

Epistle of Jude Chapter 1

by A.B. Simpson

The Epistle of Jude warns against false brethren who are corrupting the Church and encourages believers to contend for the faith and live a holy life.

Scripture: Jude 1:1

Topics: "Contending for the Faith", "Warnings Against False Teachers"

Description

A.B. Simpson expounds on the Epistle of Jude, emphasizing its solemn warnings and spiritual lessons. He highlights Jude's identity as a servant of Jesus Christ and the importance of being sanctified, preserved, and called. Simpson warns against false teachers who distort grace and encourages believers to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. He concludes with a call to build oneself in faith, pray in the Holy Spirit, and look forward to the mercy of Christ, while also providing practical guidance for soul-winning. The sermon culminates in a doxology that praises God for His ability to keep believers from stumbling.

Transcript

This little epistle of twenty-two verses and less than seven hundred words is replete with the most solemn warnings and the loftiest spiritual lessons, conveyed with a vigor and vividness worthy of comparison with some of the finest visions of the old prophets, such as Jeremiah, Hosea, and Zephaniah.

Its author is Jude, referred to in the fourteenth chapter of John as "not Iscariot," and describing himself here as "Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, the brother of James." The James to whom he refers as his brother is the author of the Epistle of James, and was one of the three most prominent apostles, and associated with Peter and John in many of the important scenes in the life of our Lord. He was the presiding officer in the church at Jerusalem, and represented in a special way the Hebrew element in the early Christian Church. He was also the presiding officer of the council at Jerusalem described in the fifteenth chapter of Acts. He and Jude both were literal brothers of the Lord Jesus, afterwards born of the same mother. But their earthly relationship was completely dropped and forgotten in the higher bond of the heavenly Master and the earthly disciple.

The epistle is addressed "to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called." If this language be too strong to apply to all Christians literally, it is well to remember that the Lord assumes that all the disciples of Christ are living up to their true standard. He speaks of them all, therefore, as "sanctified," "preserved," and "called," because all ought to be conformed to this divine standard.

To be truly sanctified is not merely to be chosen and set apart as the people of God, but to be self-surrendered and wholly dedicated to Christ, and then really filled with the Holy Spirit, cleansed from sin, and conformed to the character of Jesus Christ.

But even after this experience we still need to be "preserved." No blessing takes us out of the sphere of temptation, and the Christian's attitude is one of abiding and being "preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The expression "called" has reference, we believe, not so much to a spiritual experience as to the divine purpose in each life, and the special ministry and service which God has for each of His children, to which we are called as the servants of Christ, and for which we are specially enabled by the enduement of the Holy Ghost.

Then follows the writer's salutation: "Mercy unto you, and peace, and love, be multiplied." "Mercy" is the divine fountain of all our blessings. "Peace" is the stream that flows from that fountain. "Love" is the expression of divine fellowship toward all His redeemed children.

After this introduction the epistle naturally divides itself into the following sections:

- I. Certain reference to salvation and the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ (verse 3).
- II. Warnings against false brethren who had crept in among them and were exercising a baneful influence in the Church of God (verses 4-13).
- III. A remarkable announcement of the Lord's second coming, quoted from Enoch (verses 14-16), coupled with warnings (verses 17-19).
- IV. A beautiful exhortation to the true followers of the Lord Jesus Christ (verses 20, 21).
- V. Counsels about Christian service and soul-winning (verses 22, 23).
- VI. A glorious doxology (verses 24, 25).

I. "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that you should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." (Jude 3.)

In this remarkable passage two phrases of striking significance are used. First, he speaks of the "common salvation." By that he means the salvation which belongs alike to Jew and Gentile and is offered to every sinner on equal terms. Its watchword is, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Next, he uses the still more striking expression, "The faith which was once [for all] delivered unto the saints." This is the meaning of the Greek word translated "once." The writer's idea is that God's word of salvation has been proclaimed once as His final word, and as the one Gospel that He ever will offer to lost men. It is here described not so much as a system of truth, but rather as a faith, something to be believed. The Gospel is not a theory but a faith. There is nothing in the Gospel of the nature of theory, philosophy, and speculation. Every word is given for faith to claim, and for love to obey. And so it is called "the faith" rather than "the creed." Beloved, have we added our faith to this Word of God, and are we standing first upon and then standing for this faith "once for all delivered unto the saints"?

Jude reminds them that they must "earnestly contend" for this faith. The enemy will try to destroy it, either by discrediting the Word of God, or by keeping us from fully believing it. The apostle, therefore, means that "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" should be preserved in its integrity. There is no new Bible for modern times, and there is no part of the old Bible that is obsolete. Are we believing and living every bit of it and proving in our lives that Jesus Christ and His Word are "the same yesterday, and today, and forever"?

II. Jude now proceeds to expose certain false brethren, whose pernicious influence is already defiling and subverting the Church. Peter had warned his readers that in the last days such mockers should come, and perhaps Jude is referring to Peter when he says, "But, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts." The book of Jude was evidently written after Peter, and the things which that apostle had intimated, had already come. Briefly summed up, the false teachers against whom he directs the larger portion of his epistle, were as follows:

1. Certain men had crept in unawares, and, through their personal and pernicious influence, error and sin were being communicated and circulated. The false seed consists not merely in false doctrine, but in living embodiments of it. It is error in an ungodly and wicked man, which is Satan's choicest instrument of attack upon Christianity, and the adversary is always trying to sow these tares in the Lord's husbandry.

2. The particular character of their false teaching was "turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness." They abused the doctrine of divine grace by proclaiming liberty to sin because of Christ's salvation. They especially encouraged and practiced the sin of moral uncleanness. Jude speaks of them again in the eighth verse as "filthy dreamers" who "defile the flesh"; and in the sixteenth verse as "walking after their own lusts." In the tenth verse he uses still more realistic language in describing their coarse and brutal depravity: "What they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves."

3. The result of their teaching and their lives is "denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ." Elsewhere in the Scriptures we are reminded that men may confess Christ by their lips, but by their works deny Him.

4. These wicked men were also intolerant of all spiritual authority, self-willed, and scornful of the restraints and the warnings of those that were over them in the Lord. They "despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities." Already, in the time of Paul, such men had risen, setting at naught his apostolic authority, ridiculing his peculiarities and infirmities, and claiming for themselves the highest spiritual authority as equally inspired and authorized to teach and command.

These false teachers were schismatics and tried to break up the peace and harmony of the Church. "These be they who separate themselves." They claimed a higher sanctity and larger liberty and a loftier experience.

5. But Jude declares they were "sensual, having not the Spirit." Now this is an unfortunate translation. The word translated "sensual" literally means "psychical." That is the favorite word of our modern new theologians. They claim to be psychical. They mean some higher, finer quality of ethical and spiritual life. But Jude says they did not have the Holy Spirit, but merely a human spirit. They were what might be called "soulish people." We find this type among Christian Scientists, Spiritualists, and Theosophists. It is a Satanic imitation and counterfeit of the Holy Ghost. It is the devil's spirituality and not the Lord's.

6. Jude next proceeds to emphasize his warnings against these teachers by a threefold reference to God's judgments in the past, against those guilty of such errors and crimes. "I will therefore put you in remembrance, though you once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not. And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire."

First, he reminds them of God's judgments upon His own people Israel even after He saved them from the land of Egypt, when they fell into sin in the wilderness, as they did on several occasions through the weakness of Aaron and the wickedness of Balaam.

Secondly, he recalls the doom of those "angels which kept not their estate," but fell into sin. The nature of their sin has been the subject of much controversy, some even alleging that they were guilty of impure and literal connection with human beings, and that it was through such vile intercourse between demons and the daughters of men in the days of Noah that the giants of that age were born, and the earth was filled with violence and sin. There is no need, however, that we should go beyond the simple statement of Jude and other Scriptures. We may simply apply this to the fall of those beings who once were holy angels, but now are demons, doomed to everlasting judgment.

Thirdly, he tells them of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the special reason for that fearful retribution; namely, the defiling of their own bodies both in natural and unnatural sins of the flesh.

7. Next, Jude gives us three types of these wicked men in the eleventh verse: "Woe unto them; for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core."

The first of these types is Cain, who represents the unbelieving man, the man who rejects the blood, and who presumes to approach God in his own righteousness. This is the type that is growing so common today, the men who reject the cross, dishonor the blood, and go about to establish their own righteousness.

Balaam is the second type. Balaam represents the world, especially the attempt on the part of the followers of God to compromise with the world. This, too, alas, is the almost universal type of the worldly church of today.

The third type is Core (Korah) who rose up in rebellion against the authority of Moses and claimed for himself and his brethren an equal right to receive and proclaim the will of God. This is our blatant new theology, claiming that the gifted intellects of our time are just as true prophets of God as Isaiah, Paul, and John.

8. Finally, Jude reaches his climax in a series of magnificent and awful metaphors, whose fiery eloquence it would be difficult to translate into ordinary speech. "These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withers, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever."

Briefly summed up, these lurid sentences imply that these wicked men, with cool and insolent assurance, were making themselves perfectly at home in the love feasts of the Church, and presuming to make these sacred feasts occasions for their own gluttony and indulgence. The apostle compares them to empty clouds at the sport of every wind; showy trees whose luxuriant foliage bears no fruit; rolling waves of the sea frothing with the foam of their own wickedness; falling meteors which blaze out for a moment in the sky of night and then disappear in the darkness forever. God save us from any partnership with such awful examples of ungodliness, wickedness, and presumption. But let us not forget that the picture belongs to the last days, and that the last days are upon us.

III. "And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him."

In an old apocryphal book called the Book of Enoch, we have this prophecy almost word for word. Whether the Book of Enoch has any real authority or not, no doubt the prophecy was really given and divinely revealed to Jude. He notes particularly the fact that Enoch was the seventh from Adam, as though it had some typical significance. Did it mean that in Enoch the race reached its perfect development, seven being the number of perfection? Certainly Enoch's prophecy is one of the most complete and striking revelations of the Lord's coming to be found in the Holy Scriptures. And as certainly Enoch himself was made a glorious example of the translation of the saints before the coming of the Lord.

1. He announces the Lord's coming with His saints. That is not His parousia to take away His waiting bride, but His glorious epiphany when He will come back with His saints, and judge the wicked world, and set up His millennial throne.

2. He announces the judgment which the Lord is to execute upon the ungodly. There are some striking expressions here. Not only is He to judge the wicked, but He is to convince and convict them of their wickedness, so that there shall be no answering back in that day, but every conscience shall admit its guilt, "that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." This judgment is not for the saints, but for the wicked world. Thank God, we are saved from that by our glorious Substitute, who bore our judgment on the cross of Calvary. The coming of the Lord is here recognized in its relationship to the wicked. The saints are only seen as assessors with the Judge, and sharers in His glory and His dignity.

IV. But now Jude turns from this painful picture of wickedness, and addresses to the saints one of the sweetest and loftiest messages in all this volume of inspiration. "But you, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

1. He bids them build themselves upon their most holy faith. The same word "faith" which we notice in the beginning of the epistle is fundamental in Christian life and character as here portrayed. It is a process of building, but faith is the foundation of all. It is the same thought which Peter expresses in his second epistle: "Add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity." (2 Peter 1: 5-7.) Christian life grows, not by adding one grace to another in our human character building, but by taking every grace directly from Jesus Christ Himself, and making each addition

to the building on act of simple faith. We become complete in holiness simply by appropriating the life of Jesus, moment by moment, until He has become incarnate in all our actions and relationships.

2. "Praying in the Holy Ghost." This is the process by which our life is built up. It is a continual communion in the Spirit, a breathing out of self, a breathing in of Christ; and just as the human body grows by the exhaling of our exhausted breath and the inhaling of fresh life moment by moment, so the secret process of the soul's growth is a ceaseless fellowship with God in the Holy Ghost. Each moment brings some new need, and that need is transformed into a prayer, and that prayer into a grace, and that grace into an added element in our Christian character and life. There is not a moment in our conscious existence that we may not be thus occupied in communion, and there is not a thing that comes to us that should not be made an occasion for this unceasing habit of prayer.

3. "Keep yourselves in the love of God." Here we have the element in which we grow. It is a glorious tropical climate of divine love. It is ever warmed by the sunshine of His heart and illumined by the radiance of His smile. It does not mean our love to God, but it means our constant consciousness and recognition of His love to us. It is the same thought which the Lord Jesus expressed in the fifteenth chapter of John: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; continue [or, live] in my love."

4. The last step in this beautiful ascent is hope. "Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." That means looking for the coming of our Lord and for the glory that is to be brought unto us at His appearing. It is the uplook of a spirit that is ever gazing sunward, heavenward. How beautifully Dr. Bonar has expressed it:

"My hopes are passing onward, upward,
And with my hopes my heart has gone;
My eyes are turning skyward, -- sunward,
Where glory brightens 'round yon throne."

V. For a moment Jude turns his thought toward the sinner, and he gives two very practical directions for service and soul-winning. "And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh."

First, we are to save people by compassion. We must love souls if we would win them. And surely, if we realize their danger and their need, we shall understand the compassion of which the apostle speaks. We are to have great tenderness, gentleness, and love, or we shall be little used in bringing men to God.

But there are others with whom we must take a different course, and sometimes the sternest measure is the kindest. It is said that Mr. Moody was once talking with an inquirer who tried him with his indifference. Mr. Moody broke away from him, saying, "I guess God can get along without you, if you can get along without Him." And for the remaining meeting Mr. Moody paid no attention to the man. First, the man's pride was wounded, but soon his conscience was aroused, and before the meeting was over, he himself came imploring the prayers of the evangelist. Sometimes we must use messages as severe as Jude's strong language expresses, "pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh," and, making no compromise with sin or cowardice, press the soul right through to the most real and complete confession and renunciation of all sin as the only condition of the mercy and peace of God.

VI. Finally, Jude closes with this beautiful doxology: "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God and Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."

1. He speaks of "him that is able to keep you from falling." This is an inadequate translation. Literally it means from "stumbling." He is not only able to keep us from the great falls, but from the slightest missteps. Oh, let us claim this great and wonderful grace.

2. He is "able . . . to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." This is His purpose. For this end He is taking us through all processes of His grace and all the discipline of His love. Some day we shall understand and thank Him for it all. Some day we shall shine forth in the kingdom of our Father even as He, "faultless" or "without blemish," which the original word literally means.

3. He is here described as "the only wise God our Savior." This is a glorious name, and it is given to Jesus, the Son of man, our blessed Savior. Let us adore His glorious majesty as well as love His wondrous grace.

4. To Him "be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."

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