

Lessons from Jude

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

—*Jude 21*

JUDE ADDRESSED HIS

epistle to those who are “sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called.”

(vs. 1) We know that we can-

not measure up to the perfect standard that is held before us in the person of Jesus. We are thankful, therefore, as Jude reminds us, that “mercy, . . . peace, and love” are “multiplied” toward us in our imperfections. (vs. 2) This loving provision of divine mercy, however, does not provide an excuse for us to relax in our efforts to know and do God’s will. It rather should give us cause to rejoice in the realization that through Christ our imperfect works are reckoned acceptable. (Eph. 1:6) Thus, God will bless us, not according to how well we succeed, but in proportion to the sincere efforts we make in trying to come as closely as we can to follow Jesus’ example of perfection.

In the third verse of his epistle, Jude admonishes us to “earnestly contend for the faith which was

once delivered unto the saints.” Later, in verse 20, he speaks of “building up” ourselves in this “most holy faith.” Our opening text then follows, in which Jude exhorts us to keep ourselves in the love of God. These verses emphasize the close relationship between the “most holy faith” and divine love. Indeed, it is through this faith, “once delivered unto the saints,” that God has revealed his love to us, and it is by obedience to the glorious truth of his plan that we keep ourselves in divine favor.

Many speak in a general way of the love of God, but it is only through the truth of his plan that one can appreciate the length and breadth, and height and depth of that love. Millions, for example, have read the text that “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.” (John 3:16) Yet, many of these believe that the purpose of this gift was to rescue believing sinners from an eternity of torture. Such have certainly not come very far in discerning the fullness of God’s love. Associated with the unscriptural teaching of eternal torture is the distorted idea that, in some inexplicable way, God is his own Son, and the Son is his own Father.

Only those who know the melodious sound of the Scriptures, the “faith which was once delivered unto the saints,” and through it have glimpsed a more accurate vision of God, really understand to any degree divine love, which, so far as its fullness is concerned, is quite beyond human understanding. Therefore, if “the faith” first given to the saints by our Lord and the apostles has been revealed to us, and we have been blessed to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, let us rejoice in this understanding. Let us also be willing at all times to

contend earnestly for this divine revelation, and be diligent in building ourselves up in this blessed Truth.

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH

To earnestly contend for the faith, as Jude exhorts in verse 3, is by no means limited to upholding it against the attacks of its enemies, or against the errors of false doctrine. To “contend,” in reality, means to engage in our “good fight of faith.” (I Tim. 6:12) This fight is the Christian warfare we each have with the enemies around and within us. In this warfare we have three principal foes with which to contend. These are the world, our own fallen flesh, and the Devil. Each of these enemies is formidable in its attacks against our hearts and minds. When they join forces and work together, which often happens, we would be powerless to defeat them, apart from the marvelous provisions of divine grace by which we are kept from falling.—Eph. 2:8

One of the means by which we “earnestly contend” 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 articles, 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. 6:11-17; Ps. 91:1-4

Prayer is also a bulwark of strength to those who properly contend for the faith. Moreover, it is cited by Paul as the final element of the Christian’s armor. (Eph. 6:18) In the parable of the importunate widow, Jesus’ lesson is that his disciples “ought always to

pray, and not to faint.” (Luke 18:1) Going “boldly unto the throne of grace” is a sure method by which we may “obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” (Heb. 4:16) When the way is difficult, the storms are raging, enemies are pressing hard, and we can scarcely see the next step before us, instead of fainting and giving up, let us pray.

If we hold the Truth 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 “conformed to the image of his Son.” (Rom. 8:29) Thus, every influence exerted to prevent this growth of Christian character is something against which we should contend, whether it be from within our own fallen flesh, or from without, emanating from Satan or the world.

SATAN’S INFLUENCE DEVIOUS

Satan is a devious foe, and is quick to take advantage of every weakness of the flesh in his efforts to destroy us as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. Jude knew this, and in his epistle used various illustrations and examples to help us to be on guard against the “wiles of the devil.” (Eph. 6:11) He wrote, for example, of some in his day who had “gone in the way of Cain,” and of others going “greedily after the error of Balaam for reward.” He writes also of the “gainsaying of Core.” (Jude 11) Perhaps we may feel that there is no danger of our committing such gross sins as Jude has mentioned. However, he has simply presented the ultimate to which various weaknesses of the flesh, with the wrong influence

of Satan, might lead, if their early beginnings are not detected and the proper measures taken to cleanse ourselves from them.

The Prophet David prayed for help from the Lord to keep him from any small beginnings of sin which might lead to calamity 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

Jude did not write his epistle to unbelievers or the worldly minded. As previously noted from verse 1, he addressed his words to "them that are sanctified by God." Hence, it must have been some of these Jude noted who had followed in the ways of Cain, Balaam, and Core. This suggests the possibility of the Lord's people taking the same wrong courses if they are not diligent in keeping themselves in the love of God.

JEALOUSY—THE "WAY OF CAIN"

The "way of Cain" was the sin of jealousy. In his case it became so deeply rooted that Cain was led to commit murder. Jealousy is, indeed, "cruel as the grave." (Song of Sol. 8:6) Yet jealousy, like every other sin, usually has a small beginning, perhaps nearly imperceptible. "Who can understand his errors?" David asked, as quoted earlier. He then prayed to God 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, in order that we may take action against them.

At the beginning, jealousy may be but a passing thought. Satan, however, is swift to pick up such thoughts and urge us to develop them. Before we know it, the passing thought can become a firm conviction. This can lead to bitterness of heart, and envious attacks upon those who are the objects of our jealousy. Furthermore, the evil roots of jealousy will likely blind us to the real truth, making it impossible for us to reason correctly on any question coming before us in which the recipients of our envy are involved. How timely are the words of the hymn, “My soul, be on thy guard; Ten thousand foes arise; The hosts of sin are pressing hard To draw thee from the prize.”—*Hymns of Dawn*, #183

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—even privileges of service—than those to whom they are given. 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

Our “amount of faith,” as this phrase is rendered according to the *Weymouth New Testament* translation, most assuredly enters into this matter. If we lack faith, we will fail to have confidence in the fact

that God has set every member in the body “as it hath pleased him.” (I Cor. 12:18) Perhaps God’s purpose in permitting others to have a position, or opportunity of service, which we think we could fill much better, is to test us. King Saul was the Lord’s anointed. Even though he lost God’s favor, David, who had already been anointed to take Saul’s place, patiently waited for the Lord to remove the disobedient Saul. He did not “stretch forth” his hand against “the Lord’s anointed.”—I Sam. 26:11

There is a valuable lesson here for all of God’s consecrated people. It means that we should be content with what God, through his providences and in his own time, 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 hastily take matters into our own hands.

GREEDILY SEEKING REWARD—BALAAM’S ERROR

Continuing our consideration of Jude, verse 11, he spoke of others in his day who “ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward.” The example of Balaam is a very revealing one, and is presented in Numbers chapters 22-24. He was asked by a heathen king—Balak, of the Moabites—to curse the people of God. Balaam was not a worshiper of the God of Israel, but having heard of the many miracles accredited to him on behalf of the Israelites, he refused to curse them unless he could secure the permission of Israel’s God.

Although many details are contained in the account of this experience, 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. However, Balaam refrained from doing so only because he feared what might happen to him. He “greedily” desired the reward, and cared little or nothing about what the result of his curse might be upon the Israelites. Outwardly he conformed to God’s will and did not curse Israel, but at heart he would have rather received the offered reward.

In our case, various rewards could be suggested to us, either by the world, the flesh, or the Devil, which might lure us away from the love of God. It is well to remember, too, that God did not at first interfere with Balaam’s purpose of cursing the Israelites—hindering him later by means of an angel. We, likewise, might wrongly conclude that because the Lord seemingly does not interfere with what we are doing, it is his will that we continue. In this delay, however, he may 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 spiritual Israelites, would give them pain.

In this connection it should be helpful to consider what a priceless heritage we have as part of the “Israel of God.” (Gal. 6:16) Most people consider themselves fortunate if in a lifetime they can be assured of having made two or three real friends. Yet, God’s consecrated people have friends—loving, loyal, and understanding associates—the world over. They maintain these friendships because they keep themselves “in the love of God.” The love of God is in them and in their brethren in Christ. 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 our fellow spiritual Israelites, never entertaining any thought to “despise . . . one of these little ones” for reward.—Matt. 18:10

CORE’S REBELLION—A WARNING

The name Core is a Greek form of Korah. He was one of the Levites who led a rebellion against the leadership of Moses and Aaron. (Num. 16:1-33) The fact that Moses and Aaron had been appointed by the Lord for the service they rendered seemed to escape his reasoning. Korah concluded that he and his associates were just as qualified to share the privileges and honors which, in their false reasoning, they believed Moses and Aaron were selfishly holding for themselves.

We do not know if there were any situations in the Early Church that were similar to this case, which may have prompted Jude to mention those who followed the “gainsaying of Core.” There were “false apostles” and “false teachers” in the Early Church, and these might have been questioning the authority of God’s true apostles and teachers, insisting that they had as much authority to speak for the Lord as anyone else. (II Cor.11:13; II Pet.2:1) It is well to remember also that the Lord’s supervision over his people during the period of the Early Church was not through any one or two teachers or apostles, as it was in the case of Moses and Aaron.

The same principle is even more true today. No apostolic succession was ever authorized by God, nor is the church to be controlled by a few specially

chosen “clergy” members. While it is proper for consecrated believers to elect qualified brethren as elders, deacons, or in other service capacities, it is the Lord only, through the guiding influence of the Holy Spirit, who supervises his people. This is especially true 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 thankful acceptance of the Lord’s providences in every aspect of our lives.—I Pet. 5:6; Rom. 8:28; James 4:10

The development of a rebellious attitude toward another person might infect our character in other aspects of life’s affairs. In our work, for example, there may be those who are promoted ahead of us, when we feel that we are equally, or even better qualified. There may be little or nothing that can be done about situations of this kind, but we must guard against any rebellious spirit that might develop in our own hearts. Such a condition could well lead to bitterness which, if allowed to grow and develop, would eventually take us out of the love and favor of God.

We might even become rebellious against God’s providences in which others are not involved at all. Concerning a particularly difficult experience, we may ask, “Why did this have to happen to me?” A spirit of resentment against the Lord’s providences could be harbored, easily leading to bitterness that would hide the smiling face of our Heavenly Father from us, and result in the loss of his favor.

As we have already noted, sinful attitudes of this sort do not take possession of us suddenly. At first, as David said, they may be “secret faults.” It is only

through prayer and the daily searching of our hearts in the light of the principles of righteousness revealed through our “most holy faith,” that we are able to detect these small beginnings of sin. When we do detect them, we should quickly and diligently wield the “sword of the Spirit” to destroy the enemy.—Eph. 6:17

EXERCISING COMPASSION

Keeping ourselves in “the love of God” means that his love fills and controls our hearts, thoughts, words and actions to the greatest extent possible. One aspect of God’s love is his compassion. The psalmist said, “Thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.” (Ps. 86:15) How thankful we should be that the Heavenly Father has such compassion for us! In addition, however, he wants us to exercise similar compassion toward others, particularly for our brethren in the Truth, who may have deviated temporarily from the right way, or have stumbled and fallen.

As it has been so often stated, while we are to hate the sin, we are to love the sinner. We should not cease to endeavor to help those who have erred until it becomes unquestionably certain that it is no longer possible for them to be extricated from their sinful condition. Paul said, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness.” (Gal. 6:1) The disposition of mind and heart which will prompt us thus to do all we can to help an erring member of the body of Christ is a powerful influence in keeping ourselves in the love of God.

Those who keep themselves in the love of God will, as Jude indicates, hate “even the garment spotted by the flesh.” (Jude 23) Garments often symbolize that by which one is identified. A garment spotted by the flesh would indicate a condition in which professions and habits have arisen out of selfish, fleshly reasonings. Such a case would also give evidence that certain instructions of the Lord designed for correction have been ignored, and that the principles of divine righteousness and love have been set aside or forgotten.

If we are keeping ourselves in the love of God, we will hate any “garment” of this sort, and we will be especially on guard lest we be found wearing such clothing. Fully realizing the imperfections of our fallen flesh, we will diligently endeavor to keep it in subjection to the new mind, and rejoice to wear only the “robe of [Christ’s] righteousness.” This vesture, because of what it means to us, becomes a “garment of praise,” and a “raiment of needlework,” as we embroider upon it the various fruits and graces of the Spirit.—I Cor. 9:27; Isa. 61:3,10; Ps. 45:14

Let us continue to rejoice in the love and favor of God. Let us also “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints,” through which his love has been revealed to us. May we be more and more emptied of self and filled with divine love, which will spur us on to faithfulness in serving one another. Finally, let us help bear the burdens of our brethren, laying down our lives and “building up” one another in our “most holy faith.” ■