

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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What about my Brother/Sister?

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. 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 20–23, KJV 1900)

One of the most frequent problems with modern believers is that they approach their Christian living as if it were carved out by a stereotyped cookie cutter of their own design. Scripture teaches wisdom and discernment of its authority and teaching, not cookie cutter, self-defined faith. The content of Jude's brief letter makes it clear that grievous error was threatening the faith that the Lord had once delivered to His saints. Jude admonishes his readers to earnestly contend for that faith, not look for ways to modify it to their own private brand of faith. If the Lord directed Jude to work so hard to recover and to correct believers, it is reasonable and right that he admonish his readers to follow his example.

And of some have compassion, making a difference: and others save with fear. Jude identifies two classes of believers whom his readers are to seek to correct and to recover. You can't treat all people by any cookie cutter approach and recover them from error.

There are some believers who fall into error, either in their personal conduct or in the content of their faith, what they believe, because they are naïve. They are quite sincere, but they are not sufficiently informed and wise in the Scriptures to detect and to avoid the errors that ensnare them. If a godly believer approaches them with tender compassion and points out the inconsistencies or problems with their error, they will see it and readily repent. Your simple nudge, administered with Biblical Christian love, is all they need to turn around and regain their sound spiritual footing. Your compassion toward them will direct them back to sound Biblical thinking and conduct.

There are other believers who are so deeply entrenched in their error and so pridefully deceived and deceitful, and persuasive in their efforts to gain proselytes to their way of living or thinking that they represent a real danger, even to the godly Jude type people in their lives. In the business world, this kind of person might be described as being so persuasive that he could sell an ice maker to a person who lives at the North Pole. In fact, Jude's warning, "...others save with fear," warns Jude's readers that they should approach this person with fear lest they become the deceiver's next captive in his error.

Consider a New Testament example. In Galatians Chapter Two, Paul writes about an occasion in Antioch Church when Peter, one of the twelve apostles, became intimidated by Jewish believers from Jerusalem. There is no suggestion whatever that Peter was so sound or so well informed, or divinely programmed for that matter, that he could not possibly be deceived. He definitely was not infallible. Further, Peter's failure impacted other sound believers, including Barnabas. Both Peter and Barnabas were duped into error while Paul alone understood the error and confronted them. Think. If you are Paul and you realize that Peter has been deceived into error, how will you approach him? Will you try to be subtle and indirect, hoping that he gets your message and repents? Or will you confront him with a stern, black and white rebuke? And what about Barnabas, your bosom companion in the faith? How will you challenge and recover him? The Galatians 2 context answers the question.

Jesus is always our best example. We find examples of both methods that seek to recover an erring believer in one chapter.

But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you. (Mark 16:7)

Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. (Mark 16:14)

In Verse seven, Jesus shows amazing compassion toward Peter. Despite Peter three times denying that he even knew Jesus, Jesus, now risen from the dead, sends the message by the women who went to the tomb, to tell the disciples, emphasizing that they should be doubly sure to tell Peter this instruction. Jesus directed the women to extend His compassion to Peter. Do not allow Peter to feel destroyed by his denial. When the Lord appeared to Peter and renewed his hope by seeing the resurrected Jesus, Peter's recovery was accomplished. The Lord indeed saved Peter from dismal hopelessness to hopeful joy. Often in

Scripture, “saved” refers to events in our discipleship, in no way related to our new birth or going to heaven when we die.

In the shadow of Jesus’ compassionate recovery of Peter, in Mark 16:14, Jesus “...*upbraided them* (The other disciples) *with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.*” While Jesus did not at all save the disciples in fear, He did save them in a dramatic manner, as if “...*pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.*” Had you or I confronted this gathered body of believers, we would have unquestionably approached them in fear. After all, these men were Jesus’ most intimate followers. They should know more about Him and His teachings than any of us who believed at a far greater distance from Jesus.

Think of Jude’s two scenarios in terms of believers whom you have known over the years. Focus on one believer who may be new to the faith, still naïve and uninformed in the Scriptures, or someone who by their disposition is proud and more confident in his own ability than in the counsel of a brother or sister in the faith. He could be easily deceived to believe something wholly contradictory to the Scriptures and sincerely think that he believes the truth. If you get this naïve new believer’s attention with the Scriptures and show him how his present ideas are not supported by Scripture, he will likely thank you and joyfully turn away from the error and embrace the truth, unless he has become too addicted to sinful pride.

Now turn your focus to a seasoned believer who has been known in the community of the faithful for many years. Perhaps he is a preacher, even a preacher with a significant circle of strong influence. He and his followers will almost certainly reject any suggestion that he is wrong. How do you approach this man or one of his followers? He is so skilled in his wresting of the Scriptures that he might convince Peter or Barnabas, **or even you**. Try the low-key gracious approach to correct him, and you will quickly see how futile your strategy really is. He’ll reject your efforts with arrogance and ridicule, two common attitudes of a hardened heart. He has likely convinced himself that he could not possibly be deceived. Perhaps he has embraced some fatalistic idea that God has chosen him as one of the “Very elect” who cannot be deceived. He may well believe that the Lord “Revealed” these ideas to him with the intent of recovering all believers in his/your fellowship from longstanding error. Your only hope of recovering this person will be a very direct effort, as if you are snatching a burning branch out of the fire. And be aware. In many cases with such a person, all of your efforts will be as futile as if you were trying to pull a burning branch out of the fire and think that the fire has in no way damaged the wood. Recovery works with a sincere believer who respects the Scriptures and the Lord’s “...pillar and ground of the truth.” Like

trying to rescue a burning branch from total destruction in a fire, your efforts with a prideful believer may often fail. Jude teaches us to make the effort regardless the outcome.

If we follow New Testament teaching, there is no error that cannot be healed in a believer through true repentance. The New Testament does, however, remind us that correcting error in another believer is not a “Cookie cutter” process that is guaranteed to work. When you approach an erring brother or sister, you cannot control them or their reaction to your effort to recover them. You can only control yourself and your actions. Be aware that some children of grace, may have fallen into the snare of error so deeply that your best—and most Biblical—effort to recover them will not succeed. You and I are not prophets. We cannot know in advance if our efforts will succeed or fail. The Lord doesn’t hold us responsible for that person’s choices, ***unless we refuse to make the effort at all***. He does hold us responsible to make the effort, regardless of the outcome. I can’t count the times that I’ve reminded a person that the three steps of Matthew 18 are mandatory on a believer when tensions or disagreeable offenses enter into their relationship with another believer, but they consciously chose to ignore Matthew 18. Oftentimes, it seems, many very sincere believers prefer to complain or gossip to other believers about the person’s errors than approach that person and follow the Lord’s teaching. “I tried that once, and it didn’t work out” is not a free pass to for ever ignore Scripture’s teaching in all future problems. So it didn’t work once. In the text, the Lord teaches us that this process will not always work, but He nevertheless directs us to follow the process. If, at the end of the three steps, the offending believer refuses to change, you have done what the Lord commanded you to do. Drop it and leave that person in the Lord’s hands. “...*let him be unto thee as a heathen man or a publican.*” (Matthew 18:17b) Remember. Jesus didn’t mistreat or speak badly about Gentiles (A heathen man to a first century Jew) or publicans, tax collectors. So the Lord doesn’t give you or me a free pass to mistreat someone who refuses such Biblical efforts at peace and restoration. Make your best effort with compassion to save your brother or sister from error. In minor personal offenses, Jesus teaches us to always forgive when we see evidence of repentance, even seventy times seven in one day.

For more serious failures in the faith, Scripture teaches us to admonish the person in error once or twice, and then, if they refuse to hear and repent, to reject that person. (Titus 3:10-11). In some cases of this gravity, you may actually change (“Save”) the man, but in many such instances, you must realize that you are dealing with someone who is knowingly determined to continue in the divisive, self-promoting course that he/she has chosen. Paul’s warning specifically counts and thereby limits your efforts, “*first and second admonition.*” On a few

such occasions, I ignored this verse and continued trying to recover the person. I learned by experience that this verse is true. If you continue labor endlessly with a person who is so determined to remain in his/her error, you will only drive that person to entrench himself deeper in his error. You will not win him to repentance. If you save this person with fear, praise the Lord, but in most cases you will not. Beware. Jude's message is informative. When dealing with such a person, you are dealing with fire. You may rescue someone, but you may also burn yourself instead of rescuing him. Jude's warning is wise. Approach with fear.

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