

## **Keeping in the Love of God**

(A Posthumous Sermon)

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Morning, July 18, 1869

"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." Jude 20, 21

There is a general idea that the primitive Christians were patterns of faith and obedience, and the primitive churches models of purity in doctrine, principle, and practice. To a certain extent, this general persuasion is true, for it is based upon the word of God. Thus we read of the primitive believers—those who were called, for instance, at the day of Pentecost and immediately afterwards—that "great grace was upon them all;" that they were of one heart and one spirit, so as not to call even their own goods their own, but to have all things in common. And of the primitive churches we have this testimony, that they walked "in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, and were multiplied." So, also, we find Paul speaking to the Romans, that their faith was spoken of throughout all the world. To the Corinthians, that they came behind in no gift. To the Ephesians, that he had heard of their faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints. To the Colossians, that the word of God bore fruit in them. To the Thessalonians, that they were taught of God to love one another. Thus, we have some testimony of the eminent grace possessed by primitive believers, and by the primitive churches. But yet this happy state of things did not last long. Clouds, dark clouds, soon began to gather over this bright scene. Thus the Galatians imbibed a legal spirit, fell from their steadfastness, went back to the beggarly elements

from which they were delivered, and caused Paul to stand in doubt whether he had not laboured amongst them in vain. In the church at Corinth, there were great disorders, much strife, contention, party-spirit, winking at sin in one of their members living with his father's wife, and committing such disorders at the Lord's table, that some had actually not enough to eat, and others had made themselves drunk by taking too large a quantity of the wine. And when we pass on to the Epistle of Jude and the Second Epistle of Peter, what awful characters appear to have crept into the churches. What denunciations are launched against the men, whose character is described in such graphic language by Jude in the Epistle before us, and by the Apostle Peter in his Second Epistle. How Jude says:—"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." How he says of them:—"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." How he declares that they were "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." What language! What awful characters must those have been in the primitive churches, to have brought down upon their heads such denunciations and such warnings from the pen of the inspired Apostle? Now, seeing all these things, Jude felt it was needful for him to write unto the churches, and to exhort them that they should earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. And knowing how soon the unstable might be drawn aside, and be entangled in error or overcome

with sin, he lays before them the exhortation of our text:—  
"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."

In opening up these words, I shall direct your minds, as the Lord may enable—

I.—*First*, to the *precept* here laid before us: "keep yourselves in the love of God."

II.—*Secondly*, to the *means*, the gracious means, that Jude lays before us of keeping ourselves in the love of God, which are: 1, by building up ourselves on our most holy faith; 2, by praying in the Holy Ghost; 3, by looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

I.—Jude knew that there was only one preservative; that error is so seducing and the love of sin so powerful, that unless those to whom he spoke put on the armour of God, and especially that portion of it which consisted in keeping themselves in the love of God, some subtle form of error would arise on the one hand, or some powerful temptation to evil would spring up on the other; and by the force of one of these two, if not of both combined, they would be entangled and fall. He assumes, then, that those in whom grace made the difference had known, tasted, felt, and handled something of the love of God. He does not speak to those who had never known anything of the love of God; but to those who had had the love of God shed abroad in their heart, so as to know its sweetness and blessedness, feel its liberating, sanctifying effects upon their hearts and consciences, and how it purifies the heart, ear, and lip from sin and the world. He addresses himself especially to such, to

show them that by keeping themselves in the love of God, they would be preserved from the evils which surrounded them on every side. But you will say, "This shuts me out." Not so. If you have tasted any measure of the love of God—the apostle does not say how large a measure or how small a measure is needful, so as to know something of the love of God;—if it has been felt in any small measure, that is an earnest of more to come; that gives a sufficient taste of its sweetness and blessedness; that assures the heart, so far as it goes, of relieving it from its distresses, removing the guilt of sin, and quenching the thunders of a fiery law. That he puts forth as the grand preservative against the seductions of error and against the allurements of sin; knowing that nothing else would be strong enough to shield and guard them from the seductive attractions of error adapting itself to their reasoning minds, or from the alluring powers of sin addressing itself to their lusts and passions. Because it runs in the preceptive form; because the naked word stands, "keep yourselves in the love of God," we are not to gather therefrom that there is any power or strength in the creature to keep himself in the love of God. All these exhortations and precepts of the gospel are based upon gospel truth; so that it is assumed that those to whom the precept is spoken are acquainted with the grace of God, and know from experience and God's own testimony that the precept can only be obeyed by the power of God's grace. When, then, we are told to keep ourselves in the love of God, he does not set a task for free-will to perform or lay a burden upon the shoulders of nature; but he addresses himself to the gracious principle which God plants in the heart by his regenerating power. And it is to that gracious principle, as strengthened and brought forth into exercise by the power of God, that he says, "keep yourselves in the love of God."

I must show you, then, how, in harmony with grace, we keep

ourselves in the love of God.

1. By fostering and cherishing the least intimation of it; by not giving way to any attacks, so as to cast us out of our possession, disinherit us of our inheritance, or open a way for Satan to spoil and rob us of anything the Lord may teach us by his grace, or any communication of his mercy and goodness, any bringing in of his love and tender pity. But we are to foster it and cherish it by all the means in our power. And we foster it and cherish it most by believing it; for as faith is raised up and drawn forth to believe in the love of God, and to believe from any sweet experience of what we have received from God; if the love of God has been felt in our hearts, then to foster it and cherish it by looking for any intimation, communication, word or whisper, sign or token, that may strengthen us in the faith if we possess it.

2. Again, we keep ourselves in the love of God by avoiding everything which may damp it, discourage it, make it, so to speak, take to itself wings and flee away; everything that may harden the heart in going from the fear of God, or bring a load of guilt upon our conscience, everything that seems to chase away the love of God and to put us into a state of questioning whether we ever knew anything about it by sweet experience.

3. Thirdly, we keep ourselves in the love of God by viewing the spiritual foundation on which that love rests; not ever looking to our own bosom to find things there to draw forth the love of God, but looking beyond ourselves, to view it in the Son of his love, and to believe that the love of God is not a transitory thing, is not dependent upon what we do ourselves, does not rest upon the uncertainties of time, or the fickleness of the creature, but is in his dear Son—fixed in him; and that if loved, we are loved for his sake. Thus, you

see the firm foundation there is in the love of God; that it is not given to the creature as a creature, but given to him in Christ, in whom he stands complete; and therefore given to him so graciously, and bestowed upon him so freely, that it stands as fast and firm as the Son of God himself.

II.—But, to pass on to our next point, there are certain means pointed out by Jude, using which, in the power of God's grace, we keep ourselves in the love of God.

i. And the first is, to build ourselves up on our most holy faith. By the words, "most holy faith," we may understand chiefly the grand truths of the everlasting Gospel which are revealed unto and embraced by faith. And they are called "our most holy faith," because they are imbued with all the holiness of God; and not only so, but as they are received into believing hearts, communicate sanctification, because they have a liberating, sanctifying efficacy. The words "build up" assume that there is a foundation laid. Christ is that foundation which God hath laid in Zion—a chief corner-stone, elect, precious; and where Christ is revealed to the soul by a divine power, a foundation is laid in the heart on which every subsequent truth is to be built up. The grand thing to be clear of in our own experience is, whether Christ has been laid as a foundation in our souls or not, and if he has, we have been driven from every other as finding no rest nor peace but in him. If ever he has been revealed to our souls by the mighty power of God, then we have seen and felt in him that there is a foundation on which we can stand, and that for eternity. But as the Son of the Father in truth and love; having come to finish the work which the Father gave him to do; having put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, and brought in an everlasting righteousness in which we may stand justified, there is a foundation on which a poor, guilty soul may rest. When this foundation is brought nigh, and we,

by the power of God's grace, are lifted up to rest upon it—

"How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,  
Is laid for your faith in his excellent word."

"Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 3:11.) Now when Christ is made known to your soul by the power of God, you have views of truth in him, and of happiness in him, and of deliverance. "As ye receive Christ, so walk in him." We receive him as the Son of the Father in truth and love; we receive him as suitable to our wants and woes; we receive him as putting away sin by the sacrifice of himself, and endearing himself to our heart in the sweet manifestation of his Person, goodness, and love. Now as long as Christ and the soul are together, there is no place for error, and no place for evil. He makes the soul tender, the heart upright, the spirit broken and contrite, truth precious, error hateful, and sin loathsome and detestable. And whilst he and the soul are engaged together, error cannot approach nor evil find an entrance, so as to get any standing ground in the heart. But error is very subtle: it addresses itself to our reasoning powers; and when we lose sight of Christ then error very easily creeps in; or if not error, some special lust, or something ungodly, seems by degrees to obtain power and influence, and we gradually decline from the strength of faith, the confidence of hope, and the sweet affections of love, and drop, it may be, into a cold, carnal, careless, lifeless state, where we lie open to the invasion of error and the temptations of Satan as an angel of light or an angel of darkness. Now this is not keeping yourselves in the love of God, for it is doing the things which I showed you we were not to do if we were to keep ourselves in the love of God. But now Jude comes and says, "Keep yourselves in the love of God;" and I will tell you, if you will listen to me, how you shall do it. You must "build up yourselves on your most

holy faith." God has laid a foundation for your faith in his holy word; he has laid Christ as a foundation in your own soul. That is a very strong foundation: it is of God's own laying. It is very solid: it will bear any weight laid upon it. And therefore you must build up yourselves upon that most holy faith if you would have a religion which stands; because if your religion, or any part of your religion, be built upon another foundation, it will not stand. But if you build up yourselves on your most holy faith, then everything you build upon it will stand, because it stands upon the foundation and is in harmony with it.

Look, for instance, at the grand truths of our glorious gospel—say the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, three Persons in one undivided essence. Now every branch of that glorious Truth, the Trinity, when received into the heart, is attended with a sanctifying influence, a liberating power; and as this sanctifying influence is felt and this liberating power known, it preserves us from being seduced by error or being entangled in sin. If a man is firmly established and well grounded in the doctrine of the Trinity,—three coequal and eternal Persons in one undivided Godhead,—error on this point cannot assail him to any purpose. He may have flying suspicions, infidel thoughts, ungodly workings, which all are subject to. But if he has received the Trinity into a believing heart, and builds upon that foundation, it is part of his most holy faith; and building himself up upon that most holy doctrine, he stands secure, so far as he stands upon it, against all the shafts of error: they fly past without wounding him, because he can hold up as the shield of faith, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost to receive the fiery darts of the wicked, and they leave him untouched.

And so it is with the Sonship of Christ, his equal deity, and his incarnation in the womb of the Virgin, with his sufferings



in the garden and upon the cross, his blood-shedding upon Calvary, and his holy death: when this is received in faith, and we see it forms a blessed part of our most holy faith, and rest the whole weight of our souls upon the blood and obedience of Jesus, it is a building up of the soul upon this holy faith. It edifies the mind, instructs the judgment, comforts the heart, relieves the conscience, and fills the soul at times with sweet feelings of love and affection toward the dear Lord, for coming and saving poor guilty sinners by shedding his precious blood and bearing their sins in his own body on the tree.

So, again, with his resurrection, ascension, and glorious intercession at the right hand of the Father: it is a part of our most holy faith. As faith eyes the Mediator between God and man, the great High Priest over the house of God, an intercessor able to save to the uttermost,—as faith eyes him revealed in the word and revealed in the soul, it is a building up of ourselves on our most holy faith. And, as the love of God is in sweet harmony with the work of Christ upon the cross, with the dying, bleeding love of the Lord the Lamb, and in blessed harmony with the resurrection of Christ, and his sitting at God's right hand in glory and power, we are kept in the love of God by looking to his dear Son and being built up on this most holy faith, because by looking to him, we receive of his fulness grace for grace. And as he is pleased to open up his fulness to our mind, and to show us what he is in himself, and what he is as the Christ of God, there is a letting down into the soul a sweet sense of his suitability, blessedness, and beauty; and this being received into the heart, there is a building up of the soul on this most holy faith.

But if we turn aside from this most holy faith and listen to the voice of error directing itself against the Sonship of

Christ, or against any solemn truth revealed in the word, the spirit is grieved, the mind is darkened, the soul is clouded, conscience suffers, the Lord hides his face, and we fall into confusion. And so it is if sin be indulged, lusts trifled with, the world gone out after, and sin creep in between God and the soul, so as to get in any way the better of us: we fall into guilt and bondage, darkness, confusion, and error, and there is no keeping ourselves in the love of God nor building up ourselves on our most holy faith; for error thrusts on one side, and evil draws on the other, and thus there is a drawing us off our most holy faith and keeping us back from the love of God.

If we have known anything of the love of God and the sweetness and preciousness of gospel truth, and ever felt the liberating, sanctifying effect and efficacy of our most holy faith, we shall be safe on the one side to watch the evils and confusion that spring out of error and sin, and on the other the sweetness and blessedness of keeping firm to gospel truth, and building ourselves up on our most holy faith.

ii. But the apostle adds another blessed means of keeping ourselves in the love of God, and building up ourselves on our most holy faith, which is, "*praying in the Holy Ghost.*" Now when the Lord is pleased to begin the work of grace upon a sinner's soul, he always gives him more or less of a spirit of prayer—a spirit of grace and of supplications; and that never dies out of his soul until it is changed into anthems of immortal praise. But it will often sink very low, so as at times to be scarcely perceptible. Like a brook in summer that is so different from its full flow in winter—diminished almost to a thread, and yet never totally dry; so it is with the spirit of prayer in the soul. When the Lord first gives it, it is like a full brook in winter; but afterwards, through the power of temptation, it often dwindles to a

thread, and yet it is ever running, for there is the life of God in it.

Now many of your prayers—perhaps nine-tenths of them—are not prayers of the Holy Ghost's inditing. They are the more natural prayers that spring out of your heart; and it is evident they are so, because they bring down so few answers. Look at your prayers by your bedside, your prayers in the family, and if a member of a church, even your prayers at the prayer meeting: how often your prayers are nothing but words, the mere chattering of your tongue, the labour of your lip, without the Holy Ghost prompting a desire, and without Christ in your soul.

But there is, blessed be God, such a thing as praying in the Holy Ghost; that is, in the power of the Holy Ghost, and in his divine work and most gracious witness and operation. And the Lord, from time to time, enables his family to pray in the Holy Ghost; and when they pray in the Holy Ghost, then their prayers are answered; for that holy teacher, and inditer, and intercessor never indites a prayer in a believing heart, that does not enter the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.

You have seen the difficulty, no doubt, as I have traced it out, of keeping yourselves in the love of God, and building up yourselves in your most holy faith; and though your conscience has borne testimony to the truth of my words, it has been rather from a sense of guilt upon it and of shortcoming, than from being able to have the witness of a good conscience, that you have been enabled to act upon it. And yet you feel the truth and force of it, not only in the word, but in your own soul, so as to see that there is a keeping one's spirit in the love of God, and building up one's self on one's most holy faith; and that this is the pure effect of grace in the heart.

Now you may take a review sometimes of where you are, what you have been brought into, and brought from; and you may look back to the days of your youth, when the light of God shone upon your tabernacle, and your soul was happy in the Lord. And taking a review of days gone by, you say, "It is not with me as in time past, when the candle of the Lord shone upon my tabernacle, and by his light I walked in darkness: it is not so with me now." Now is not all this difficulty you feel in your conscience a testimony to the truth of my words, that you have not kept yourselves in the love of God, that you have not built up yourselves on your most holy faith? For if you had, by the power of grace, kept yourselves in the love of God; if you had not been drawn aside into error or evil, but had built up yourselves on your most holy faith, you would not be in your present low state; sin would not have had dominion over you, the world would not have drawn you aside, nor would Satan have gained such power.

As these things are laid with weight and power upon your mind, you begin to sigh and cry under the burden. You look back to those happy days when you walked more humbly, tenderly, consistently with God; and you long that those days might return and you might have more enjoyment in your soul of the Lord's presence and power. Now you begin to pray in the Holy Ghost. Your sighs, your cries, your groans, your desires, your self-condemnation, your confession of sin, your longing for the return of the days of your youth, your anxious nights, your gloomy days, your wanting some sweet manifestation of the Lord's goodness and mercy—here is praying in the Holy Ghost. For the Holy Ghost helps our infirmities and teaches us how to pray—for we know not what we should pray for as we ought—and himself intercedes for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now here are the groanings which cannot be uttered: and here you are

praying in the Holy Ghost, when he is interceding for you with these groanings which cannot be uttered, when he is enabling you to sigh and cry, mourn and weep, confess your sins, and seek healing from the Lord. Here is a praying in the Holy Ghost. For praying in the Holy Ghost does not consist in length of prayer, or loudness of prayer, or eloquence of prayer; but consists in that Holy Spirit interceding in the heart, with those groanings which cannot be uttered. And you will always find a very sweet connection between praying in the Holy Ghost, and building up yourselves on your most holy faith; because the Holy Ghost takes of the things of Christ and reveals them to the soul.

So every fresh view of the glorious Trinity; every fresh view of the incarnation, blood-shedding, sufferings and death of the Son of God; every fresh view of what Christ is now at the right hand of the Father, is attended with a spirit of grace and of supplications; and the same Holy Spirit that prays in us and for us, takes of the things of Christ and makes them known with divine power to the soul.

iii. The last means mentioned in the text of keeping yourselves in the love of God is, *"look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."*

"O," says the soul, "I come short in everything." "I don't know that ever I do feel the love of God shed abroad in my heart in a very plain and clear manner," says one; "then how can I keep myself in it?" "I don't know," says another, "clearly and fully, whether I am standing upon the right foundation: how then can I build myself up upon it?" "I don't know," says a third, "whether I am aware of what it is to pray in the Holy Ghost; and how am I to get at it?" Well, now, he says to all such, "looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." We all come short, and there is no

one who does keep himself in the love of God; there is no one who really is building up himself on his most holy faith, as he should do, or as he is exhorted to do. Then what is he to do? Must he give all up and say, "Because I cannot keep myself in the love of God, nor build up myself on our most holy faith; because I am a poor, vile sinner, full of filth, and sin, and misery, who never can do, never has done anything but sin against God,—must I give it all up and sink into despair and die?" "No," says Jude, "looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ."

See what a merciful Saviour he is; how he came to seek and to save that which was lost. View him in the garden sweating great drops of blood; see him on the cross bearing the wrath of God due to sinners; behold the mercy of God shining forth in the face of a Mediator, and I would say, turn your desponding eyes and look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. He has kept you from error, and kept you in some measure tender in conscience, and from falling under the power of evil. He has wrought something in your heart by his own Spirit and grace, and if he has not given you those sweet manifestations of pardoning love, or revealed to you his dear Son in the same way he reveals him to others; and if your prayers are faint and feeble, so that you can scarcely believe you know what it is to pray in the Holy Ghost; yet I would say, Don't cast away your hope because you cannot lay your hand upon special blessings and call them yours. Look for the mercy of your Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. View his divine love as bringing him from heaven to earth; see what he endured in the days of his flesh; view him going about doing good, and even speaking a word of mercy to the dying thief, as though for a moment he lost sight of his own sufferings to save him. Again he says, "Look for the mercy of God unto eternal life." By so doing, you will be kept on the one hand from error, and on the other from being entangled

in the power of evil. No man can stand against either in his own strength and wisdom. If we think we can stand against the power of temptation in our own strength or wisdom, we are only deceiving ourselves. Nothing but the power of God and his special grace can keep us from being entangled in the snares of sin and Satan. But God has appointed a certain way whereby he keeps his people from both; and only as we walk in that way are we secure. If a man thinks he can master error by his own reasoning powers against it, he will be defeated by Satan at the first encounter, for he is a keen logician; and if he thinks he can keep sin at arm's length, he will find his mistake, for sin will come between him and his guard.

The Holy Ghost, who has inspired the word of God with infinite wisdom, has laid up these sacred instructions that they may be for our benefit, and it is our wisdom to attend to them, and to beg of God to enlighten our mind unto the understanding of them, and we shall find as we journey onward with humility of mind seeking the Lord's face, attending to his word and will, and earnestly desiring to be taught by his Spirit,—we shall find many dark paths made light, and many crooked places made straight, and many things in our experience very puzzling and trying made plain; and then we shall see that the love of God once fixed upon his dear people is always the same in Christ; that though we may lose sight and sense of it, it is not taken away, but always abides firm in him; and that his precious truth, though we cannot and do not always feel its sweetness and power, yet possesses a blessedness and a reality, and so far as we are led into it, we derive a measure of its liberating, sanctifying effect and influence.

Thus, though these things may not be clear to many at first, yet as the path of the righteous is like "the shining light

which shines more and more unto the perfect day," these things will open upon his mind in their sweetness and power, confirm him in the truth of God, show him the blessedness of the grace of God in leading him into these things, and keeping him from error on one side and from evil on the other; and then he will have reason to bless and praise God for dealing with him in mercy and not in wrath, leading him into truth, and establishing his own word with power upon his heart.