

The Epistle of Jude (4)

vv.17-23: The Charge to Believers

17 But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; **18** How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. **19** These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.

v.17: 'But' marks a contrast between the apostates and believers to whom Jude writes. They are commanded (*imperative*) to 'remember' the words spoken by the apostles concerning these men. This included **Paul** (Acts 20.29-30; 1 Timothy 4.1-2; 2 Timothy 3.1-6), **John** (1 John 2.18) and **Peter** (2 Peter 3.3). Although these words were orally delivered in the past, they have abiding validity and value (*perfect tense*). In the face of such heresy and apostasy we do well to remember the word of God in general, and that God has spoken of these things in His word. He is still in control.

v.18: These apostles 'continued to tell' the believers there would be 'mockers' or 'scoffers' in the 'last time'. 'Scoffers' are not necessarily ignorant of God's word, but they make a mockery of it showing contempt and derision. Peter describes these men as denying the truth of the second coming and refusing to believe God will judge them for their immoral behaviour (2 Peter 3.3-4). Mockers will no doubt increase as the 'last time' progresses. **McShane:** *The 'last days' began with the first advent of Christ and will continue until His second advent. The phrase can be compared with 'last times' (1 Peter 1.20) and 'in the last days' (2 Peter 3.3).* These men follow nothing but their own desires for 'every kind of different wickedness'. They are ever intent on experiencing the thrills of new forms of ungodliness. **v.19:** They also 'make separations', that is, their teaching created divisions within the Christian community with some believers being drawn away after them. Beware of spiritual cliques (see 1 Corinthians 1.11-13). They are 'sensual' or 'soulish', being governed by self-will and self-interest rather than the Spirit. In fact, although they may have claimed to be Spirit led, they are none of His (Romans 8.9). Their inspiration does not come from God; they are in fact unregenerate.

20 But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, **21** Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

How should the believers live in the light of such men? There is personal responsibility! The section contains one command (v.21a) which is supported by three clauses: *building*, *praying* (v.20) and *looking* (v.21b). Firstly, believers are to build and pray which indicate how we are to 'keep ourselves in the love of God' (v.21a).

- **Building.** Believers are personally responsible to keep on growing and developing spiritually. Jude is employing the figure of building a house or temple. The foundation is the 'most holy faith' (cf. v.3) which they are not only to contend for but build upon. *The faith was the foundation on which they had rested their souls when they were converted; now its teaching will develop them as saints. The word of God is the means that produces personal spiritual growth (Acts 20.32) and immunizes us against the deceptions and false teaching of apostates.*
- **Praying.** Not only Bible study but prayer is essential. We should have a fixed habit (*present tense*) of prayer, ever conscious of our own weakness and helplessness. We need strength from God to fulfil what the word of God teaches. Prayer should ever be 'in the sphere' of the Holy Spirit. There are two thoughts here. *First*, as prayer is a spiritual activity, He is the one who enables us to pray (John 4.23, Ephesians 6.18). *Second*, prayer must be controlled, guided and directed by the Spirit of God (cf. Romans 8.26) as opposed to prayer which is recited mechanically or filled with self (James 4.3). The Spirit of God inspires us to prayer rather than pride and independence of God. *Spurgeon: Praying in the Spirit is to pray fervently, perseveringly, humbly, faithfully.*
- **Keeping.** Jude commands the believers to 'carefully ensure' they remain **consciously** in the sphere of God's love. It is not, of course, that God's love for us wavers, but rather our appreciation and enjoyment of God's love will wane if we are not busy *building* and *praying*! Let us remember that abiding in the love of Christ is conditioned on obedience (John 15.9-10). *John 15.10: If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love. Tatford: We keep ourselves in the sunshine of His love by our submission to His will and obedience to His Word. When we sin... it seems like a cloud hides the sunshine of His love from us.*
- **Looking.** This is the expectant attitude of those who remain in the conscious enjoyment of the love of God. There is an 'attitude of eager expectancy' towards the very thing the apostates deny. Are we ready to welcome the Saviour? *Titus 2.13: Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.* The first coming of the Lord Jesus was regarded as a great mercy (Luke 1.72, 78) as will His second coming, especially by those who look for Him. He will remove us from this sin-sodden world and we will stand in the full enjoyment of His 'favour' and 'eternal life', the final outcome and manifestation of His mercy.

22 And on **some** have mercy, who are in doubt; **23** and **some** save, snatching them out of the fire; and on **some** have mercy with fear; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. **RV**

Jude now urges his readers to 'earnestly contend for the faith' on behalf of those who have been influenced by the apostates. Great spiritual discernment is needed to distinguish between those who teach error and those who have been deceived by such. There is no guidance on the apostates themselves; as Jude has clearly shown, God will deal with them in judgment. There is huge variation in the manuscripts for these verses making it difficult to ascertain whether Jude has two or three groups in mind. Given his love for triplets, three groups are more likely, differentiated in the RV by the word 'some'. It should be noted that it is unclear whether believers or unbelievers are intended here. Perhaps this is intentional on Jude's part as a mixture of both may have been involved (see 2 Peter 3.17).

- **Doubters** (v.22). Some were 'wavering' under the influence of the false teachers. They were unable to make up their minds *for* or *against* the truth (2 Peter 2.14). This group is not antagonistic, but beset with sincere inner doubts and questions. With such, believers are to be 'compassionate', 'tenderly' seeking to show them the truth. *Note. Alternative readings have 'reprove' or 'bring to conviction' rather than 'have mercy'.*
- **Desperate** (v.23). Some were close to being captured by the teaching and behaviour of the apostates. Such needed to be 'urgently rescued' from the fire that threatened to destroy them. They had started out on the wrong way and needed to be forcibly arrested on their downward spiral. The picture may be drawn from Genesis 19.16 where Lot was 'snatched' from Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. Jude v.7, Amos 4.11) or Zechariah 3 where Joshua the High Priest was referred to as a 'brand plucked out of the fire' (of Babylonian captivity). *'There are very effective workers for Christ who are on skid row and work with those who are down and out, hopeless and helpless.'*
- **Defiled** (v.23). The final group are those who had already fallen into the gross moral sin advocated by these men. They are to be actively 'pitied', yet with a sense of 'caution' and 'fear' lest any believer be contaminated themselves. *He who would cure an infectious disease runs the risk of infection.* The 'undergarment' represents the *character* and *conduct* of the person who wears it. Here they are seen as having been 'defiled' or 'stained' by sin (Revelation 3.4, cf. Leviticus 13.47-52). Though the person should be treated with compassion, their sins must be 'detested'.

vv.24-25: The Character of God

24 ~~Now~~ (But) unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, **25** To the only ~~wise~~ God our Saviour (through Jesus Christ our Lord), be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

Jude closes his letter with an expression of worship or a *doxology*. **Spurgeon**: *A doxology is a pause to magnify the Name of God.* This pause serves as a reminder of the divine power available to believers living in such difficult times. Firstly, 'God is able' – to *save* (Hebrews 7.25), *establish* (Romans 16.25), *succour* (Hebrews 2.18), *subdue* (Philippians 3.21) and *keep* or 'protect against perils' as a shepherd watches over his sheep (Luke 2.8). Praise God, He is able to keep us from 'stumbling' (let alone 'falling'), 'tripping' or ever making a 'false step' on the road of life. Invariably, however, we do trip and fall, but only because we have ignored God's means of support (vv.20-21). God will also 'cause us to stand without blemish' or 'blameless' in the immediate presence of His glory in a day to come (cp. Romans 3.23). This will be in an environment of great joy or 'exultant jubilation' with all fear banished.

v.25: Cause of worship: Jude ascribes his worship to the only true God (cf. v.4) who is our Saviour. Of the 24 occurrences of 'Saviour' in the NT, eight are ascribed to God. He has provided salvation through the instrumentality of Jesus Christ our Lord. What a contrast to numerous religions which promise salvation apart from Him (cf. John 14.6)! **Content** of worship: Jude celebrates the attributes of God, two relating to His **Person** and two to His **rule**. There is the *brightness* of His Person (glory) and the *greatness* of His Person (majesty). He rules in *strength* (dominion) and *supremacy* (power). The authority of any other ruler is subservient to His. 'Both now and ever' is an expression of eternity. These qualities are eternal. *What God is now, He has ever been and ever will be.* **Call** to worship: Amen! This is a response by which the readers make the prayer their own. *It is not a wish, but a strong affirmation, placing a personal seal of approval on what has just been said.*