

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## An Active Faith in Conduct

*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, KJV 1900)*

Several years ago, I realized that Paul typically "Bookends" his letters by identifying his primary objective in writing near the beginning and the end of his letters. By studying a letter to uncover that "Bookend" idea, we gain clarity in our study of the whole letter. Jude follows a similar pattern in his brief letter. While obviously concerned with evil, deliberate false teachers, Jude begins and closes his letter with positive and truly edifying truths. The best antidote against a false teacher's influence is to develop a strong, healthy faith, and to live by it faithfully. Peter follows a similar pattern in Second Peter. The first and third chapters contain powerful positive truths. The first chapter affirms the divine origin, preservation, and value of Scripture. The third chapter reminds us of the glorious reality of the Second Coming. The second chapter warns us against the onslaught of false teachers, highly skilled and often effective for a season at deceiving the naïve. But, despite the false teachers' guile, God's foundation stands secure, "The Lord knoweth them that are his." (2 Timothy 2:19) False teachers can—and often do—deceive naïve sheep and lead them into fruitless failure in their faith, but God's eternal purpose in saving His own from their sins—and from false teachers—remains securely intact. I often marvel at the typical false teachers who are always eager to pronounce that one or another person who refuses to accept his teachings is surely not a child of grace. If following error is a sure mark of not being a child of God, and if the false teacher gains a following, what is the final state of his followers? Many a false teacher would say, if they fell into error and died in it, they have no hope of glory. Logically, it seems that the false teacher who led these naïve sheep astray should be the one to face such punishment, while mercy might be extended to the naïve, misguided sheep.

Jude's opening word in our study passage marks his transition from exposing and refuting the false teachers who threatened the sheep to whom he wrote this letter, "But..." As Jude moves toward his conclusion, he reinforces the truth that he stated at the beginning of the letter.

In the opening verses, Jude defines his purpose in writing, the same exhortations that he repeats at the end of the letter.

1. His readers are beloved; Verse 2 and Verse 20.
2. His readers are charged with faithfulness in the face of deceitful false teachers. They are to "...earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints," Verse 3. Jude exhorts them to build themselves up in the most holy faith and to keep themselves in the love of God; verses 20-21.

How do we develop optimum insulation of our faith from the toxic influence of false teachers? Jude gives us the full details of the right strategy. The faith of God, the truths that God entrusts to us to keep and to teach, is not a newly discovered idea. It is an old truth that God gave once and only once for all time to His saints, Verse 3.

In developing his "Bookend" points, Jude emphasizes a powerful truth to his readers. In the opening verses, Jude anchors our thoughts on God's purpose and power in saving and keeping His chosen ones. In closing his letter, he focuses on our active responsibility in attitudes and behaviors that harmonize with those same truths.

1. Verse 1. We are "...preserved," kept by Jesus Christ. Verse 21. Jude exhorts us to keep ourselves in God's love. Simply stated, Jude teaches us to act and to consistently live in harmony with what God has done to us and in us. Our conduct in the faith is not the result of puppeteer-like divine orchestration. Jude charges us with that responsibility. If it were impossible for us to not persevere in the love of God, any exhortation to do so would be senseless and purposeless. If we need to work at keeping ourselves in a state of mind and conduct that mirrors the grace bestowed upon us, the exhortation has meaning and purpose.
2. Verse 2. We are loved by God. Verse 21. We are to keep ourselves in His love. That is, Jude exhorts us to conduct our lives in keeping with God's love that He constantly exercises toward us. Again, this is something within our power as children of God, but it is not an automatic or divinely

orchestrated response. Jude imposes the responsibility onto us, and we are so responsible to obey.

3. Verse 2. We are the recipients of God's mercy. Verse 22. Jude directs us to show this mercy toward others. False teachers leave their landscape strewn with the wrecked lives of those whom they deceive. The faithful in the faith seek out those wounded sheep and work gently—mercifully—with them to restore them to a healthy, vibrant faith. The merciful charge of the faithful is to find those wounded souls and mercifully, gracefully take them by the hand and help them find their way back to the right path of God-glorifying service.
4. Verse 3. God delivered the faith to us once for all time. He doesn't deliver revised versions of that faith over time through false teachers and their pretentious claims of a "Revelation" from God. Verse 20. Jude admonishes us to build ourselves up in that most holy faith, not in the endless revised counterfeit editions contrived by the false teachers.
5. Verse 1. We are sanctified by the Father and preserved in Jesus Christ. Verses 21-23. Jude teaches us to keep ourselves in the most holy faith and thereby to reach out to those around us, striving to restore and to keep them in the faith as well.

Scripture frequently links our eternal standing in Christ with our present faith-walk. The union is not a cause-effect formula, but a matter of right thinking and right doing that is compatible with what God has done for us, to us, and in us. Because of God's powerful and permanent work in us, we live with the obligation—His commandment—to live our lives in harmony with His work in us. We in no way add security or certainty to His work. His work is sufficient in and of itself to reach and to keep all His own. However, we do glorify and honor Him in our active discipleship in the here and now by living our lives in harmony with His gracious mercy that we have received. The Holy Spirit empowers us to obey, but He does not coerce or manipulate us to do so. It is this principle that Jude powerfully develops in his brief letter. The path from saving grace to serving grace is clear and logical, though clouded by the threat of false teachers. The more we keep our minds immersed in Scripture and in serving God by serving His people in our lives the less influence the false teachers will have on us.

Scripture consistently emphasizes that those who glorify God in their lives do so by serving, ministering to, others. You occasionally encounter someone in a church who, by time in service and by experience should be mature and strong in the faith, but, somewhere along the way, they took a detour and failed to grow. For these folks, the idea of serving others is highly objectionable. Be they

preacher, deacon, or simply a member of long standing, ***God only honors the spirit of service, not the spirit of lordship over His sheep.*** Let the people talk and tell you what they want, but then you do—and force them to do—what you want, because you know best for them. This attitude diametrically contradicts the New Testament spirit of obedience to the faith through magnifying the spirit of the faithful servant, not the despotic lord. Neither deacons nor ministers have Biblical authority to lord their ideas over a church. Deacons are to serve at the direction of the pastor (Acts 6:3b "...whom we may appoint..."), and pastors are to serve by example, not by lordship. (1 Peter 5:1-3) Even a noted apostle refused to approach an erring church with such a sinful attitude.

*Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand. (2 Corinthians 1:24)*

A large majority of professing Christians in our age give lip service to Jesus washing the disciples' feet, but refuse to actually practice what He commanded and described as an example. However, if those of us who believe that Jesus intended for us to actually practice this act fail to put the spirit of the act into action in our attitudes and conduct, we make a greater mockery of the solemn example than those who openly refuse to practice it. If we practice the act, we are bound by that action to live it in our interactions with the people in our lives, especially with people who belong to the household of faith. I suggest that Jesus included this act—and commanded it to be followed as an example—because He knew how easily His children could forget His lordship and, like the disciples just a few days earlier, engage in sinful dispute over who should be the greatest or the most important person in the church. Think of those disciples arguing over who would be the greatest as they approached Jerusalem. And then think of them in that upper room as Jesus personally wraps a towel around his waist and stoops to wash their feet. Do you think they may have felt some stinging of conscience? Indeed they did, and they needed to feel it. We need regular reminders no less than those twelve men needed Jesus' powerful reminder. If we truly desire to follow in His footsteps and do what He commanded—and what pleases and honors Him—we must shed all the pretenses of lordship over His sheep. We must in daily action, not just occasionally in a symbolic service, demonstrate the heart, hands, and feet of a faithful, humble servant. The occasional act of washing the saints' feet becomes far more blessed and meaningful when we practice the attitude and action consistently throughout the course of our life.

It is only by cultivating the heart and mind of a servant that we can build ourselves up in the most holy faith and keep ourselves in the love and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church  
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Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor