

Jude vv. 17-25
Keeping Ourselves in the Love of God
Keep yourselves in the love of God – v. 21

Every time I have occasion to read this tiny epistle written by Jude it seems that I can never escape the impact of the one and only command in the epistle found in v. 21 – the command to *keep yourselves in the love of God*. It certainly seems as if this entire epistle aims for that commandment.

Jude begins by expressing his desire to write on the subject of salvation. Indeed, he was ready to give great diligence to write on that subject as v. 3 indicates to us but necessity dictated that he address another issue, an issue not unrelated to the subject of salvation but an issue that arises out of the subject of salvation and that is the issue of contending for the faith which is tantamount to contending for the gospel or contending for the doctrine of salvation. **{see v. 3}**

Jude then presents a history lesson in which he demonstrates the severe consequences toward those who had abandoned the faith, even the Israelites in the wilderness who knew so much of God's love and power and provision but who nevertheless in the end failed to believe. God is a God of judgment, Jude goes on to say, and just as there have been corrupting influences to the gospel of salvation in the past so were there corrupting influences in Jude's day. Jude goes into great detail describing these gospel corrupters. *These are spots in your feasts of charity he says in v. 12 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 etc.*

In contrast to the mockers of the last time, Jude writes, *ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost*, and then here comes the command *keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life*.

Keep yourselves in the love of God. Maybe one of the reasons this text seems to jump off the page at me is because it is so needful for the follower of Christ in all ages and under any and every circumstance. When the trials of life are raging and the challenges of life seem insurmountable – keep yourself in the love of God. When life is going smoothly and everything seems to be falling into place and sailing in life has for a season become easy – keep yourself in the love of God. When life becomes strange and your circumstances seem inexplicable and you don't understand God's dealings with you – keep yourself in the love of God.

This is why I say it's an exhortation for all ages and for all circumstances. It's certainly a good and fitting exhortation for our time around the Lord's table and as we'll see in the course of our study, utilizing the Lord's table is certainly one of the ways that we keep ourselves in the love of God. And so I want to look at this exhortation or this command

this morning in preparation for our time around the Lord's table. And in our study we'll consider the need for such a command, the challenge such a command poses to us as well as the way such a command is to be kept.

Keep Yourselves in the Love of God

Consider with me, then, first of all:

I. The Need for Such a Command

Keep yourselves in the love of God – Jude writes. And the reason for such a command is readily apparent when you consider that without the love of God ruling our hearts we are nothing. Isn't that Paul's message in 1 Corinthians 13? *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.*

Don't these verses show us that you can sure have a lot and yet still amount to nothing so far as God is concerned. You can speak, you can be a gifted orator with the skill to capture and hold your listening audience bringing them to the edge of their seats as they hang on your every word, or you can understand mysteries, you can be knowledgeable, you may be a highly skilled theologian that knows how to reason from the scriptures and probe into the deep things of God. You can be among a small elite of men that have actually read Calvin's Institutes and Hodges Systematic Theology and the works of John Owen and others.

Or you can remove mountains because of your faith or you can be sacrificial even to the point of dying a martyr's death. You can have all these things and do all these things and yet still be nothing if you don't have the love of God ruling in your heart. You begin to see, I hope, the importance for such a command and our need to not only heed but diligently heed such a command. We must keep ourselves in the love of God.

The church at Ephesus demonstrates to us the truth of 1Cor. 13. There was a church that did have much. The church at Ephesus was a working church and a patient church and a discerning church. They could tell the difference between who was a true apostle and who was a liar and yet they failed to keep themselves in the love of God. *Thou hast left thy first love* Christ says to them in Rev. 2:4.

And because of that loss of their first love the church at Ephesus was a church in danger. They were in danger of having their candlestick removed which is tantamount to saying that they were in danger of losing their spiritual vitality altogether. The candlestick, you see, was fed by the oil that flowed through the pipes. The candlestick is a picture of the Holy Spirit's ministry of keeping a spiritual vitality going in our lives because our hearts are fueled, as it were, by the ministry of the Spirit.

It becomes readily apparent, then, doesn't it, that Christ himself places a very high premium on love. And it's no wonder that Christ places this premium on love for as John tells us in his first epistle *God is love*. Without love, then, there is no conformity to Christ. Christ loved his Father and rendered his obedience to his Father out of that love. If you're seemingly rendering obedience to God but it's not being generated by that love to Christ because of an awareness of his love to you then you may appear impressive outwardly but you're not impressive to God.

This command, then, to keep ourselves in the love of God is something that becomes foundational to every Christian duty we endeavor to perform. You can't be a good husband or a good wife if you don't keep yourself in the love of God. You can't be a good parent without keeping yourself in the love of God. You won't be a good neighbor, you won't be a good employee or employer you won't be a good citizen of your country if you fail to keep yourself in the love of God.

Paul writes to the Galatians in Ga 5:6 that *in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love*. James tells us in his epistle that faith without works is dead – I think we could add that faith without love is also dead, for our works must spring from that love we have for Christ.

Stop and think about it for a moment – do you not know it to be true in your own experience? Can you remember the time when the love of Christ won your heart? You were able to sing with the hymn writer – *That man of Calvary, has won my heart from me, and died to set me free, blessed man of Calvary*. You knew a love that caused your heart to burn with devotion and zeal. You ran in the power of love because your heart was filled with thanksgiving to Christ for what he had done to save your soul. You showed the same kind of zeal that the Galatians showed who were willing to pluck out their own eyes and give them to Paul.

But through the failure to keep yourself in that love you slowed down, you, more or less, settled into a routine and in the end you went through the motions of your Christian duties but missing from those duties was that bright burning flame of devotion that had energized you in the past.

How thankful we should be this morning that the Lord's table is designed to bring us back to our first love, back to the realm of God's love. It is through this sacrament that we can render obedience to the command to keep ourselves in the love of God. This is the means to returning to that love and it's the means for keeping ourselves in that love.

We see, then, the need for the command to keep ourselves in the love of God. Would you consider with me next:

II. The Challenge of the Command

Keep yourselves in the love of God our text tells us. So much of our joy and peace and stability depends on our ability to take heed to such a word. And yet such a word does present a challenge to the follower of Christ. This is not to suggest that the realm of God's

love is a slippery place or that the love of God for his redeemed ones ever varies. There is no variableness or shadow of turning with God (James 1:17). And so his love is constant. Nothing can separate us from that love. Paul lays great stress on that fact by elaborating many particulars at the end of Romans 8 that would endeavor to move us from the love of God. *For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Paul was persuaded of this love the passage says, he was persuaded that nothing could separate us from it. And in that phrase *I am persuaded* I think we find the thing that varies where the love of God is concerned. It is not the actual love of God itself – that can never vary. But the degree to which we're persuaded of that love can know great variableness.

Let's face it there are times when we doubt the love of God. There are times when we're barely persuaded of it. This was certainly the case with the Psalmist when he cried out in Ps. 77:7 *Will the Lord cast off for ever? And will he be favorable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?*

Don't such expressions stand in stark contrast to being persuaded the way Paul was persuaded in Rom. 8? The storms of life can greatly weaken the degree to which we're persuaded of God's love. The disciples who accompanied Christ throughout His earthly ministry were anything but persuaded when they cried out in Mk. 4:38 *Carest thou not that we perish?* And so the command in our text presents a challenge to us – not because of God's variableness but because of our own variableness. We experience various degrees of persuasion and the challenge to keeping ourselves in the love of God becomes the challenge of keeping ourselves persuaded of the love of God.

The Lord's table is designed to keep you persuaded. Here is something that is fixed and steadfast and sure in the midst of the ups and downs of life – Christ became a man and gave his body to be broken for you. Christ was nailed to a cross and he shed his blood for you. Do those glorious truths ever change? When life's storms are crashing all around you and it seems like nothing more can go wrong because everything is already going wrong – does that nullify the truth of Christ or the power of his atoning blood? You know that it doesn't but you also know that when the challenges of life confront you it becomes very easy to take your eyes off Christ and focus on the angry waves instead. This is why the Lord's table is so important. It calls us back to a right focus that enables us to put everything in its right perspective.

So the text poses a challenge to us because of our own variableness. That challenge becomes more acute because of the times in which we live. Notice what was taking place in the days of Jude – days that are called in v. 18 *the last time* which would certainly encompass our days also. In those days as well as our there was and is a denying of the Lord – v. 4 *For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained*

to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

The thing to note about Christ deniers is that they're subtle. They may not directly assault the doctrine of Christ's person and Christ's work – what they'll do, rather, is deny it practically by abusing the notion of grace. They have a form of godliness but know nothing of the power. And where their influence spreads others are brought into the same condition of mere externalized religion. Externalized religion you could say is “feeling-less” religion and hence the love of Christ is reduced to a mere dogma that becomes abused and twisted in order to justify what really amounts to a love for the world and a love for carnal pleasures.

It can also be said of such times that not only is there a denying of the Lord but there follows a defiling of the flesh. *Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities* – v. 8. How often do we have occasion to cry out – *Lord, save me from being a filthy dreamer!* When we are bombarded with immorality and untold temptations to the flesh from any and every source we need deliverance from the thoughts of our minds and hearts and the defilement that our hearts bring upon us.

So we find a climate described in which there is a denying of the Lord, a defiling of the flesh – we could add there is also a defiance of authority – cf. v. 8 (again). The degree to which such defiance occurs in our day can only be described as depressing. Children defy their parents – students defy their teachers – workers defy their bosses – citizens and non-citizens defy the government and government defies those they claim to represent.

All of this defiance boils down to what may be described as a fierce spirit of independence that ultimately defies God himself and the authority of his word. It's the spirit that is described in Judges as *each one doing that which is right in his own eyes*. It doesn't matter how the preacher expounds God's word – it doesn't matter what God's word plainly states – *we'll do what we want* – and this becomes the driving force behind men's actions.

I could add more from this epistle of Jude to the description of the culture of the last time but I think you begin to see the challenge of the command from what I've give you already. The current against which we must swim is the current of denial, defilement, defiance as well as deadness – *twice dead* it says in v. 12. And in such conditions as these we know too well what Christ Himself said prophetically in Mt 24:12 *And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.*

And so we find ourselves challenged when it comes to keeping ourselves in the love of God. Our own variableness contributes to that challenge and the culture in which we live contributes to that challenge. The thing we must consider finally is how that challenge is to be met and that leads to my last point. We've seen the need for the command, the challenge of the command – consider with me finally:

III. The Keeping of the Command

Keep yourselves in the love of God. We need that command and we want to rise to the challenge of the command. We know what forces of resistance make the command challenging. How do we do it? How do we keep ourselves in the love of God?

The text is very explicit when it comes to instructing us on how this is to be done. Notice the beginning of verse 20 where it says *But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith.* To edify and to build up in the faith mean the same thing. And this is how we keep ourselves in the love of Christ by edifying ourselves and edifying each other which amounts to taking each other to heart by encouraging one another and by ministering and sharing the things of Christ with one another. What it amounts to is an effort to be constantly growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Don't ever make the mistake of thinking that you've exhausted the truth of God's love in your understanding or experience. We are far, you see, from fully comprehending the dimensions of His love. I dare say that the most seasoned Christian has barely begun to scratch the surface of all that Christ's love entails. And so it was Paul's prayer that the Ephesians would *be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God* (Eph. 3:18,19).

And here again – the Lord's table serves the purpose of adding to that comprehension. I hope today that as you remember Christ's broken body and shed blood you will scale new heights and plumb new depths of that love and that you will indeed be filled with all the fulness of God. By coming away from the Lord's table with such an experience you will have gone far in keeping yourself in the love of God.

The first precept that must be applied, therefore, is the precept of edification – building up yourselves on your most holy faith. In close connection with edification comes intercession – notice the rest of v. 20 *building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost.*

If we would keep ourselves in the love of God and not be swept away by the flood tide of denial, defilement, and defiance then we must give ourselves to prayer. We must plead for the Holy Spirit to minister the love of Christ to our hearts. The place of prayer, you see, is where we make use of the knowledge we gain of Christ. It is in prayer that we appropriate to ourselves the love of Christ. It is in prayer that we open our hearts to the Spirit of Christ in order to hear Him say to our souls *I am thy salvation.* This is why prayer is a vital practice in our observance of the Lord's supper. We must be given to prayer.

This entire 20th verse, I feel, indicates to us that there is no neutral ground when it comes to our walk with Christ. We will either go against the current of a depraved culture or we'll be swept away by it. There's no such thing as taking our ease in the midst of it – any more than you could take your ease while rafting through the rapids of some mighty river. And so we must press on to build ourselves up in the faith and we must press on in prayer. There is an element of edification, an element of intercession, and then there's an element of anticipation.

Look at the rest of verse 21 – *keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life*. This is the prize we anticipate – everlasting life and the grounds of our hope is in the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. This glorious anticipation is conveyed even more forcefully through the benediction of v. 24 – Look at what we are able to anticipate in that verse – {v. 24}.

How do we keep ourselves in the love of God, then? We do so by keeping our minds and hearts on the prize of being presented faultless before the presence of His glory. What condescending love has come our way in order to lift us to such a place. By basking in the love behind such a gracious and exalting provision we will indeed keep ourselves in the love of God. Let's make that our aim, therefore, as we meet around the Lord's table. We will keep ourselves in the love of God – as Paul puts it in 2Thess. 3:5 *The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ*. May our hearts be so directed this day.