

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Pretense versus Reality

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 withereth, 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 for ever. And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh 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. (Jude 12–15, KJV 1900)

Regardless of the theological bent, perhaps one of the most common disputes among Christians deals with who belongs to the Lord and who doesn't, who is and who isn't a child of God. This foolish and often self-serving attitude thrives despite Jesus' pointed condemnation of it in the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares. All humans are not children of God. Hell shall be populated. However, Jesus' warning in the parable goes to the heart of the attitude's greatest danger. When people who profess to be informed believers pass blanket judgments against other people, accusing them of being wicked depraved sinners, they do irreparable damage to other believers. Jesus' reason for not immediately plucking up the tares was that, in pulling up the tares, the precious wheat plants would be damaged. It is believed that the tares in the parable refer to a weed common to wheat farmers in first century Judah that looked almost identical to the wheat plant during most of its growing cycle. Only as the plant reached maturity and approached the time of harvest did the differences appear that made distinction from wheat plants clear. The workers wanted to immediately go out and tear up the tares, but Jesus in the parable forbids it because of potential damage to the wheat plants. I grew up on a farm. Regardless of the crop grown, weed plants are almost always far more rugged than fruit-producing plants. They will survive most efforts to eliminate them, while the crop plants are often fragile and need special care to grow a good harvest. In the analogy of the wheat and the tares, this point might well apply. Tares focus on their own survival and on proliferating their kind, while wheat plants focus on producing wheat that benefits others. How does this point translate into Biblical teaching regarding denying self and serving God by serving others?

While we should respect and follow Jesus' warning in the parable, Scripture abounds with lessons that remind us that the human family divides into wicked and godly, those who are and those who are not God's children. At the final Day of Judgment, there will be only two classes of

people. Our carnal divisions of humanity into endless classes based on the color of one's skin, the dialect of one's language, or other such grounds reveals the broken sinfulness with which the whole race of humanity lives.

Apparently, Jude is dealing with a class of people in his day who pretended to believe the gospel and actively participate in the work of the church, though their motives and actions contradicted faithful service and submission to God and His commandments. Cain, Balaam, and Korah served to expose the sinful motives of these people, Jude's point prior to taking us to the heart of the matter in our study verses this week. Jude uses five analogies to depict the wicked character of these people.

1. *...spots in your feasts of charity.* Imagine going to a formal banquet and sitting down to food with flies swarming on the food set before you, or looking at a dish on your plate that looks delicious and tasting it, only to discover that its taste is obnoxious. Then apply that principle to someone who attends church, engages people in dialogue, but whose attitude and conduct periodically is as contradictory to Biblical ethics as this analogy.
2. *...clouds they are without water.* I live in southern California. Our region just ended one of the driest years in its recorded weather history. It is not unusual at all to see clouds in our sky, but most of the time for over a year those clouds produced no rain. They appear in a form that gives hope, but they fail to deliver. Again, the analogy is rich with spiritual meaning.
3. *...trees whose fruit withereth.* Appearance and reality contradict each other. Consider Jesus withering the fruitless fig tree. In spiritual matters, we are dreadfully prone to judge people and actions within a narrow timeline or frame of reference. Often people say or do things that strike us

favorably, but, over time, what sounded good at the moment sours as we realize that it wasn't based on sound Biblical principles. Or someone will appear to act on a self-denying disciple, but over time prove to be self-promoting, not self-denying.

4. ...*raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame.* Often, when someone falls into self-serving sin, he becomes selectively blind, though the wise Bible student need not join the blindness. The very thing that the person in error should view with shame becomes a thing of pride to him.
5. ...*wandering stars.* Ancient travelers relied on the fixed and reliable position of the stars to guide them. A star that is not fixed will consistently mislead anyone who relies on it. People who escape from grave spiritual error consistently tell the story of being deceived and misled by those who influenced them away from God and His ways.

One of the most discouraging scenes for a godly preacher or pastor is to see deceitful men gaining influence over naïve sheep and leading them ever deeper into error. Often the deceiver has a winsome personality. He adroitly uses his appealing ways to deceive and influence his followers. And, sadly, he is often frighteningly successful for a time. A few years ago I heard of such a man talking to one of his followers about some who opposed him, "We'll win in the end because we have more young people with us." What ever became of "We'll win in the end because we are doing what God commands us in Scripture, He is with us"?

Jude will not leave us in this depressing situation. He punctuates his lesson with the answer that every faithful believer should constantly keep in mind.

And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh 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.

Whether the occasion was during the life of Enoch, the time of Jude, or today, the firm mindset of the godly believer must recall that God has not vacated His rule, His moral, righteous rule to religious politicians (Always testing the direction of popular attitudes for "Political correctness") or charlatans. However successful these people may appear to be at the moment, they have not yet faced their moment of righteous judgment. We may be

slipping slowing off the cliff toward the flood or some other major judgment of God, and popular opinion is set against us. This is the precise moment to remember Enoch's words and thoughts. The final judgment of every person, saint and sinner, faithful servant and charlatan alike remains in God's hands, not man's. And no one, however winsome his personality or however politically correct and popular his ideas, can deceive God or alter His truth as if truth were Silly Putty to be molded by us into our preferred form.

Through almost sixty years of ministry, I have experienced a few occasions when I needed to remind myself of this truth. Scripture emphasizes that godly ministers and faithful churches are to confront and reject error and those who promote it. Passivity in the face of error is never approved in Scripture. In the process of opposing error, however, we must never forsake Scripture's teachings that inform us as to how we should oppose and refute error. And there may come a time when, after doing what Scripture teaches us to do in this process that we need to stop rather than pounding ahead contrary to Scripture's teachings. At that point, the Enoch reminder becomes clear.

The process of dealing with error when the promoter of error lives in one region and belongs to one church, but works with guile to promote his error abroad is ever a major challenge. The promoter of error is more concerned with his success than with Biblical principles. He has no scruples about violating Scripture's teachings regarding each church being a spiritual unit accountable to the Lord, not one cog in a greater political machine that this man strives to manipulate. Scripture's teachings regarding error within a local church are clear. In an ideal situation where both ministers and churches respect each other and seek to work together, the harmony of Jerusalem Church and Antioch Church in Acts 15 is highly instructive. In less ideal situations, one church may be wholly under the influence of the man who promotes the error, so they have no interest in working with a sister church to preserve harmony based on Biblical truth. Perhaps in such situations, there comes a time when you can do no more than constantly establish the church that you serve in Biblical truth so that her members increasingly understand the character of error and of those who promote it. At His time and way, the Lord shall come and judge those who oppose Him.

It would be a wonderful world if we could go through generations of the faith with no Cain, Balaam, or Korah, but Scripture warns that we do not live in such an ideal world. (2 Peter 2:1-3; do not overlook Peter's next point, similar to Jude's. God shall personally judge and dispose of false teachers). We should not forget, as well, that the Lord doesn't come alone. He comes with a large number of His saints. The false teachers may attract disciples, but they cannot rob the Lord of a single one of His chosen sheep. God has promised

in Scripture that He shall preserve His Word and His church against all adversaries, both within and without. That is the "Enoch Principle." Believe it. Trust God to fulfill it. And pray for Him to execute it speedily.

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Worship service each Sunday	10:30 A. M.
Joseph R. Holder	Pastor