

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Before of Old Ordained

For 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." (Jude 4, KJV 1900)

Error doesn't mysteriously appear out of mid-air. It begins with a person who chooses to reject God's Word and the faith "...once delivered unto the saints" in favor of their preferred ideas. They magnify their ideas above God's revealed truth. In fact, they typically work long and hard to twist God's Word (2 Peter 3:16), giving the appearance that their new ideas are supported by Scripture. Jesus warned that they shall be competent, deceiving many. (Matthew 24:11) Jude honorably fills the role of a godly, caring pastor who refuses to sit idly by and allow these false teachers and their ideas to invade the minds and lives of the people under his ministry, the reason stated in the first verses of Jude for his writing the letter.

For there are certain men crept in unawares. It is not that sound, godly believers are not aware that these men exist. They are not invisible. Jude's point is that they enter the body of believers under the false pretense that they are faithful believers. They will often continue in that role for a long time, slowly building acceptance and respect in the minds of other believers of similar faith. Eventually, they will begin to talk to other believers about their errant ideas, quietly and subtly seeking to win them away from their established faith. They hid their true motives and/or beliefs in entering.

...who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men. Sometimes we read Scripture far too casually instead of reading—and studying, really studying—it with our minds fully focused and engaged. For many years, I have made it my habit to do all of my serious Bible study in the morning before the work and distraction of the day wears me down. My mind is fresh in the morning and far more able to focus on my studies. We all need to develop habits that put us in touch with Scripture at our peak. I appreciate that "Body clocks" differ for each individual. Some people speak of themselves as "Morning people." I fit that category. Others are "Night people" who are more energetic and alert in the evening than in the morning. Whereas I am more productive in my studies in the morning, these folks may be more productive in the evening. We should schedule our time with God and with Scripture at our peak. I appreciate that many people habitually read their Bible in the evening just before going to bed for the night. If I tried this habit, my eyes would close

before I read a single page. And the next morning, I couldn't tell you what I read.

What is my point? If we read this verse with our minds half-focused and half-distracted, we are liable to read into it ideas that it does not at all contain. I've heard people talk who proved the point all too well. They will teach that, for mysterious reasons known only by God in His "Secret will," God actually in some way caused these men to have their ungodly, errant ideas, intending some supposed greater good. What a bizarre thought! As clearly as Scripture consistently condemns false belief and ungodly conduct, a term in Scripture that refers to far more than gross immoral actions, the idea that God would cause a man to believe such error contradicts the Scriptures and impugns the righteous character of God. Think about it. In Scripture, God forbids and condemns false beliefs, but, wholly apart from Scripture—and secretly—He supposedly causes this sinful conduct because He intends to orchestrate it for a mysterious greater good. How does such a twisted idea match up with Scripture? It doesn't. "But he *is* in **one mind**, and who can turn him? and *what* his soul desireth, even *that* he doeth." (Job 23:13; emphasis added) James 1:6-8 describes a double-minded man, but James clearly tells us later in the chapter (Verses 13-17) that this description in no way applies to God. Thankfully, we do not worship a double-minded deity.

Our study verse in no way even implies that God causatively determined that these men would creep into the number of His faithful believers, all to later teach, often by twisted words and by equally twisted conduct, anyone who would listen to their false ideas. The verse doesn't say that God ordained them to this conduct, but to this condemnation.

Jude's point is clear. God doesn't change His mind or His truth. Neither does He change His righteous judgment against those who conduct themselves in this ungodly manner. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." (Isaiah 8:20) From that first law in the Garden of Eden, God commands our conduct in righteousness, and He simultaneously announces His righteous judgment, condemnation, against any violation of His commandment. He never reacts by "Knee-jerk" reaction. No depraved man's errant

idea or conduct ever takes Him by surprise. From "...of old," God has declared His righteous condemnation against all violations of His truth and of His commandments. In first century language, the word "condemnation" in its various forms referred to the decision of a judge in a trial, as does the word "Justified." To bring these two terms into our twenty-first century legal world, the equivalent terms are "Guilty" and "Not guilty." Both the New Testament terms and the contemporary terms refer to the findings of the court regarding the conduct of the individual on trial. Jude's point refers to God's timeless and righteous judgment against the conduct to which he refers. God didn't approve it in the Old Testament; He doesn't approve it in the New Testament. You can read the oldest passages in the Old Testament, and you learn from them just as clearly as in this verse about God's righteous condemnation of those who act in contradiction to His commandments and to His revealed truth in Scripture.

...ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness. The twisted interpretation of this verse that lays the cause for the ungodly conduct of these men onto God is itself described in these words. Fatalistic ideas have a history of aggressive support at times, followed by equally aggressive rejection. Often in times of spiritual decline or trial, those who suffer in the decline try to find explanations for the problem. When they cannot find a satisfactory explanation for the decline or trial, they often try to lay the blame onto God. Consider Jeremiah. While Daniel was a captive in a Babylonian royal experiment and Ezekiel suffered in the captive slave camps of Babylon, Jeremiah remained in Judah and lived through the dark ravages of the nation after the Babylonian captivity, just such a dark spiritual season as I've suggested. And, quite to my point, we find Jeremiah repeatedly confronting, refuting, and rebuking the fatalistic ideas of the people around him in Judah.

*Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, **We are delivered to do all these abominations?*** (Jeremiah 7:9-10; emphasis added. The implication is that they thought that God caused them to do these abominable things)

This rebuke of fatalistic thinking appears several times in Jeremiah's prophecy. He obviously encountered this fatalistic abomination more than once during those dark years. Wise and godly men have observed; if you notice a man begin to entertain fatalistic ideas, rest assured. Either he has committed some major sin, or he is planning to commit it, and he wants to blame God. So true.

...and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. A person may acknowledge the

existence of God, perhaps even claim to be a believer, yet deny the character of God or deny His revelation in Scripture, and thus deserve this classification. Think about the many Jewish groups and individuals who interacted with Jesus in the gospels, all claiming to be followers of God, all carrying the reputation of being devoted religious folk, and yet Jesus describes many of them in words far more indicting than Jude's words. Read the whole twenty-third chapter of Matthew, but especially notice Jesus' words in this verse.

Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? (Matthew 23:33)

Jesus was not talking to the criminals and pagans of His day in this sermon. He spoke the words directly to the leadership of the Jewish religious establishment! While we might view His words as harsh from our perspective, we must keep in mind that Jesus, God Incarnate, knew every human and every thought, so He spoke to these people based on perfect knowledge of them. (John 2:23-25) We do not have this knowledge, so we should avoid such accusations. God handles His business far better than we can possibly manage it. In fact, whenever we attempt to manage God's business, we predictably and miserably fail. (Matthew 13:24-31; especially verses 28-29. Based on Jesus Himself, not only do humans make mistakes when they attempt to do God's business, but they irreversibly damage other children of God in the process)

The words "before of old ordained to this condemnation" were translated from a single Greek word that referred to a written condemnation. Simply stated, the condemnation of which Jude writes was nothing new or surprising. God made sure that His fixed righteous condemnation of this kind of conduct was condemned in writing long before the men of whom Jude writes began their devious work.

While the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" is an offensive weapon, all the other items that Paul lists in the "whole armour of God" (Ephesians 6:10-20) are defensive weapons, intended to protect the engaged soldier from the assaults of the adversary. The truths that Jude teaches in our study lesson logically fall into the category of a defensive weapon. You can know the truth and have the strongest offense imaginable, but if you wholly ignore the adversary's assaults against you, you become a casualty of war, not a victor. God wisely teaches us; have we learned?

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor