

Contend for the Faith

Jesus Preserves Believers from Stumbling

Jude 24a

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Scripture

The Letter of Jude deals with the subject of false teaching, which is the greatest danger to the Church of Jesus Christ today.

As we study Jude 24a today, we will see that Jesus preserves believers from stumbling. Let's read Jude 24-25, although we will study only verse 24a today:

²⁴ Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24)

Introduction

If you have been a Christian for any length of time, you undoubtedly know of someone who once claimed to be a Christian but now no longer makes such a claim. There are, in fact, many such people. They claimed to be Christians at one time but now make no such profession. In fact, they may even deny Christianity.

I find it discouraging to see people profess faith in Christ one day and then deny him the next. Some questions come to mind:

- How do we know that we shall continue to be Christians throughout our lives?
- Is there anything that will keep us from falling away from Christ?
- Is there any possibility that we will turn away from Christ and lose the blessings of salvation?

These are the questions that we will address in the final two verses of Jude's letter.

But, first, let's review what we have covered so far.

Review

Jude began to write this marvelous letter to believers to encourage them with the wonderful truths “about our common salvation” (v. 3a). However, he “found it necessary to write appealing to [the believers] to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (v. 3b).

Why? Because word had reached Jude that false teachers had “crept in unnoticed.” They perverted the grace of God into sensuality and denied the deity of Jesus by their character, their conduct, and their creed (v. 4).

Jude said that God’s attitude toward false teachers was displayed in implacable judgment. He pointed to God’s attitude in his judgment of unbelieving individuals, rebellious angels, and sinful communities (vv. 5-7).

Jude then gave a description of false teachers. He said that false teachers were immoral (they “defile the flesh,” v. 8a), insubordinate (they “reject authority,” v. 8b), and irreverent (they “blaspheme the glorious ones,” vv. 8c-10).

Further, Jude said that false teachers disobeyed God (v. 11a), they influenced others to disobey God (v. 11b), and they led a full rebellion against God (11c).

He compared false teachers to five natural phenomena: hidden reefs (v. 12a), waterless clouds (v. 12b), fruitless autumn trees (v. 12c), wild sea waves (v. 13a), and wandering stars (v. 13b).

Jude noted that false teaching existed in ancient times (vv. 14-15), it exists in the present (v. 16), and it will exist in the future (vv. 17-19).

As Jude began to draw his letter to a close he said that believers avoid false teaching by growing spiritually in doctrine, prayer, obedience, and hope (vv. 20-21). And believers help others avoid false teaching by reaching out to the confused, the convinced and the committed (vv. 22-23).

Lesson

In our lesson today, Jude states quite simply that Jesus preserves believers from stumbling.

Jude said in verse 24a, “**Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling.**” He is saying that Jesus is able to keep believers from falling away from salvation.

Jude is affirming what theologians call “the perseverance of the saints,” or “the preservation of the saints.”

Dr. James Montgomery Boice, former pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, PA, and from whose writing I am drawing heavily today,¹ said that “the doctrine of perseverance means that God who has begun a good work in electing and then calling an individual to salvation, according to his own good purpose, will certainly keep on in that purpose until the person elected and called is brought home to the blessedness that has been prepared for him or her.”²

I. What Perseverance Is Not

First, before looking at the biblical teaching regarding perseverance, let us consider what perseverance is not.

A. *Perseverance Does Not Mean that Christians Are Free of All Spiritual Danger Just Because They Are Christians*

First, perseverance does not mean that Christians are free of all spiritual danger just because they are Christians.

New Christians are sometimes surprised by this. They think that coming to faith in Christ will somehow make all their troubles go away. However, the opposite is often in fact the case. When they become Christians they suddenly find that Satan and the

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive & Readable Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 518-526.

² *Ibid.*, 518.

world are now opposed to them. Prior to conversion they were on the same team as Satan and the world. But, after conversion they discover that Satan and the world are actively opposed to them.

Listen to Jesus' prayer for his disciples just before his crucifixion, "And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. . . . I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one" (John 17:11-15). Jesus knows that believers will face opposition from Satan and the world.

B. Perseverance Does Not Mean that Christians Are Free from Falling into Sin Just Because They Are Christians

Second, perseverance does not mean that Christians are free from falling into sin just because they are Christians.

Every new Christian soon discovers that he still sins. However, he also discovers that he does not want to sin anymore. He learns that his experience is the same as the Apostle Paul's, who wrote in Romans 7:15, "For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate."

The Bible is full of examples of people who were genuinely converted who still sinned. Yet they were not lost. In fact, there is not a single story in the whole Bible of anyone who was truly a child of God who was lost. Many were overtaken by sin for a season, but none perished.

C. Perseverance Does Not Mean that Those Who Merely Profess Christ without Being Born Again are Secure

And third, perseverance does not mean that those who merely profess Christ without being born again are secure.

Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless

one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Clearly, the new birth (regeneration) is required for salvation.

However, it is possible that some people profess faith and are not really born again. Specific warnings are given in Scripture to those who profess faith and are not really born again. For example, Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples” (John 8:31). Again, Jesus said, “But the one who endures to the end will be saved” (Matthew 10:22). Jesus is saying that the ultimate proof whether a person is truly born again is that he will persevere to the end. It is possible to be quite close to Christian things and yet not be truly born again.³

II. What Perseverance Is

Now, let’s examine what perseverance is.

Simply put, perseverance means that God will bring those who are born again safely to heaven for all eternity.

Our *Westminster Confession of Faith* states in the chapter on Perseverance: “They, whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved” (XVII:1).⁴

Perseverance means, as the Puritan Thomas Watson puts it, that “the heavenly inheritance is kept for the saints, and they are kept for the inheritance. . . . Though the saints may come to that place that they have but little faith, yet not to have no faith. Though their grace may be drawn low, yet it is not drawn dry; though grace may be abated, it is not abolished; though the wise virgins slumbered, yet their lamps were not quite gone out.”⁵

Perseverance means that once one is in the family of God he or she is always in that family.

The Bible is clear that those who are justified from sin cannot

³ *Ibid.*, 519-521.

⁴ *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996).

⁵ Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, reprinted 1978), 280.

be lost. For example, David wrote in Psalm 138:8, “The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever.”

The author of Hebrews declares in Hebrews 10:14, “For by a single offering he [i.e., Jesus] has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.”

The Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, 14, “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed. . . knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.”

The Old Testament often speaks specifically of the keeping power of God. In Psalm 121 the Lord is compared to a divine watchman whose concern is to keep watch over his people during their earthly lives. The words *keep*, *keeps*, or *keeper* are used six times in verses 3-8: “He will not let your foot be moved; he who *keeps* you will not slumber. Behold, he who *keeps* Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your *keeper*; the Lord is your shade on your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will *keep* you from all evil; he will *keep* your life. The Lord will *keep* your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.”⁶

III. What Paul Said About Perseverance

In the New Testament there are four important texts about perseverance. Two are from the lips of the Apostle Paul. And two are from the lips of Jesus.

Let’s see what Paul said about perseverance.

A. *Philippians 1:6*

The first great text on perseverance from the lips of Paul is

⁶ Boice, 521-522.

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found in Philippians 1:6:

“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

This is a condensed statement of the principle stated at greater length in other places—God finishes what he starts. Literally, the Greek says that God will “keep on perfecting his work until the day of Christ.”

The verse speaks of “a good work” which God will bring to completion. What is that good work? It is not spelled out very clearly in Philippians 1:6 but is in Romans 8:29. “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.” Is this something that is to happen in heaven only? Not at all! It is also God’s plan for us now. Philippians 1:6 is saying that God will not give up in his efforts to make us like Christ even now. So, God works in our lives through trial and hardship and suffering and discipline to make us more and more like Jesus. And God does that in the life of every single born again child of God.⁷

B. Romans 8:33-39

The second great text on perseverance from the lips of Paul is found in Romans 8:33-39:

“Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written,

‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor an-

⁷ *Ibid.*, 525.

gels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Paul lists three possible causes of separation from God’s love in these verses but then dismisses them all. Sin (in verses 33-34) cannot separate us from the love of God. Suffering (in verses 35-37) cannot separate us from the love of God. And supernatural powers (in verses 38-39) cannot separate us from the love of God.⁸

III. What Jesus Said About Perseverance

And finally, let’s see what Jesus said about perseverance.

A. *John 6:37-40*

The first great text on perseverance from the lips of Jesus is found in John 6:37-40:

“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

Having declared that all who have been given to him by the Father will in fact come to him, Jesus goes on to stress that he will certainly keep the ones who do come to him. In Greek this sentence contains a double negative which might be translated as follows: “and whoever comes to me I will never, never cast out.”

If the passage stopped at this point, it might be argued that the double negative refers only to Jesus’ receiving the one who

⁸ *Ibid.*, 524-525.

comes to him initially—that he will never, never reject anyone who comes to him—but that such a person may nevertheless decide to leave Jesus on his own initiative. But that is not possible.

As Jesus makes clear in the following verses, all who have been given to him by the Father and who therefore come to him and are received by him will be raised up at the last day. He will lose nothing of all that God has given to him.

B. John 10:27-30

The second great text on perseverance from the lips of Jesus is found in John 10:27-30.

This text follows the same outline as the verses in John 6. But in this case Jesus is responding to a request from his listeners to speak “plainly.” Of course, the difficulty was not in his speech but in their hearing. Nevertheless, Jesus replied in John 10:27-30:

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”

“I know that no one will snatch us out of Jesus’ hand,” says someone. “But suppose they choose to jump out of their own accord?”

“They shall never perish,” says Jesus.

“Never?”

“Never,” says Jesus. “They will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”

James Montgomery Boice has a wonderful picture to show how Jesus preserves believers for all eternity:

I have sometimes thought that what Jesus did in uttering these words was like something a carpenter often does. Sometimes in rough carpentry a workman will drive a long nail through thin-

ner boards so that the point sticks out the back. Then with a blow of his hammer he will drive the point of the nail sideways, embedding it in the wood. This is called clinching the nail. It makes the joint just a bit more firm because the nail cannot work itself out from this position.

This is what Jesus did in these verses. He was so interested in getting the doctrine to stick in his disciples' minds that he not only drove one nail, he drove two and clinched them both.

First, he taught that those who are his have been given eternal life. "I give them eternal life"—that is the nail. This alone makes the truth fast; for eternal life is life which can never be lost. If it could be lost after a few years or even after many years, it would not be eternal. Nevertheless, Jesus knew that many would attempt to explain it away. So he said, "They will never perish"—that is the clinch by which the doctrine of perseverance is made fast.

One nail, however well fastened, does not always make a good joint, though. So Jesus went on to drive a second nail and clinch that as well. His second nail, "No one will snatch them out of my hand." The clincher, "My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."

We can imagine ourselves to be a coin folded in his fingers. That is a secure position for any object but especially for us, considering whose hand holds us. But Jesus adds that the hand of God is over his hand. We are enclosed in two hands. We are doubly secure. If we feel insecure, we can remember that even when we are held in that manner, the Father and Son still have two hands free to defend us.⁹

Conclusion

Isn't this a wonderful way to end a letter? Jude reminds us that Jesus preserves believers from stumbling when he said, "**Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling.**" If you belong to Jesus, if you have been born again, if you have been justified, be assured of this: Jesus is able to keep you from stumbling. Amen.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 523-524.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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PRAAYER:

O Lord our God, thank you for preserving us until we see you in heaven. And thank you for sending your Son so that he also preserves us from stumbling.

And all of this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

To you who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ:

May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. Amen.