

Keeping Ourselves in the Love of God

“Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.”
—**Jude 21**

IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL, the Apostle John wrote, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) God’s love thus extends toward the whole world of mankind, but it is not forced upon his creatures. In order to maintain the full benefit of Divine love, we must believe and trust him.

To believe on Jesus does not mean merely to have a mental assent to the fact that he is the Son of God and that he died to redeem us from sin and death. True belief implies a full yielding of our wills in consecration to do God’s will, an acceptance of the terms of discipleship. “Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone [by itself, *Marginal Translation*].”—James 2:17

God's love is all abounding, and if we are to continue enjoying its warmth as Jude writes, we must keep ourselves in that attitude of mind and heart. God will then be pleased to continue showering his blessings upon us. By surrendering ourselves to the doing of his will, it means that we are enjoying his favor in the light of his countenance that is shining upon us. To remain in this honored and blessed condition of Divine favor, we must faithfully carry out the terms of our consecration vows.

We know that we cannot measure up to the perfect standard that is held before us in the Scriptures, so we are thankful, as Jude reminds us, that through our Lord Jesus Christ mercy is shown toward us even in our imperfections. This loving provision of Divine mercy does not provide an excuse to relax in our efforts to know and to do God's will, but it does give us cause to rejoice in the realization that through Christ our imperfect works are acceptable. God will bless us, not according to how well we succeed, but in proportion to the sincere efforts we make in trying to do so.

THE MOST HOLY FAITH

Jude admonishes us, "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." (vs. 3) He also has established the necessary priorities of our faith, "You, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith; praying in the Holy Spirit."—vs. 20, *New American Standard Bible*

Then, in our featured text, he has exhorted us to keep ourselves in the love of God. This emphasizes the close relationship between the ‘most holy faith’ and Divine love. It is through this faith—that which was once delivered to the saints—that God has revealed his love to us. By obedience to this glorious truth of the Divine plan, we may keep ourselves in the Divine favor. Many may speak in a general way of the love of God, but it is only through the truth of the Divine plan that we can ever appreciate the length, breadth, height, and depth of that love.

Only those who know the joyful sound of present Truth—this faith which was once delivered to the saints—really know to any degree the true love of God. It is through the Truth that they have glimpsed this blessed fact. Its fullness is quite beyond human understanding. If the faith which was once delivered to the saints has been revealed to us, and we have been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, let us rejoice and be willing at all times to contend earnestly for this Divine revelation, and be diligent in building ourselves up in this most blessed Truth.

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH

Contending for the faith is by no means limited to upholding it against the attacks of its enemies. This contending is in reality our good fight of faith—the Christian’s warfare. In this warfare, we have three principal enemies with which to contend. These are the world, the flesh, and the Devil. Each of these enemies is formidable in its attacks against our hearts and minds. When they work together, as they frequently do, we would be helpless

before them but for the marvelous provisions of Divine love and grace by which we are kept from falling.

One of these provisions is the Truth itself, which Paul likens to an ancient soldier's armor, with its helmet, shield, breastplate, girdle, sandals, and sword. Each of these, from one standpoint or another, is symbolic of the Truth which is our shield and buckler. If we keep this armor on, and girded closely to us, we will be able to withstand all the "fiery darts" of the Adversary.—Eph. 6:10-17

IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER

Prayer is also a bulwark of strength in the Christian's spiritual life. Jesus' teachings on the subject are recorded for us, "He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." (Luke 18:1) Going to the throne of heavenly grace is the sure way of finding spiritual help. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." (Heb. 4:16) When the way is difficult and we can scarcely see the next step before us, instead of fainting and giving up, let us pray.

If we hold the Truth both in our minds and in our hearts it will manifest itself in our lives. Since the Truth reveals the love of God, to be built up in this most holy faith implies a development into the character likeness of God, and being transformed into the image of his dear Son. Every influence exerted to prevent this growth of grace is something against which we should contend, whether it be from within our own flesh, or from without.

A WILY FOE

Satan is a wily foe, and is quick to take advantage of our every weakness of the flesh in his efforts to destroy us as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. Jude understood this, and in his epistle uses various illustrations and examples to help us to be on guard against the wiles of the Devil. He cautions, “Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.” (Jude 11) Perhaps most of us may feel that we are in no danger of committing such gross sins as Jude has suggested, but he has simply presented the ultimate to which various weaknesses of the flesh, with the help of Satan, might lead if their early beginnings are not detected and the proper measures taken to cleanse ourselves from them.

David prayed for help from the LORD to keep him from any small beginnings of sin which might lead to tragedy in the end. He said to the LORD, “Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.”—Ps. 19:12-14

THE WAY OF CAIN

Jude did not write his epistle to unbelievers and the worldly-wise, but “to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called.” (Jude 1) So it must have been some of

these who had 'gone in the way of Cain.' This suggests the possibility of the Lord's people taking the same wrong course if they are not diligent in keeping themselves in the love of God.

The way of Cain was the sin of jealousy. In his case, it became so deep-rooted that he was led to commit murder, as jealousy is "cruel as the grave." (Song of Sol. 8:6) But jealousy, like every other sin, usually has a small, perhaps almost imperceptible, beginning. 'Who can understand his errors?' David asked, and then prayed to the LORD to cleanse him from 'secret faults.'

We also should pray to be cleansed from secret faults. In addition to praying, we should probe deeply into our own hearts in order to discover any possible small beginnings of jealousy that may be taking root. Do we truly rejoice when those with whom we are associated, in the church or in the home, appear to be receiving a larger measure of the Lord's favor than ourselves?

Satan is ever alert to sense our fleshly weaknesses and to take advantage of them. Before we know it, the passing thought may become a firm conviction that leads to envy and bitterness of heart. The evil roots of jealousy blind us to the real truth, making it impossible sometimes to reason correctly on any question coming before us in which the objects of our jealousy are involved.

THE MEASURE OF FAITH

Prayer and a proper application of the Word of God will cleanse us from the possible beginnings of jealousy. To be jealous means that we consider ourselves more worthy of, and better qualified for, certain

blessings than those to whom they may be given. The Apostle Paul gave us good advice in this connection, writing, "I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."—Rom. 12:3

If we lack faith we will fail to have confidence in the fact that God has set every member in the body as it has pleased him. (I Cor. 12:18) King Saul was the LORD'S anointed, and David knew he had been anointed to take Saul's place. He patiently waited for the LORD to remove the disobedient Saul, and he did not lift up his hand against the LORD'S anointed.—I Sam. 26:11

This principle applies to all of our associations, and it means that we should be content with what the Lord, through his providence, sees best for us. If our lot does not seem as favorable as that of others, let us wait on the Lord to change things rather than be too hasty in taking matters into our own hands.

THE ERROR OF BALAAM

Jude also speaks of others in his day who, being once in the love of God, did not keep themselves in it. Instead, they ran greedily 'after the error of Balaam for reward.' Our first thought may be that this could not possibly be true of us or of anyone in the Truth. Let us remember that every sin has its small beginning in our minds and hearts. The example of Balaam is a very revealing one. He was asked by the heathen King Balak, of the Moabites, to curse the people of God. Balaam was not a worshipper of God, but having heard of the many miracles accredited to

God on behalf of the Israelites, he refused to curse them unless he could secure the permission of Israel's God. The account is recorded in chapters 22 to 24 in the Book of Numbers.

The point of the lesson for us is that Balaam really wanted to do the bidding of King Balak in order to get the reward that was offered, but refrained from doing so only because he feared what might happen to him. He greedily desired the reward, and cared little or nothing what the result of his curse might be upon the Israelites. Outwardly he conformed to the Lord's will, but at heart he still wanted the offered reward.

Various rewards could be suggested to us, either by the world, the flesh, or the Devil; or even by all three, which might lure us from the love of God. The example Jude has given of Balaam may serve as a warning to us along lines which may be much more subtle. In this connection, it should be helpful to consider what a priceless heritage we have in the church of God. Most people consider themselves fortunate if, in a lifetime, they can be assured of having made a few close friends. But the Lord's people have true friends that are loving, loyal, and understanding because they are in the love of God, and the love of God is in them. It is a genuine and glorious fraternity of love. If we appreciate this as we should, we will gladly lay down life itself in helping to safeguard the interests of those who are also the Lord's friends.

One of the allurements which Satan holds out to the Lord's people is the reward of being looked up to with a little flattery or praise. If we allow the spirit of ambition to develop to this point, we might easily

find ourselves using schemes and methods to accomplish what by now we have convinced ourselves to be God's will. We may be willing to circulate a half-truth about brethren, which apart from the whole truth is actually a slander, as one means of attaining the ends we seek. Some may thus be injured by our methods as we falsely reason that it is the Lord's will that we get our reward.

It is well to remember that the Lord consented to Balaam's starting out to curse the Israelites but hindering him later. We might conclude that because the Lord does not interfere with what we are doing it is his will that we continue. But in this the Lord may only be testing us. Those who keep themselves in the love of God are those who in their hearts are so loyal to the principles of righteousness that even the thought of saying or doing anything which might even remotely result to the disadvantage of one of the Lord's little ones would give them pain.

The greediness of Balaam in seeking a reward would, in principle, represent any selfish attitude we might have which, if permitted to grow, would lead to words and actions designed to promote our own selfish interests regardless of what the result might be to one or more of the brethren. Our protection against this sin, even though its beginning may be difficult to detect, is a true self-sacrificing love for the brethren. If deep down in our hearts we would rather die than say or do anything that would even in the smallest degree injure one of our brethren, then there is little likelihood that we will be snared by the sin of Balaam, and thus be taken out of the love of God.

THE GAINSAING OF CORE

Core [Greek form for Korah] was one of the sons of Aaron who led a rebellion against the leadership of Moses and Aaron. (Num. 16:1-3) The fact that Moses and Aaron had been appointed by the LORD for the service they rendered seemed to escape his reasoning. He concluded that he and his associates were just as qualified, and therefore should share the privileges and honors which, in their false reasoning, they concluded that these two servants of God were selfishly holding for themselves.

It is doubtful that, at the time Jude wrote his epistle and mentioned those who followed the 'gain-saying of Core,' there were any situations in the church which were exactly like the case of Core. There were false apostles in the Early Church, and these might have been questioning the authority of the Lord's true apostles, insisting that that they had as much authority to speak for the Lord as anyone else. But the Lord's supervision over his people at that time was not through any one or two of the apostles, as it was through Moses and Aaron. Jude's illustration, even in his day, could apply only in principle, and the same is true today. The principle is important now, even as then, that we recognize the Lord's supervision over his people and especially in our own individual affairs. It implies the humbling of ourselves under the mighty hand of God that he may exalt us in due time. It means the humble and thankful acceptance of the Lord's providence in every aspect of our lives.

If we are associated with a group of the Lord's people in an ecclesia, circumstances and situations may arise that we might like to change. Perhaps our

ways would be better than those being followed. There would be nothing wrong in suggesting what may seem to us a better way, but if the Lord, in his providence, does not permit the change to be made, we should accept the Divine will.

In this case the 'gainsaying of Core' principle could perhaps manifest itself in unjust and unloving charges against our brethren. We might become obsessed with the importance of what we would like to accomplish. Should we find ourselves tending toward such an attitude it would be well to remember the lesson of Core who forgot the Lord. He thought only of himself and of Moses and Aaron, whom he looked upon as thwarting the attainment of his wishes and the position among God's people he sought to occupy.

There are no doubt very few in the church today who find themselves in this type of situation. Perhaps there are none, but this principle applies in all our associations. In the factory or office, there may be those who are promoted ahead of us, when we feel that we are equally, or even better, qualified. Usually there is little or nothing that can be done about situations of this kind, but we do need to guard against any rebellious spirit that could easily develop in our own hearts. This could lead to bitterness of heart which, if allowed to develop, could eventually take us out of the love and favor of God.

It is possible to become rebellious against the Lord's providence in which others are not involved at all. The spirit of resentment against his providence could easily become stronger, leading to bitterness that would hide the smiling face of our Heavenly

Father from us, and therefore cause us the loss of his love and favor.

Sinful attitudes of this sort do not take possession of us suddenly. At first, as David said, they are ‘secret faults.’ It is only through prayer and a day by day diligent searching of our hearts in the light of the principles of righteousness and peace that are revealed through the most holy faith that we are able to detect these small beginnings of sin. But when we do detect them, we should diligently wield the sword of the Spirit to destroy the enemy.

COMPASSION

In his many illustrations, Jude presents the extremes of both sin and sinners. Of those who have drifted completely out of the love and favor of God he says, “These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.”—Jude 12,13

But of those who have not kept themselves fully in the love and favor of God, he adds, “Of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.” Here Jude seems to be suggesting that not all to whom he referred earlier in his letter had gone the full length into sin. He continues, “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.”—vss. 22-24

To keep ourselves in God's love means that the love of God fills and controls our lives—our every thought and every action. One aspect of God's love is his wonderful compassion, and how truly thankful we should be that he has so blessed us. He wants us to exercise a similar compassion toward others, particularly toward our brethren in the Truth who may have deviated temporarily from the right way, or have stumbled and fallen.

It has often been stated that while we are to hate the sin, we are to love the sinner. We should not cease in our endeavors to help those who may have erred until it becomes certain that it is no longer possible for them to be removed from their unrighteous condition. The disposition of mind and heart which will prompt us to do all we can to help an erring brother is a powerful influence in keeping ourselves in the love of God. Let us remain in the right path ourselves and call to those whom we would help. To do otherwise might lead to a falling into sin and error by all concerned.

Those who are striving to keep themselves in the love of God will, as Jude indicates, hate even the garments spotted by the flesh. Garments may sometimes symbolize that by which one is identified. Garments spotted by the flesh would be professions and customs arising out of selfish, fleshly reasoning in which the instructions of the Lord are ignored, and the principles of Divine righteousness and love are set aside or forgotten.

If we are keeping ourselves in the love of God we will hate garments of this sort by whomever they are worn, and we will be especially on guard lest we be found wearing such garments ourselves. Realizing

the imperfections of our fallen flesh, we will diligently endeavor to keep our bodies in subjection to the new mind, and rejoice to wear the robe of Christ's righteousness which to us becomes a garment of praise.

Let us continue to rejoice in the love and favor of God, and contend earnestly for the 'faith which was once delivered unto the saints' through which his love has been revealed to us. May we be emptied of self and filled with Divine love which will lead to faithfulness in serving one another, bearing the burdens of the weak and laying down our lives in helping to build one another up in the most holy faith.

