

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 31, Number 12

March 23, 2014



Special Help for Abused Sheep

And of some have compassion, making a difference: and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. (Jude 22–23, KJV 1900)

Through our study of both Second Peter and Jude, we have followed the inspired writers as they put the devious motives, tactics, and errant doctrine of false teachers under the spotlight. Neither writer shows any tolerance for these people. However, Jude takes us further down this path to examine the wounded and abused people whom these false teachers have led astray. His counsel for our treatment of them is the mirror opposite to his view of the false teachers themselves. In examining Scripture's teachings about false teachers, as well as having observed a few of them, we learn that a false teacher commonly thinks of his followers in terms of himself and his "Success," not in terms of beloved children of grace whom he is charged to serve. Anger surfaces in the false teacher when one of his followers doesn't follow his script. He may choose to show it carefully, but beware. He will show it, and, if he thinks he can, he will abuse and wound those followers who refuse to follow his personal expectations for them.

In my almost sixty years of ministry, I have witnessed several extreme views come and go in terms of what people teach and believe. I lived through the arrogance of people who actually believed that God had empowered them to tell a preacher where he could and could not preach the gospel without a single verse in the Bible so empowering them, but with clear teaching that condemns such human efforts to control the preaching of the gospel. (1 Thessalonians 2:16) Later I witnessed preachers who used their Biblical privilege to preach where ever they chose, using this liberty as a cover to support and to encourage false teachers with whom they quietly agreed or empathized. Scripture never approves of any man lording his opinion over a minister of the gospel by telling the preacher where to preach or where not to preach, but Scripture also never approves of a faithful preacher's encouraging false teachers. I have also seen the essential truth of church discipline taken to the extreme of abuse, so much so that our present time witnesses a dangerous rebellion against all forms of church discipline. In our study of Scripture, we learn that one extreme is fully as dangerous as the other. First Corinthians Chapter Five warns us of the danger of no discipline, even as it sets the balanced example for us to follow in faithful church discipline. Along with these behavioral issues, I have witnessed various

doctrinal errors from extreme legalism to universalism and fatalism. In many cases, the poor people who fall under the influence of a false teacher become so wrecked and wounded that they often simply drop out of sight from any church. Often these wounded souls slip out the door and disappear from church. Jude teaches us to at least make a noble effort to reach these people and show them the grace and mercy in short supply among false teachers who demand personal obedience and near blind loyalty from their followers. A false teacher once told me that he believed it was quite acceptable at times to "Lie for the sake of the kingdom of God." I rejected his idea emphatically. You cannot honor God and His righteous grace by violating His commandments, much less by doing so and rationalizing that you are actually engaging this sin for the betterment of God's kingdom. Such a false teacher likely confuses what he thinks will benefit him with a kingdom benefit. Abominable! In more recent years, I heard such a man claim that God actually violates His stated commandments in Scripture, but that He does so in keeping with the provisions of His "Secret will." James 1:13-17 rejects any twisted idea that God ever contradicts Himself or His moral character. The "Secret will" idea that contradicts God's revealed will and moral character in Scripture is as bogus in light of Scripture as the "Lie for the sake of the kingdom" heresy.

A dominant strategy of false teachers, regardless of the error taught, appears in their abusive attitude and action toward the people under their influence. Jude directly addresses this problem and teaches us to make a double effort to reach these wounded souls and work to help them find grace and merciful healing for their wounds. Scripture never tolerates or advises any tolerance for the false teacher, but Scripture strongly urges us to show grace and love, love in action kind of love, toward those whom false teachers abuse. Even if a wounded believer cannot immediately understand the error of the false teacher who deceived him, the most wounded of souls can sense genuine, unselfish grace and love that seeks above all else to nurture him back to spiritual health. John 13:35 sets the example of grace toward other believers in terms that even a deeply wounded believer can grasp. The principle of love in the New Testament deals with conduct, not with feelings or emotions. It

defines how we treat others far more than how we feel toward them. Showing unselfish love in action toward a wounded believer is a healing balm to the soul. We may love these deceived believers back to the fold of gospel truth long before they return to a clear understanding of Biblical truth.

And of some have compassion, making a difference.... Jude draws a distinction between two classes of believers that attracts our attention. In effect, Jude instructs us to show compassion toward one class of believers; "...making a difference."

...and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. Jude's distinction becomes clearer as we review the two strategies that he outlines. The first group is to be given strong compassion. Go above and beyond the call of duty to recover them. Other believers who have been deceived and misled by a false teacher may appear so entrenched in the error, despite coming to see the true dark colors of the false teacher, that a godly believer seeking to recover such a one should approach him/her with caution. False teachers develop duplicitous tactics and deceitful words to mislead their followers. They appear to the casual observer to be ever so sincere and ever so concerned with getting it right according to Scripture, but they always find a way to get it wrong. "...considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." (Galatians 6:1b)

Parents occasionally witness their adolescent children sincerely trying to reach out to their friends who may be flirting with trouble. In the beginning, the child truly wants to recover his/her friend, but the allure of the errant conduct can quickly entice and deceive the sincere friend into falling prey to its vice. Although we focus this point on adolescents, in fact, the problem is quite real for believers of all age and all levels of experience. Scripture commands us to make every effort to recover those in error, but Scripture also warns us to take grave care, lest we fall into the snare ourselves. Jude's description of the second class of erring believers reminds us of this danger. "...save with fear" reminds us that the snare that entrapped this believer could well have trapped us—and yet could do so. I have seen more than one sincere preacher who wanted to recover an erring brother from his false ideas become that false teacher's next victim. We should accept Jude's caution wisely. Yes, you hate the garment that carries the residual smell of smoke and error. Yes, you should strive to recover the wounded soul who wears those stained garments. But do not inflate your ego or think that you are impregnable to the error. You enter the process with fear, but you do enter it and work to heal the wounded soul who yet wears the smoke-reeking garments that the false teacher convinced him to wear.

We must keep our minds sharply focused on the stain of sin that has marred the fallen believer's spiritual wardrobe. It could well stain our "Grace

clothes" as well. (Colossians 3:5-14; Warren Wiersbe interestingly develops Paul's analogy in these verses under the dual heading of "Grave clothes versus grace clothes") We never interact with another believer from an invulnerable vantage point. The duplicitous twist that a false teacher puts on his errant ideas is sadly effective, or the false teacher would fail in attracting anyone to follow him. "But he is such a good, sincere man." In the case of false teachers, the accusation is not about the man's perceived moral conduct, and the man can be ever so sincere in his error. The whole point is the error of his teachings. Do you really think those various people who regularly knock on your door and want to talk to you about their faith are insincere? No, they are quite sincere, but they are also quite wrong. (Romans 10:2-3)

Jude instructs us to work hard at healing and restoring those whom false teachers have wounded and abused by their self-serving tactics. One class of people lead astray by the false teacher simply needs sound teaching and a season of exposure to the truly unselfish, other-serving, God-focused mindset of a faithful teacher. Witnessing this godly faithfulness in a true servant of Christ restores this person to soundness and balance. However, Jude reminds us that we should also work to regain another more difficult class of people who have been more deeply impacted by the false teacher. They may have well seen the disgusting selfishness of the false teacher, but they have come to deeply and sincerely believe the error that he taught them. Before they consider repenting, they must see the error of that bad teaching and come to fully realize that it fails to harmonize with Scripture's teachings.

I have witnessed both classes of believers. The first requires time and longsuffering grace, but they are far more receptive to the restoration of the gospel than the second. The second class of believer must be taken past the errors he learned from the false teacher, past that false teacher's—and his own—ego investment in that false belief, and rebuild his faith from the ground up. In the language of Scripture, "...ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat." (Hebrews 5:12) Often pride interferes with spiritual recovery in these believers. They may fully grasp the reality that a false teacher used and abused them, but they try to hold onto some of the ideas that the false teacher taught them, sincerely believing those ideas. Before you regain this believer, you must fully convince him that the ideas are as wrong-headed as the man who taught them.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor