

Abiding Fruit

Informing the Mind & Inflaming the Heart

Vol. 2 No. 20

February 4, 2007

Keeping & Being Kept Jude 21, 24

This brief letter (25 verses) is packed with powerful statements about spiritual perversity and the coming catastrophic judgment of God against sinners. Therefore, for these reasons alone, the book is worthy of deep study and reflection. The Apostle Jude (brother of the James, and therefore half-brother of our Lord) originally intended to write to his readers about the glorious subject of the believer's salvation (vs. 3), but felt that it was more important to write about contending for the faith. From this point on in the book (vs. 4 – 23) he is concerning with dealing with the two issues outlined above. He provides numerous examples of both concerns mixing his treatise with applications from various illustrations. Jude is a marvelous book to study especially given the present climate of the Church.

Jude is concerned enough for his readers to give them fair warning about spiritual false teachers (apostates) who seduce the Christian who is not paying attention to the truth. It appears that Jude wrote his letter after 2 Peter (written by Peter), because when Peter refers to false teaching, he speaks as if it is a problem on the rise, whereas Jude speaks of it as an accomplished fact. The false teachers were active and present among the churches. Thus, Jude writes pointedly to get believers to realize the danger to themselves and the Church as a whole.

These apostates have crept into the church (vs.12), they are very accomplished in the art of flattery (vs.16), they have perverted God's grace (vs.4), and they were working on causing divisions within the church (vs.19). One of the great questions requiring an answer, is whether an apostate is Christian or not. Jude answers this clearly affirming that no Christian can ever be an apostate. The reason ultimately for this is because of verses 21 and 24, where we are to *"keep ourselves in the love of God"* (vs. 21), and more importantly it is God who is keeping us (vs. 24) from falling away. These two statements alone direct our attention to our relationship to God in two ways, firstly, from our perspective (vs. 21), and then from God's perspective (vs. 24). This tells us that the Christian has a responsibility and will exercise that responsibility to keep himself or herself in the love of God. This is not the only injunction here, for in verse 20, we are encouraged to *"build ourselves up in our most holy faith,"* to *"pray in the Holy Spirit,"* and in verse 21, *"to wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life."*

Jude greets his readers as *"those who are called"* (vs. 1). This calling results in being loved by God and in preservation. The New Testament speaks of two kinds of calling. There is the outward call that goes to all men in the preaching of the Word of God (Matt. 20:16), and there is the inward call (effectual call) by the Holy Spirit (John 5:25; Rom. 8:28) resulting in regeneration and conversion. These are the readers of Jude's epistle, and by extension we regard ourselves also as the called of God by virtue of the New Birth. They had heard the outward call, and had responded in faith and repentance to it.

One of the results of a genuine call is godly sorrow for sin (Jer. 31:9). This is seen in the life of the prodigal son (Luke 15:17-19). Another result is holy wonder at the goodness of God extended to you. Peter refers to this as being called out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Pet.2:9). There is also the freedom and desire to be obedient to God. Every believer must give evidence of his or her call. This will be seen in a change of heart and change of behavior.

Jude addresses the effects of this calling in verse 1. The Authorized Version (KJV) uses the word “*sanctified*” whereas other versions either use “*loved by God or (be)loved in God the Father*”. The calling of God results in either of these two states. Genuine conversion produces a sanctified life, and salvation is indicative of God’s love to us and for us and of our being in the sphere of God’s love. These I call the display of God’s love or the position of being loved by God. The calling of God results in this inestimable privilege.

God the Father is the author of this great love and of our sanctification. Sanctification may be said to be from God the Father, in the Son and through the Spirit. Each Person of the Trinity is active in the believer’s sanctification. We are “*kept by or for Jesus Christ.*” God’s work in our lives springs from His love and our continuing in the faith is preserved by Christ. As God begins His good work in us, He will see it through to completion. He will perfect that which is imperfect. God’s love is manifest now in the present, but His preservation applies to the future.

The word “*keep*” (τηρέω) has a number of meanings, these being; keep, observe, pay attention to, keep under guard, keep in custody, keep back, hold onto, reserve, maintain, and keep firm. In verse 1, Jude has the idea of keeping from harm or disturbance, and this fits with the context. The apostates are causing disturbance, they are upsetting believers, and therefore, it is to the believer’s advantage and help to know that Christ is keeping them secure.

To be “*kept for Jesus Christ*” (vs. 1) implies that the goal of our calling is Christ sometime in the future, but this seems weaker to me in light of the context of the epistle. It is true that we are kept for Christ. He will lose none of His own (John 6:37-40; 10:28, 29). The emphasis in John is on security relating to eternity, but in Jude, it is on present preservation. He keeps us presently, thus we can make the connection immediately with verse 24. In verses 20 and 21 there are four commands. We are introduced to, two great means of perseverance: love and hope. “*Keep yourselves*” is not stating that salvation depends upon our own efforts. Salvation is by grace through faith, and not of ourselves –it is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8, 9). In verse 1, the word “*kept*” refers to being kept from harm by Christ. He is the one who keeps the believer safe. There is a sense here in which this is also true. Keep yourselves from harm so that you can enjoy the love of God in the future, however, the word “*keep*” can also mean “*to maintain*”, and I prefer this here because of the context (especially in vv. 20, 21).

Keeping ourselves in the love of God is connected with building and praying (vs. 20). We are to make use of the means to preserve ourselves from the doctrinal errors of the false teachers. By what means shall this be done? It is by keeping ourselves in the love of God. Perseverance is both a human work and a divine work (Phil. 2:12, 13), but this perseverance is not a keeping ourselves from harm physically, but rather a means of keeping ourselves spiritually. Physical protection offers no help against false teaching, but spiritual protection keeps the believer safe (cf. John 17:12, 14, 15). “*In the love of God*” is the love of which God is the author (cf. John 15:9, 10). Jude speaks of God beginning this love in us, and of our keeping it, maintaining it, and increasing in it. Verses 24 and 25 conclude Jude’s letter in the form of a doxology. All doxologies focus on the glory of God. There is no glory found in man. God does two things in verse 24. First, “*He is able to keep you from stumbling*”, and second, He is able “*to present you blameless before the presence of His glory with great joy.*” The *stumbling*, here, is a falling into apostasy. We are preserved by the promise of God and then indirectly by the power of God (cf. John 17:11-15). It is preservation from complete destruction. The keeping power of God is directly related to His ability to preserve. According to God’s ability we are kept secure, therefore our security is absolutely certain (unlike the apostate whose destruction is absolutely certain). It is God who prevents us from falling into apostasy. Praise God He keeps us, for if He did not we would fall away, but let us go on keeping ourselves in the love of God.