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“Keep Yourselves in the Love of God” Jude 17-21 Sermon

Jude here is bringing the body of the letter to a close. In the last two verses he did two things. He began to address the true church, the beloved, and give them instructions. False teachers were in their midst, what were they to do? He tells them to remember the predictions of the apostles, that in the last time there would be scoffers.

The second thing he did in verses 17 and 18 is round off his arguments about the false teachers. He says in verse 18 that the scoffers about whom the apostles predicted would come were unspiritual, without the Spirit. This was his closing argument, false teachers do not belong in the church. So Jude began to address the true church and he then closed off his arguments about the intruders.

Here in verse 20 Jude once again takes up his instructions to the church. And as he does this, he will not mention the false teachers again. Verses 20-23 then are solely taken up with what Christians are to do when false teachers, ungodly people are present.

Really, even though the instructions are somewhat specific to the situation, these commands are actions believers should take throughout the course of their lives. The central command in these two verses is that believers should keep themselves in the love of God.

Jude, in verse 20, repeats word for word what he said in verse 17. He says, “*But you, beloved...*”—The word order in the English in verse 17 is different in some translations, but in the original both are the same. They both literally read, “*But you, beloved*”

Jude then as it were was looking into the eyes of the church. Antichrists had slithered in, what were they to do? Interestingly enough Jude does not command them to focus their attention on the intruders. Remember this was a general letter. It was not addressed to any one church but it was presumably sent to all the churches. The threat of false teachers was something Jude thought all the churches during this time needed to be aware of.

Jude does not give the details of the information he has about them nor do we know of how much or how little the churches knew about the false teachers. Jude does say they slipped in unnoticed in verse 4 and that they participated in their love feasts in verse 12.

This is different then what the apostle John does in 3 John. There he specifically names a man, Diotrephes, who was rejecting authority and causing divisions.

Jude does not do this. Jude was aware of the false teachers and that they were present in the fellowship of Christians, perhaps of several different places. So he warns the church to contend for the faith. Now Jude could have done a couple of things here.

After having solidified the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ would judge them on the last day and that this judgment was written about long ago, Jude could have said, “But you, beloved, you do not need to do anything” Since the Lord will judge them I place no commands upon you.

And since you are kept for Jesus Christ, as he said in verse 1, God is guarding you and therefore once again, you may remain passive. Or Jude could have commanded the church to go on a hunting expedition

for them. After having given the proofs and the kinds of characteristics the false teachers have, he could have commanded the church to root them out and extradite them.

This does not mean that disciplining action should not be taken at times against such people. Paul commanded the Corinthians to remove the man who had committed sexual immorality by taking his own father's wife. He said to them, "*let him who had done this be removed from among you*" (1 Cor. 5:2).

The church needs wisdom and grace from God to determine when and how to go about doing this. But here with Jude at this point, he did not want his hearers to focus on the ungodly but to focus on themselves. The central command is that they were to keep themselves in the love of God.

This central command comes not just to individuals, though it includes that, but it comes to the whole believing church collectively. Together they were to keep themselves in the love of God when faced with threats of ungodliness in these last days.

Even though the main command is to keep themselves in the love of God, Jude further describes the ways in which the church was to do this. And he does this by giving another group of three. So we are to keep ourselves in the love of God and how are we to do this?

He says believers are to be praying in the Holy Spirit, building ourselves in the most holy faith and waiting for the mercy of Christ that leads to eternal life. He first says believers are to build themselves up in the faith. Jude draws from the biblical image of the church as a building or temple.

This is what the apostle Paul did in Ephesians. He said that the Gentiles by faith were like the stones of a temple alongside Jewish believers and other Gentile believers; "*so then you are no longer strangers and aliens but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord*" (Eph. 2:19-21)

The glory and beauty of the OT temple was but a type of another temple, the true temple, and that is the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said to the Jews at one point in His ministry, while in the midst of the second Jewish temple, "*destroy this temple and three days I will raise it up*"

We are told that He was talking about the temple of His body. Christ's resurrection body is far more glorious and beautiful than the old temple ever was. And by faith in the power of the Spirit believers are united to this Holy Temple, his body.

We then have become living stones that make up this spiritual temple. And together we, Paul goes on to say, as this living temple, are a dwelling place of God's Spirit. Jude says we are to build upon this spiritual structure. What Jude had in mind here is not so much that the church is to seek to add new stones (though we should certainly pray and labor for this) but that through personal spiritual development the members of the church were to build upon and strengthen what was already there.

How do we do this? Jude says we are to build ourselves up "*in the most holy faith*". This holy faith is the faith he referred to in verse 3. It is the faith once for all delivered to the saints. What is this "*faith*"? It is the holy gospel revealed in the Old and New Testaments.

Paul says we are a living temple built upon the foundation of the apostles with Christ as the cornerstone. We are a living, breathing temple of the Spirit built upon the apostolic foundation of the teaching of the gospel, which has as its central core, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And it's not just this teaching but includes the characteristics of the whole life that this gospel teaching produces. In a word, it is true religion as that religion is expressed in our worship and in our daily lives.

This kind of life in the holy faith contrasts with the lives of the ungodly. *They* are blemishes at the love feasts. Judas Iscariot defiled the last supper Christ had with his disciples. Cain's offering was rejected by God.

And building ourselves in the faith contrasts also with the overall lifestyle of the ungodly who follow their own sinful desires and turn grace into sensuality. Now if we are the temple and we are built upon the apostolic foundation of the teaching of the gospel and if that gospel's substance is the death and resurrection of Christ, then building ourselves up in the faith means that we by God's grace, strengthen and build up our knowledge of Christ by feeding on His Word.

And not only feeding on the Word of Christ but letting the Word direct and guide how we live. Jude calls it the most holy faith, because the message of this faith comes from above. It is the gospel of God and we who believe it are holy people.

And what do we find in this apostolic teaching but the love of God for His people. So the first way we keep in God's love is through the building up that comes from absorbing the teaching of God's Word.

Next Jude says we are to keep ourselves in God's love by praying in the Holy Spirit. Again this activity on the part of true believers contrasts with the false teachers. They are devoid of the Spirit as Jude says in verse 19. They may "pray" but they do not do this in the power of the Spirit.

Jesus said that we are not to pray like the hypocrites who love to be seen by others. And He said do not pray like the Gentiles who heap up empty phrases thinking they will be heard for their many words.

In a sense then these groups "pray" but their prayers are despised by God because they are not prayers made in the name of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jude is also *not* speaking about some higher form of prayer made by Christians. In other words he is not saying there is regular prayer by Christians and then there is prayer in the Holy Spirit.

No, all believers have the Spirit. Paul says that "*anyone who does not the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him*" (Rom. 8:9). All believers by faith have received the Spirit, the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry "abba, Father". Wherever and whenever we pray, whether corporately or privately, we pray *in the Holy Spirit*, i.e. by the power of the Spirit.

In the power of the Spirit we voice our concerns to God. By faith we draw near to the Father, through the merit and mediation of Christ's blood. And we come boldly, because Christ has opened the way. The Bible commands us to pray at all times, without ceasing. Paul told his young protégé Timothy that he prayed for him day and night; "*I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day*" (2 Tim. 1:3)

In prayer friends we draw near to God and He draws near to us as James says; "*draw near to God and he will draw near to you*" (Ja. 4:8) In Spirit empowered prayer we draw near to God who is love and He comes near to us. Through prayer in the Holy Spirit we keep ourselves in the love of God. As one writer put it, "love for God cannot be sustained without a relationship with him, and such a relationship is nurtured by prayer"

So we keep ourselves in the love of God through building ourselves up in the teaching of the gospel, apostolic doctrine, or the most holy faith and by praying in the Holy Spirit.

Lastly we are to keep ourselves in God's love by waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. This "*waiting*" is not a passive waiting watching the time go by. The waiting Jude refers to here is another way in which we stay in the love of God.

This is an active, patient, and self-controlled looking forward to the return of Christ and the great mercy He will show to us on the last day. Having already shown us mercy by giving us faith and forgiving our sins He will consummate this mercy when He comes again. This is how Titus defined this "*waiting*". He said that the grace of God has appeared training us to "*renounce ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ*" (Tit. 2:11-13).

As we pray and feed on the gospel we are to have our minds and hearts fixed on that day. Jude says here that the mercy of Christ revealed on that day will lead to eternal life. Christ has already given us eternal life by His Spirit inside us but this life will be experienced in its fullness in body and soul with the appearing of Christ.

Eternal life in Christ includes the richness and the fullness of life that was intended for man from the beginning. It is unending life in the Spirit, in fellowship with Christ and in sinless communion with all the members of the church in a redeemed land free of corruption and free from the threat of enemies, whether external or internal.

In love God predestined us for this end, eternal life. Because of His love for us His Son suffered and died on a cross to purchase us and to acquire this inheritance for us. Therefore we remain in God's love by looking forward with eager expectation for this day. What this means though friends is that by God's grace we must put to death any love we have for *this* world and yearn for the world to come, that world that will come with the appearing of the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And so we keep ourselves in the love of God by building ourselves up in the faith, praying in the Spirit and eagerly yearning for the appearing of Christ. Beloved notice that these are largely activities of the mind. We remain in the love of God by the renewal of our minds as we think upon and love Jesus Christ as He is given to us in the holy gospel. And as our minds are renewed our love for God grows and our love for one another grows. Contending for the faith looks like this.

That last thing I want to consider here is the fact that Jude commands the church to do something to or for themselves with respect to spiritual matters. This is the central command of this section. He says "*keep yourselves in the love of God*". God has shown His love for us by giving His Son as a ransom for us and calling us to embrace His Son in the gospel.

Jude said this in verse 1. He said we are those who are called, beloved in God the Father. He has poured His love into our hearts by His Spirit. But this love *from* God produces in us a love *for* God. It is in this love that we are to remain.

And we abide in this love as we abide in Christ. Jesus said "*as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love*" (Jn. 15:9) Jude also says that we are kept by the power of God for Jesus Christ in verse 1. This is what the Bible teaches. Once we are called our faith is guarded by Christ and we are kept for Christ by the Father.

We are given the Spirit who will be with us *forever*. It is because God works in us that the church will persevere to the end. Therefore, God receives all the glory for our salvation from beginning to end. In verse 24 Jude gives glory to God who alone is able to keep us from stumbling. True believers then can never ultimately fall away from grace.

There are some who teach this, but if this was the case then it would mean that one of us who believe in Christ, could truly and finally fall away and become an unbeliever. If this is the case for one then why could it not be the case for all members.

If perseverance and keeping was truly left to our power, then we must admit that there remains the possibility that *every* member of the church could fall away. This is impossible. Jesus said that of all that the Father had given Him He would lose *none*.

No true believer can ultimately fall away from grace because God keeps us, He cannot deny Himself. But then we have clear commands like this to *keep ourselves*. What this means for us friends is that we are to know that God keeps us. And because He keeps us we, by faith and in the power of the Holy Spirit, are to keep ourselves in God's love.

And we do this in the ways that Jude has given; building, praying and waiting. In other words, God keeps us *through* the Spirit empowered activity and participation of the saints in keeping themselves in the love of God. Or as Paul said Christ's love *controls* us; "*For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised*" (2 Cor. 5:14-15)

When God who is able to keep us from stumbling, says keep yourselves in my love, we in the power of the Spirit listen and obey. In Jude's day God had ordained the entrance of scoffers to refine the true church's love for God. Beloved, He does the same thing for the church in every age, ordaining suffering that we might learn all the more to abide in His love. And as we do this by faith we imitate our Savior Jesus Christ who kept Himself in the love of the Father all the way to the cross.