

Jude 1:22-23 “Rescue Operations”

For the Children: Perhaps you have seen people rescued on TV. Someone who has fallen off a cliff; or finds themselves in danger of drowning at the beach; or firemen pulling someone out of a burning house. Those who rescue others are often called “heroes.” When it comes to rescuing sinners from God’s judgement, we are not the heroes. The Lord Jesus is the only One who can save them. But He does use us to tell others the truth of the Gospel. We are showing mercy when we do so, even if they do not listen. God has shown us mercy, so we want to be part of His rescue work wherever we can. **Questions:** What are some of the ways in which we can help people who are in danger from error and sin? Many will not listen: Is it therefore a waste of time? In what cases do we need to be careful not to get too close to people we are trying to help?

Introduction:

First Point: Reinforcing Waverers

- 1) Those Who Are Doubting: The least extreme case among those affected by the mockers is those who were doubting. The word could also mean “disputing.” At any rate, they do not appear to have made up their mind entirely and were therefore more open to correction.
- 2) How to Show Mercy: The reader is commanded to show mercy to such people – and to keep on doing so, which requires patience and perseverance. Mercy is not shown by tolerating their error or sin; nor by simply avoiding them. We must try to convince them from God’s Word, while they are still more open to consider what we say. We do also show mercy by admonishing brethren when necessary. This mercy should be driven by the knowledge that we have also been shown mercy – and by the knowledge that there is joy in heaven when a sinner repents.

Second Point: Snatching Those Close to the Fire

- 1) Those Drawn to the Fire: The next step-up in extremity is those who draw close to, or even step in the “fire” – into those things that may bring God’s judgement upon them if they do not repent.
- 2) Plucking Them from the Fire: We are called to act as spiritual “firemen,” seeking to pluck them from the fire. This reflects the language of Zech.3:2, where the high priest, Joshua, and Jerusalem with him, are accused by Satan of deserving judgement. But the Lord says that He has plucked them from the fire. God rescues His people by covering their sins with Christ’s blood. That makes it possible for us to be used as means to pluck sinners from the fire: the effort is not a waste of time.
- 3) Agents of Salvation: As we do this “rescue work,” we are said to “save” others. Of course, God is the One who changes hearts and brings salvation. But He uses us as means, especially in bringing His Word to bear upon sinners. This, too, requires patience: the command implies continual effort to save by snatching from the fire.

Third Point: Dealing with the Polluted

- 1) Those with Polluted Garments: The last category is the most extreme: those who are steeped in sin, being thoroughly defiled or polluted by it. The tense implies past action with ongoing consequences.
- 2) Against Close Association: Those who are so defiled present a great danger to others. Their defilement affects everything – and often everyone – closely associated with them. We are warned to avoid close association with their world, described here as their “garment polluted by the flesh.” The garment in view is the tunic worn next to the skin – hence, that which is closely associated with them. See also Lev.13 on the garments contaminated by leprosy. These garments are to be “hated.” (Jude 1:23). The caution called for is that of partial distancing to avoid contamination. See 2 Thess.3:6,14. In the extreme, we may even have to break off contact (Mt.7:6).
- 3) Mercy Even in This Case: Yet even in this extreme case, we are to pity them. In Zech.3:3-5, the Lord removed Joshua’s filthy clothes and gave him festal robes and a clean turban. The Lord can cleanse even the most polluted sinners. Therefore, though we must exercise great caution in such cases, we still look for opportunity to show mercy – with fear, hating the “filthy garments.” We ourselves have been given a new set of clean clothes through the Lord Jesus (Rev. 3:4). We must take care not to dirty them by the wrong kind of association with the wicked. But those who are thankful and full of joy for that cleansing will also want to call on the wicked to repent, so that they, too, may share that joy.

Conclusion:

