



From Now till Then: What?

But ye, 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. 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. (Jude 20–23, KJV 1900)

Scripture teaches us clearly that the central theme of the gospel deals with God's eternal purpose to have a people who shall throughout eternity be with Him and worthily praise Him for their redemption. Sadly often, preachers and other believers alike follow one of two out-of-balance themes in their teaching. 1) They focus wholly on the Second Coming, often adding one bizarre imagination after another to Scripture's teachings, leaving believers under their care puzzled and ignorant of how to live their lives in the often demanding here and now. 2) They ignore the Second Coming as if Scripture never mentions the event and teach a legalistic "Checklist" form of Christian conduct that leaves their hearers cold and misguided regarding the glorious liberty of the children of God to serve God with joy according to the model of Jesus, not the demands of an ever-growing checklist of "Do this" and "Do not do that."

Jude is one of the shortest of the New Testament inspired letters, but it is condensed and brimming over with information. After anchoring his reminder of the Second Coming to an ancient prophecy from Enoch, Jude describes the character of those whom the Lord shall judge at His final coming. Some of the traits in Jude's description are to be expected, no surprise at all. Others, however, are quite a surprise. While I do not agree with Chuck Swindoll's theology, I often find worthwhile nuggets in his thoughts. He has observed that our present thinking about heaven, specifically who shall be there and who shall not be there, will shock our thinking with two surprises. The first surprise shall be that we shall see people in heaven whom we did not at all expect to see there based on our limited knowledge of them in this life. Secondly, we shall be surprised that we shall not see some folks whom we fully expected to be there. Jude's description of those whom the Lord shall judge and send away into eternal punishment affirms this observation.

Immediately after affirming that the Lord shall return in victory and in righteous judgment against the wicked and his description of those wicked people, Jude directs us regarding how we should live our lives in the here and now. If you firmly believe in the Lord's final and glorious return and have at times wondered how you should live your

life from now till either you leave this world in death or He returns in glory, Jude simply answers your question.

1. *...building up yourselves on your most holy faith.* Jude specifically identifies "your most holy faith." He is likely referring to that faith once for all time delivered to the saints and, through those saints, to Jude's readers. The body of faith, what we believe, is not "Up for grabs" by each individual believer in each successive generation. Rather than recreating our private version of faith from our personal understanding—or imagination—Scripture directs us to its teachings and to a fixed truth that is historically preserved across generations of believers by His "...pillar and ground of the truth," His church. Jude directs us to this "most holy faith," not to our private "most personal faith." In Scripture, "holy" means dedicated to God, not dedicated to our private opinions or interpretations of Scripture. (Proverbs 3:5). No individual believer should ever attempt to supplant or to replace the Lord's "pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:15)
2. *...praying in the Holy Ghost.* Scripture's teaching about prayer is highly instructive. While Scripture directs us to make our requests known to the Lord (Philippians 4:6), Jude reminds us that prayer is not our private and self-focused wish list to the Lord. Praying "in the Holy Ghost" is not characterized by indiscernible utterances or sounds, but by a believing child's appeal to and acceptance of the Father's wise and loving care. From Jesus' model prayer, "Thy will be done..." to Jesus' prayer just prior to His arrest, Scripture consistently teaches us to approach God in our prayers as our "Father." I accept that my reaction is a personal thing, but I confess that I cringe when I hear people address God in their prayers by high sounding titles, "Holy, divine, august, eternal..." The Biblical model for every believer's prayer is simple, "Our Father." A self-centered rebellious child will resist the parent's ideas, regardless what the parent thinks or says. A wise and loving child will understand and respect the father's words as growing out

of love and concern for the child's well-being. How much more then should we approach our Lord in prayer with the firm and stated Biblical baseline that acknowledges that He knows what is best for us far more than we know, so we give Him our requests with the caveat of "Thy will be done." The submissive child's heart far more matches "*praying in the Holy Ghost*" than any other trait that we can name or imagine. I recently heard a preacher tell about receiving wise words from an older believer. In the preacher's youthful zeal of thinking he knew more than anyone else, a wise older saint quietly and privately gave him a memorable and wise word about prayer. "Son, don't quote the Book to the One who wrote it." Occasionally very sincere believers will quote more Scripture in their prayers than state their requests. Every prayer, including public prayers offered in the gathered church assembly, should be framed as if God alone is the audience of our words. I am persuaded that the Lord pays very little attention to prayers that are carefully worded to impress the human audience of those words.

3. *...keep yourselves in the love of God.* Paul and other inspired writers consistently teach us that nothing can finally separate us from the love of God. Jude does not address that point or suggest that we might play a role in keeping ourselves from being finally separated from Him. Beginning in Romans 8:21 and continuing to the end of the chapter, Paul makes a powerful point that our indissoluble union with the love of God relates to Jesus and what He did for us, not to how well we keep ourselves. The historical and Biblical doctrine of God's faithful "Preservation" of His chosen people is in our day sadly often misrepresented as the believer's personal "Perseverance." In Scripture or in any respected dictionary of the English language, the two words have different meanings. Biblical perseverance is God's admonition to His born again children to stand faithfully with Him in their Christian warfare, the one appearance of the word in the King James Bible. Thus, in Scripture, the word is never used to refer to a hypothetical divine puppet-like orchestration of a believer's conduct in godliness. The Lord keeps us securely in His love, inseparably so by Himself alone. He holds each of His chosen children firmly in His love so as never to let them go or be finally lost from Him world without end. However, in our present pilgrimage, God holds each born-again child personally responsible and accountable to Him for keeping themselves in heart, mind, words, and actions in harmony with that inseparable love. John repeatedly underscores this point in his writings, especially First John. You can't claim to love God while you hate your brother or sister. Jude doesn't charge us to keep ourselves aloof from our brothers and

sisters whom the Lord loves. He charges us to keep ourselves in the love of God, a task only accomplished as we manifest that same love in thought, word, and deed to other believers. How can you keep yourself in the Lord's love while treating other believers with scorn or any way disrespectfully? Impossible. We can't control a brother or sister, but we can control our own conduct. The Lord dwells within us and, in the new birth, transformed us, a new creature in Christ Jesus. By that transformed nature, we can—and the Lord commands us to—keep ourselves from hateful, sinful words and actions. More than avoiding hateful behavior, Jude directs us to keep ourselves actively and graciously in the Lord's love, manifested by our words and actions toward other believers.

4. *...looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.* And while we keep our most holy faith fresh and pure, pray under the canopy of the Holy Spirit, and keep ourselves in the Lord's love, we must keep the final goal fresh in our hearts and minds. Our eternal life does not result from our earning or deserving it. It rests wholly on the Lord's tender mercy. God's mercy is not a proposition or an offer. It is a fact that God has fully acted out already in His merciful redemption of His beloved children. You and I personally were embraced in the full and rich benefit of His mercy long before we drew our first breath. That mercy was not conditioned on anything that we might or might not do. It was based on the love of God. Jude simply names the final and certain outcome of God's mercy. It shall find its final completion only in the eternal life of His beloved and chosen people.

Jude reminds us of a truth that we have often visited in this study. A faithful and Biblical view of God and of our final place with Him in His everlasting love in glory integrates our hope of glory with the Lord and our daily task of seeking to "Do godly Christianity." Even as we live life in the sometimes ugly and always challenging trenches, Scripture sets before us the one true and reliable roadmap for living life in a way that glorifies the Lord. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) And that "Roadmap" reminds us. You can't understand your direction, the course of your journey unless you keep the destination clearly in your mind. As you keep the faith, abide in prayer, and keep yourself in the Lord's love, Jude admonishes you also to keep your heart fixed on heaven.

Several years ago, Sandra and I took our RV from California to the Mt. Rushmore area of South Dakota. We'd never been anywhere near that destination. Well in advance of the trip, we got maps and charted our course in fine details. We also programmed our first GPS device to guide us step by step. To be honest, I relied far more on the

GPS than on the printed maps that I kept close at hand. The GPS worked quite well until we started home. We were driving from South Dakota toward Wyoming on a highway (not a freeway). This road took us through a long stretch of barren land. In that open barren land, as we approached the Wyoming state border, the GPS “Spoke” and directed me to take a sharp left turn a mile ahead. As we approached that one mile distance, I saw no road that turned to the left, only the “Welcome to Wyoming” sign. The only road I saw was the road we were traveling due west. What was wrong? The GPS had not been carefully programmed and loaded with accurate maps. The road that we were driving in South Dakota continued straight ahead, but on the GPS data, it as it transitioned from South Dakota to Wyoming, it was charted several miles to the south. Human error, if I had followed it, would have turned us off the right road into a barren pasture. Instead of relying on information that was obviously wrong, I continued along the paved road and soon arrived at our destination. As a preacher and pastor, I have sadly at times encountered believers who relied more on their own flawed and unreliable understanding (Proverbs 3:5) than trust the Lord. They thought they knew more about the Bible than anyone else, and they thought they were always right, so they refused to listen to anyone who dared to differ with their private and flawed understanding. Scripture is all true and right, but our understanding of Scripture is not so inspired or flawless. And over time, I sadly observed the inevitable outcome of their self-driven faith, not their “most holy faith.” It was always shipwreck. Always.

Jude provides a better way for the child of grace to live, a way that will not end in shipwreck, or, as in my GPS example, misguide you in the middle of nowhere, bewildered and confused. An old hymn contains two different versions of its chorus in various hymnals. Some hymnals read, “We’ll wait till Jesus comes,” while other hymnals read, “We’ll work till Jesus comes.” It might not fit the music as well, but the Biblical truth reminds us that we should “...**work while we wait** till Jesus comes.” Keep your faith’s eye and your heart lovingly fixed on heaven and the Lord’s return, but follow Jude and keep working to encourage tired pilgrims while you wait.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
Joseph R. Holder Pastor