair identifies a theological posture before a social one—discontent not simply with people or circumstances, but with God's distribution of place, role, and restraint. Read this way, their speech belongs to the same category as the “harsh words” condemned in the judgment oracle. It is not principled critique; it is rebellion voiced. If this is softened into “they have concerns,” Jude's argument collapses. The issue is not inquiry but corrosive dissent.

“Following After Their Own Lusts” — The Engine Beneath the Noise

Jude supplies the governing engine: they are “following after their own lusts.” The participle marks a settled course of life and direction, not episodic failure. Desire governs. A life ordered by craving will resent any boundary that frustrates that craving. This explains why their teaching and behavior drift toward license and self-interest.

Their theology is bent to serve appetite; grace is turned into license, and authority is rejected in practice. When desire rules, doctrine becomes a servant and people become means. This rules out the distortion that treats false teaching as a sincere but mistaken attempt to read Scripture. Jude's portrait is ethical before it is academic. The will is bent before the mind is.

“They Speak Arrogantly” — Words That Outrun Truth

From motive Jude turns to manifestation in the mouth: “they speak arrogantly.” The phrase points to inflated, overbearing speech—language swollen beyond proper measure. This is pretension that assumes status and authority it does not possess. It connects directly to the oracle’s focus on ungodly words: hostility toward the Lord shows itself not only in open irreverence but in speech that authorizes itself and refuses restraint. Churches that confuse volume with authority and confidence with faithfulness are already on the slope Jude exposes.

“Flattering People for the Sake of Gaining an Advantage” — Manipulation Exposed

The final clause exposes the social mechanism accompanying their pride. The idiom of “admiring faces” denotes partiality—treating persons as means rather than neighbors. Their arrogance is calculated, not naïve. They flatter “for the sake of gaining an advantage.” Flattery is praise with a hook. The goal is leverage—status, protection, influence, or profit.

They can thunder with swollen words when it serves their status and fawn when it serves their gain. Jude strips away the last disguise: these are not misguided shepherds but self-interested operators. Their kindness is a tool; their praise is bait. The community is not being served; it is being used.

What Breaks If This Text Is Softened

A soft reading that treats these as personality flaws collapses Jude’s argument. If grumbling is treated as temperament, Jude’s first

diagnostic sign disappears. If lust is reduced to occasional weakness, the moral engine of their influence is ignored. If arrogant speech is excused as personality or gifting, the evidentiary value of words is lost. If flattery is called "people skills," manipulation is baptized. Jude compresses posture, motive, speech, and strategy into one verse to prove that the future judgment just announced is already justified by present evidence.

The Apostolic Pivot: From Apostates to the Armed

Jude has just finished dragging these false teachers into the light, exposing their complaining hearts, their flesh-driven theology, and their weaponized flattery. He paints a terrifying picture of the infiltration. But staring into the darkness for too long can paralyze a church.

So, in verse 17, Jude grabs his readers by the shoulders and executes a violent, necessary pivot: *"But you, beloved..."*

He shifts his gaze from the anatomy of the apostate to the armor of the faithful. The courtroom exhibition is over. The diagnosis is complete. We know exactly what the enemy looks like and how they operate. Now, the tone changes from an indictment of the ungodly to a battle plan for the saints. The question is no longer *who are they?* The question is, *what must we do to survive the siege and rescue the perishing?*

Doctrinal Warnings

Do Not Redefine Complaint as Discernment: Jude distinguishes principled contending from corrosive grumbling. When criticism is driven by discontented desire rather than revealed truth, it is a mark of ungodliness, not faithfulness.

Do Not Separate Desire from Doctrine: “Following after their own lusts” explains their influence. Teaching that flows from unruly desire will always bend toward self-advantage and away from submission to Christ.

Do Not Sanctify Manipulation: Flattery for advantage is not pastoral wisdom; it is exploitation. When people become tools, the ministry has already abandoned the Lord’s pattern.

☰ Example

Illustration: Israel’s wilderness grumbling (Num 14) was not fatigue but unbelief voiced against God’s leadership. Jude places these men in the same moral stream—complaint as rebellion.

Applications

✍ Write

1. Examine your speech: where does murmuring or faultfinding reveal resistance to God’s providence rather than humble trust?
2. Identify the ruling standard of your decisions this week—Scripture or desire—and repent where appetite has set the

direction.

3. Audit your words and relationships: where has self-exalting talk or strategic flattery replaced truthful, God-fearing speech?
4. Commit to discernment in the church by evaluating teaching not only by claims but by the observable pattern of life and speech, refusing influence that depends on flattery.

Homework / Next-Step Practice

Action

- Reading:** Read Jude 1–25, once per day for five days, outlining how v. 16 functions as the hinge in the argument.
- Memory:** Memorize Jude 1:16 (NASB 1995).
- Thinking (written):** In 150–200 words, trace how “desire” explains the other traits in v. 16 and proves that speech and motive are evidence in God’s judgment.
- Obedience (specific action):** Confront one instance of manipulative flattery or habitual complaint this week with a spoken prayer of thanksgiving and submission.

Study Resources

Word Studies

Original	Pronunciation	English	Jude Context	Notes
γογγυσταί	gong-gys-TAI	grumblers	Chronic murmuring against God’s providence	Covenant resistance, OT echo of wilderness unbelief

Original	Pronunciation	English	Jude Context	Notes
μεμψίμοιροι	memp- SEE-moy- roy	faultfinders	Blaming one's allotted portion	Discontent expressed as accusation
ἐπιθυμίαι	ep-ee- thoo-MEE- ai	lusts/desires	Governing standard of their walk	Desire- driven direction; explains the tactics
ὑπέρογκα	hy-PER- ong-ka	swelling words	Inflated, pretentious speech	Self- authorizing talk; parallels 2 Pet 2:18
θαυμάζοντες πρόσωπα	thou-MA- zon-tes PRO-so-pa	flattering people	Partiality for gain	People- reading for leverage; calculated manipulation

Cross References

Passage	Connection to Jude
Numbers 14:1–4	Wilderness murmuring as covenant rebellion and unbelief
Romans 16:17–18	Serving appetite through deceptive and smooth speech
1 Timothy 6:3–5	Corrupt motives and gain-driven teaching
James 2:1	Warning against partiality ("admiring faces") in the assembly
2 Peter 2:18– 19	Swollen words used to entice and promise false freedom

Passage	Connection to Jude
Jude 3–4	Urgency to contend against men whose desire reshapes doctrine into license
Jude 17–19	Apostolic reminder and contrast that follows the verse 16 hinge
