

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Scripture Judges Those Whom We Cannot Judge

These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage. But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; how that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit. (Jude 16–19, KJV 1900)

I frequently remind myself and my readers that we are commanded by Scripture to avoid passing judgment against people regarding their eternal standing with God; Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares. However, we should not ignore that the Holy Spirit in Scripture does state such judgments. He knows the hearts of all, but we do not—and cannot. Much in the context we have studied in Jude points distinctly to the idea that the people whom Jude examines and condemns in this setting are not children of God, but wicked sinners. The strongest of such descriptions closes our present study, "...having not the Spirit." Jude doesn't write that they simply are not presently manifesting the Spirit, but that they do not have Him. I suspect that some of the Puritans who often wrote of "Pretenders" versus "Possessors" of God's grace within the community of the Lord's church may have overstated the matter, but I cannot deny that some wicked sinners occasionally do make their way into a church and use the church as their vehicle to promote their ego rather than as a spiritual resource by which to worship God and serve others. The Scriptures that suggest this point mirror Jude's descriptions in our study passage. These people are wholly self-centered and self-promoting. You see their bogus pretenses most clearly when you observe Scripture's description of the motives, attitudes, and actions of a self-denying, other-serving faithful believer. Next to Jesus, perhaps Paul most clearly sets the golden example, "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." (2 Corinthians 4:5) At the end of a sermon, do you want to praise the man for his exceptional insights, polished delivery, or winning way, or do you want to praise God for sending His gospel to you, regardless of the identity of the messenger. We are to honor the sender of the message over the messenger.

1. *These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts.* Jude's first description identifies these people as never satisfied. They always find something wrong with other believers or with the Lord's church. And, of course, they are always right in their ideas, if

you listen to them. Murmuring and complaining are symptoms of our sinful carnality, not of a superior spirituality. ...*that there be no complaining in our streets.* (Psalm 144:14b) While we cannot know their motives, Jude associates motives with actions, and we may well observe their actions. At the end of the day, what lesson do you learn from these people? "It is all about me," or "It is all about the Lord and His children." Paul describes the wicked in similar terms, "...whose god is their belly." (Philippians 3:19)

2. *...and their mouth speaketh great swelling words.* No big surprise, their words swell their own superiority over other believers, always exaggerating what they know and how godly they live their Christian life. In terms of truth and error, Jesus' teachings were probably closer to the Pharisees' beliefs than other major beliefs, but He consistently condemned their self-righteous attitudes. Sadly, a carnally minded person who embraces religious beliefs tends to exaggerate his own accomplishments and purity, while finding endless faults with others around him. "...great swelling words" suggests pride, deep, sinful pride.
3. *...having men's persons in admiration because of advantage.* And also no great surprise, somewhere in the culture, their actions often aim to impress someone whom they admire. Their religion is more centered on building their own reputation and impressing others than in pleasing God. For those who seek to gain the approval of another human, that insatiable desire for admiration from others becomes a god in its importance to such a person.
4. *But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.* None of this news is startling if we read and embrace Jesus' words and warnings. How often, either directly or indirectly through His condemnation of the various Jewish sects of His day, did He prepare the disciples that they would never be free of nay-sayers and unbelievers.
5. *...how that they told you there should be mockers in the last time.* The "last time" in the

New Testament refers more often to the last age of time, the New Testament era, than to the final years prior to the Second Coming. John in his first epistle makes this point repeatedly and clearly. And the history of the Christian religion from the first century to the present confirms the prophecy. The enemies to the faith within the church community pose a far greater threat than anyone outside it.

6. *...who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.* We may not always know an individual's motives, but Jude—by the Holy Spirit's direction—suggests that people who follow this course of action do so to feed their ungodly lusts. While we normally reserve the word "Lust" for reference to various forms of sexual sin, Scripture uses the word more broadly. Any self-serving, self-centered, or self-promoting attitude grows out of Biblical lust, an ego more driven by taking care of self than of serving others. Paul describes these wicked people, "...whose god is their belly." (Philippians 3:19) In this sense, lust refers to anything that a person craves. Consider as one simple example the problem of money. Paul does not write that money is the root of all evil, but that the love of it is the root. When someone craves your money and works without moral principle, he demonstrates the kind of lust that Jude here condemns. We should consider the possibility that God in kind grace prevents many of His children from gaining too much wealth, for He knows them well; well enough to know that they couldn't handle it. Scripture commands faithful believers to live in contentment with what they have; never to look with envy at others who appear to have more than they. We become guilty of ungodly lust either by making its possession such an all-consuming goal that we will sacrifice anything to gain it or by viewing other believers who have a portion of wealth with envy.

7. *These be they who separate themselves, sensual.* Shocking as it seems that people so out of touch with Scripture and the Holy Spirit's guiding influence in the heart, if they are a child of grace, would live so contrary to the influence of grace. And it is as shocking that someone without the Spirit would bother to make an attempt to appear spiritual. But depraved humans will use just about any tool they can find to feed their ego, their wicked, self-serving senses. Satisfying the material senses becomes their object of worship. In the process of seeking more material things or admiration from other people, these people separate themselves. They put themselves in a special class. Scripture warns against covetousness, but that passage doesn't apply to them. Scripture warns against a meddling, gossiping spirit, but they elevate gossip to a noble virtue. They thrill at thinking that they

know something—anything—that you don't know.

8. *...having not the Spirit.* Perhaps this simple comment says more to explain these people than all of the descriptions that Jude has used up to this point. If we accept the simple thought the words convey, we must deal with unregenerate, hell-bound sinners who, for altogether self-promoting motives, pretend to be believers in Christ and promote themselves while trying to leave the impression that they are serving God. Jesus spoke similarly harsh words to some of the Jewish leaders, so we should not be surprised that Jude would do likewise.

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. (John 8:44)

What defines a godly believer in Christ? If you were to ask the pedestrian Christian of our day the question, he'd almost certainly begin to tell you about his decision, or his faith and good works. Jude ignores this superficial and prideful attitude and takes us to the heart of the matter, "...having not the Spirit." Paul writes similar words.

Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. (Romans 8:9b)

The primary distinction of a child of grace has to do with his possession of the indwelling Holy Spirit, not with his ideas or accomplishments. While steeped in pride and oblivious to God's grace, the person who matches Jude's description will focus on what he has said or done. When this same person has been created anew in Christ in the new birth and begins to understand the truth of the gospel, he will eventually come to a startling realization. The major question is not my decision for God, but His decision for me.

From our myopic perspective, we cannot make righteous judgments about who is or is not a child of God. But we must not ignore the Scriptures and their informed assessment of the hearts of all men. God knows His own, and He knows the prideful, self-satisfying motives and actions of all. Jesus' parable of the fishing net might instruct us wisely on this question. If we live in harmony with the Lord's kingdom, we will live to see the occasion when spiritual wise men *"...gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away."* (Matthew 13:47-50) In the parable, Jesus tells us that the net is the item that is similar to the kingdom of heaven. The net doesn't alter the nature of the sea life caught in it, but the net does bring what it catches into our view so that we can know more about it than we ever could know apart from the "net," the kingdom of heaven.

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor