

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 31, Number 8

February 23, 2014



Sin Never Produces Righteousness

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. (Jude 11, KJV 1900)

Although punctuation marks were not used in early Bible languages and manuscripts as we use them in the English language, we should respect the King James translators' use of those marks as communicating to us in our English language the sense of those manuscripts. You will notice that the King James Bible uses very few exclamation points. An exclamation point is used in our language to express strong feelings or high volume. Such strong reactions should be reserved for rare occasions, or they become useless. A preacher who either writes or preaches in constant "High volume" or strong emphasis defeats his design. What he intends as strong emphasis becomes no emphasis when he writes or speaks only with maximum intensity. And most people simply do not like being constantly shouted at. The rare exclamation point in the King James Bible teaches a wise lesson that preachers should heed.

Our last study briefly anticipated the three men mentioned in this week's study verse; Jude uses them to add emphasis to the point already made. Our human nature relishes the idea of doing or saying something to gain attention or praise to ourselves. Sadly, the very things that grow out of this carnal appetite for self-glory never accomplish anything good or beneficial for spiritual growth or maturity. A harsh word of criticism to a believer about someone in the church who has hurt your feelings will never produce good results in the spiritual climate of a church. Scripture associates harsh, critical words with hateful acts of murder. (1 John 2:9, 11; 3:15; 4:20) Jesus sets this tone even more emphatically in the Sermon on the Mount. (Matthew 5:21-26) Scripture consistently informs our actions and requires a specific response to anything that another believer says or does that offends us. It requires going to that person privately and striving to resolve the problem, not talking to others about it. (Matthew 18; the whole chapter deals with this question, including Jesus' warning that God looks on constantly and will judge us righteously, but severely, if we do not follow His words in this setting) How much has God forgiven you? And, should He demand that you pay fully instead of forgiving you, how readily would you be able to pay? His requirement in this matter is clear and demanding. In fact, we only honor Him by denying our carnality and doing what He commands

in the chapter. His words in this chapter are not mere suggestions. They are a commandment.

As a pastor for most of my life, I've observed this problem repeatedly, but I have never—not even one time—seen an unbiblical reaction do anything other than what Scripture teaches us that it shall accomplish, shipwreck to those who ignore Scripture's requirements. Our culture today is so steeped in sinful pride that many, even among the most conservative of believers, have lost touch with Scripture's simple teachings on this question. How we need Jude's stern reminder today that sinful conduct will always produce sinful destruction, never spiritual benefit. We cannot rationalize or justify a non-Biblical attitude or action and sterilize the sin out of it. Nor can we engage sinful attitudes or actions and avoid the spiritual destruction that Scripture warns is inevitably associated with such actions.

Jude gives us three of the Old Testament's most informative examples of sinful conduct to remind us that any attitude or action that fails the Biblical test predictably and surely produces spiritual shipwreck. Let's review each of these grave examples.

1. Cain. You can read about Cain in Genesis 4. He was Adam's and Eve's first son. Soon after his birth, Abel was born. From the beginning, these two men, though natural brothers had very different dispositions and interests. Their different dispositions go far deeper than their livelihood. "And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell." (Genesis 4:4b-5) No different than today, God looks at the character of the person before He looks at the offering the person brings, and that character reveals whether the person is devoted to serving God or to doing his own "Thing." ***Cain's sin was one of godlessness, violence, and greed.*** Cain got mad at God, but, since he couldn't change God, he reacted in sinful rage and murdered his brother. Human, sinful rage has operated similarly ever since. If someone says or does something that you dislike, neutralize them. Inherent in Cain's reaction is utter avoidance of any belief in

or respect for God's righteous judgment. If Abel did something wrong, God would deal with him. And, if Cain did something righteous, God would no less deal righteously with him and with his conduct. To take the matter into his own hands, Cain chose to ignore God and react to his own depraved hatred. "Oh, but preacher, I'd never think of murdering that person who offended me in the church." Perhaps not, but this would be a good time to visit those First John passages mentioned above. While you'd refuse to take a gun and pull the trigger, are you happy to "Pull the trigger" of your tongue and talk to other believers about how terribly someone treated you or how strongly you disagree with them? What is the difference? Scripture tells us that there is no ethical difference. Cain's murderous example always ignores God and His righteous commandment, and it always takes the matter into one's personal hands to settle the score "My way." And, friends, "My way" always results in sinful ethical murder, even if the person whom you speak against continues to live and breathe, oblivious to your sinful words. Cain doesn't give us an acceptable example for how to deal with a problem between a brother or sister and us. We need a better example.

2. Balaam. We read the "Balaam" story in Numbers 22-24, three whole chapters. Balaam was never a prophet in Israel, never. He was a pagan prophet. When a pagan king approached the pagan prophet to curse Israel, promising a rich reward, the pagan prophet was quite happy to go along. Neither the king nor the prophet considered that they had set themselves in battle against Israel's God, not just Israel. While Balaam pays impressive lip service to righteous intentions, Jude—inspired by the Holy Spirit—tells us the pagan prophet's true motives. He had no interest in right and wrong. He wanted the reward that the pagan king promised. ***Balaam's sin involved trying to compromise God's ways and people by teaching them that they could sin with impunity.*** You will—thank the Lord—rarely, but sadly hear someone say, "Oh, but God loves you. He won't really be that severe with you if you sin." Try that idea against Scripture and see what you discover.

We can seldom—if ever—know the real motives in other people, but we should never forget. God does know them. And, while we may pay lip service to noble intentions, we cannot hide our sinful motives from God. Nor can we rationalize them so that we gain His approval of our

sinful actions. The theology is bad, but the cliché does make a moral point, "The path to hell is paved with good intentions." Scripture makes it clear. God requires good intentions, but He also requires good—righteous—actions. No amount of good intentions can wash the stain of sin off of any action or motive that Scripture condemns. Our age seems drunk with the idea that a person can say or do anything he wishes and gain the Lord's blessings, only if he says or does it with good intentions. Scripture never supports the idea. Every passage that deals with God's righteous judgment deals with actions taken, not just with intentions. Good intentions that go off-track into sinful actions are not at all good in God's view. God always judges both motives and actions.

In the end, Balaam failed to directly curse Israel. However, Numbers 31:16 reveals Balaam's "Plan B." Revelation 2:14 affirms that, upon his failure at directly cursing Israel, Balaam took the indirect route. He counselled the pagan king to encourage intermarriage between his subjects and Israelites. An unbelieving spouse would be far more effective in corrupting—thereby cursing—Israel than his mountain top prophetic charades. How often, when someone consciously chooses to ignore God and His ways, they strive to convince others to fall to their personal low instead of repenting and working to increase their own godliness.

3. Core or "Korah." We read the "Korah" episode in Numbers 16. He tried to undermine Moses' authority and leadership of Israel. In fact, by this sedition, ***Korah tried to undermine God's authority.*** The Christian culture is sadly awash with devious men who work to manipulate their naïve and unsuspecting followers. However, despite this corruption, Scripture affirms that God has established a very precise and specific way of serving Him, including a precise man whom He calls to teach and to lead a local church body. I suggest that any man who presumptuously attempts to wield his influence on more than a local body that he serves reveals his own corruption and will inevitably bring his followers down, not improve their spiritual maturity. And anyone who attempts within a local church body to undermine the teaching authority of the man whom the Lord has called as their pastor follows the Korah example and will eventually experience the Korah end. Scripture is sufficiently clear that God appoints one man, not a committee of men, to teach and

to direct a local church in His ways. When anyone in that local body teaches contrary and tries to establish himself as the spiritual teacher or advisor of that church, he is dangerously close to the Korah subversive spirit.

Jude uses these three men from the Old Testament to put his readers on notice that error is just as deceitful today as it has ever been, and that any attempt, regardless of the tools used, to alter God's ways shall meet with God's resistance, and, in the end, shall fail, even if the man who subverts God's ways thinks for the moment that he has succeeded.

The powerful lesson that comes to us from Jude's three examples serves both to warn and to instruct us wisely that no way other than God's ever produces anything respectable or desirable in a church.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
Joseph R. Holder Pastor