

## Sustaining Our Faith

Lesson for March 3, 2024

### Unit I: Faith-FULL versus Faith-LESS

#### Adult Topic:

#### Background Scripture: Jude

#### Printed Text: Jude 17-25

**Key verse:** *“But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.”* (Jude 20-21, NIV)

I recently saw the story of a high school values clarification class conducted by a teacher in Teaneck, New Jersey. A girl in the class had found a purse containing \$1000 and returned it to its owner. The teacher asked for the class's reaction. Every single one of her fellow students concluded the girl had been “foolish.” Most of the students contended that if someone is careless, they should be punished. When the teacher was asked what he said to the students, he responded, “Well, of course, I didn't say anything. If I come from the position of what is right and what is wrong, then I'm not their counselor. I can't impose my views.” It's no wonder that J. Allen Smith, considered a father of many modern education reforms, concluded in the end, "The trouble with us reformers is that we've made reform a crusade against all standards. Well, we've smashed them all, and now neither we nor anybody else has anything left."

Senator Dan Coats, *Imprimis*, Vol. 20, Number 9, Sept 1991.

Having a “shortcut to success” may persuade some people to compromise their standards. How do people remain true to their values in the face of enticing trends? Jude writes to the community of faith, assuring them of God’s promises: to keep us from falling and to make us stand without blemish in God’s presence. (*Sunday School Commentary, 2023-2024*, Townsend Press, p. 242)

### Key Terms

1. **Mercy** (verse 21) – Compassion or forbearance shown especially to an offender or to one subject to one's power. Blessing that is an act of divine favor or compassion.
2. **Scoffers** (verse 18) – Persons who jeers or mocks or treats something with contempt or calls out in derision.
3. **Ungodly** (verse 18) – One without God, estranged from the life of God, whom he neither fears nor serves. Lacking respect, piety, reverence.

## Lesson Background

Jude is a brief letter, that reflects a perilous time similar to our circumstances. Some ambitious and prideful people have attached themselves to congregations, presented themselves as leaders and practiced an immoral lifestyle. Jude calls them “ungodly” people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality (Jude 4). In addition, these intruders exploited their welcome by promoting immorality, mocking the judgment of God and behaving as if God could not hold them accountable for their actions and immoral ethics. They despised authority, spoke evil of others, and sought wealth in their greed (vv. 8, 11). Jude called them “blemishes at your love feasts” who had nothing true or valuable to offer. They were like clouds “without rain” and fruitless trees (v. 12). They “followed” their own evil desires, and though they influenced many, their words were filled with their own ambition (v. 16). This was a dangerous time for the churches, and Jude addresses the situation directly with both warning and hope.

Who was Jude? Jude, who wrote this letter, was the brother of James who was one of the elders and leaders of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Galatians 1:19; 2:9). Since James was a brother of Jesus, Jude was as well. Though both opposed Jesus during his ministry before his death, both became committed believers after the resurrection of Jesus (I Corinthians 15:7; Jude 1).

The book of Jude was probably a sermon that circulated among several congregations as an open letter. He addressed a number of congregations at one time, as they were all endangered by ungodly intruders and leaders. Jude clearly stated his main interest. He encouraged believers to “contend for the faith” that had been delivered to them (Jude 3). He identified the troublemakers, warned that their destiny is the same as that of Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 7) and the devil (v. 9), and promised God would execute judgment against the “ungodly” for their “ungodly acts” (v. 15).

Summarily, what are believers to do? How do they contend for the faith? How do believers live out their faith in such perilous times? Jude sends his letter with a call to persevere in the faith. That call is our lesson text today.

## Lesson in Depth

### I. To Be Forewarned is to Be Forearmed (Jude 17-19)

**But you, beloved, remember:** We are to be different. We are to remember what Jesus and the apostles said, **which were spoken by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.** The word of God is always the answer to dangers in or out of the church.

The apostles had warned that just these things would happen; and even more so as the day approaches:

*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables (2 Timothy 4:3-4).*

Jude calls us to think about the predictions and prophecies in the Bible, especially the predictions of the apostles as they travelled with Jesus and learned from Him the prophecies He would fulfill in His first coming and those He would fulfill in His second coming. We need to be watching what is happening in our world today and consider the predictions in the Bible as we make ready for the Lord's return.

**There would be mockers in the last time:** Perhaps Jude had in mind those who mock the idea of Jesus' return. Or he may mean the kind of men who mock those who don't go along the same path of destruction they travel on.

**Mockers... who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts:** Those who live **according to their own ungodly lusts** love to mock those who want to please God. Jude wants Christians to *expect* this kind of mocking, so they won't be surprised by it.

What we know as selfish, self-centered, self-indulgent, sinful worldly pleasures Jude labels "ungodly lusts." Those who are motivated to indulge these ungodly lusts scoff at God, at the Bible, at Bible-believing Christians, whether Christians try to encourage them and offer to help them change their behavior or not. As the second coming of Jesus Christ draws near, such ridicule and scoffing by unbelievers will increase in volume and intensity, often leading to persecution. Moreover, such scoffers will develop their own belief system or theology or adopt an established one or find a church that will enable them to live an ungodly life, harden their conscience, and disregard the truth of God.

**People who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit:** Essentially, these men were not spiritual; they were carnal and insensitive to the Holy Spirit.

**Sensual** in this context has nothing to do with sexual attractiveness. It describes the person who lives only *by* and *for* what he can get through his physical senses, and he lives this way selfishly. His motto is, "If it feels good, do it" or, "How can it be wrong if it *feels* so right?"

**Who cause divisions:** These *certain men* had an instinct to separate themselves and make **divisions**. "The word, found only once in the Bible, denotes those superior people who keep themselves to themselves – Christian Pharisees." (Green)

**Not having the Spirit:** This same description could be written over many churches, or church projects, or evangelism campaigns, or home groups, or even individual Christian lives. The church and the world truly need genuinely *spiritual* men and women today.

Unfortunately, Jude needed to recognize and warn people about situations we also know about by experience today. In the church, we find worldly people who do not follow Jesus Christ and His teachings, people who do not believe the Bible is the infallible word of God (without error in all that the Bible affirms). These people are not indwelt by the Holy Spirit; indeed, they actually call God a liar when they reject the Bible's clear and consistent teachings on the most basic moral and theological truths that Jesus and the apostles especially upheld as of first importance for all believers and the church in all times and places. They reject the leading and teaching of the Holy Spirit as He tries to teach them the meaning of the Bible and help them apply the Bible's teachings to their behaviors and beliefs. Such people cause divisions in the church, divisions that we experience or hear about almost every day, divisions we try to overcome in Christ.

## II. Strengthen Your Faith and Commitment (Jude 20)

**Building yourselves up on your most holy faith:** This is one way that we can keep ourselves in the love of God. It means to keep growing spiritually, and to keep building up. Jude tells us, “**build yourselves up on your most holy faith.**” This means that we are responsible for our own spiritual growth. It means that we cannot wait for spiritual growth to just happen, or expect others to make us grow.

Jude has shown us the frailty of men and how deceivers even infiltrated the church. If you entrust your spiritual growth to someone else, it will not only hurt your spiritual growth, but it may also lead you astray.

ii. Others can help provide an environment conducive for spiritual growth. But no one can *make* another person grow in his relationship with the Lord.

**On your most holy faith:** The **most holy faith** is the same as *the faith once for all delivered to the saints* (Jude 3). Jude wasn't talking about growing *in the most holy faith* (though that is a valid idea). Jude is talking about growing **on your most holy faith**. We grow *on the foundation of the truth*.

**Praying in the Holy Spirit:** This is another way to keep ourselves in the love of God. The battle against wrong living and wrong teaching is a spiritual battle, requiring prayer in the Holy Spirit.

Many of our prayers are directed by our own needs, by our own intellects, or by our own wishes and desires. But there is a higher level of prayer: “*Likewise, the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us*” (Romans 8:26).

Notes collected and developed by Ethel Williams

The Holy Spirit may help us pray by giving us the right words to say when we pray. He may speak through *groanings which cannot be uttered* (Romans 8:26). Or the Holy Spirit may do it through the gift of tongues, a gift God gives to seeking hearts, which want to communicate with Him on a deeper level than normal conversation.

### III. Love is Key (Jude 21)

**Keep yourselves in the love of God:** We know that God loves even the ungodly (Romans 5:6). Therefore, Jude doesn't mean, "Live in such a way to make yourself lovable to God." Instead, to keep yourselves in the love of God means to keep yourself in harmony with God's ever-present love.

But we should understand what it means when the Bible says that God loves the ungodly. The significance of the idea that God loves us all has been twisted considerably. Consider the sinner who defends his sinful practice by saying "God loves me just the way I am." His implication is that "God loves me; I must be pretty good." Actually, the fact that God loves him is a reflection on *God's* goodness, not his own. The perspective isn't, "I'm so great that *even* God loves me," but "God is so great that He loves *even* me."

God's love extends everywhere, and nothing can separate us from it. But we can deny ourselves the benefits of God's love. People who don't **keep themselves in the love of God** end up living as if they are on the dark side of the moon. The sun is always out there, always shining, but they are never in a position to receive its light or warmth. An example of this is the Prodigal Son of Luke 15, who was always loved by the father, but for a time he did not benefit from it.

**Looking for the mercy of Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life:** This is a third way that we can keep ourselves in the love of God. As we keep the blessed hope of Jesus' soon return alive in our hearts, this effectively keeps us in the love of God, and helps us to *not* give away our faith.

### IV. A Rescue Mission (Jude 22-23)

**On some have compassion:** Jude begins here to tell us what we must do with those who have been influenced by these *certain men*. We need to make **a distinction**, based on where they are coming from. Certainly, **on some have compassion**.

Using wisdom we approach different people in different manners. By being sensitive to the Holy Spirit, we can know when we should comfort, and when we should rebuke. Christians should not abandon a friend flirting with false teaching. They should help him through it in love.

The means we continue to love them. No matter how bad a person is, or how misleading and terrible their doctrine is, we are not allowed to hate them – or to be unconcerned for their salvation.

**Compassion** often means watching over someone, helping them with accountability. “Meantime watch over others as well as yourselves; and give them such help as their various needs require.” (Wesley)

**Others save with fear:** This second group must be confronted more strongly – but in **fear**, not in a sanctimonious superiority. You may need to pull **them out of the fire**, but never do it in pride.

This *outward* look is important. It demonstrates that we are not only concerned for our own spiritual welfare. It proves that we genuinely care about other Christians who are edging towards significant error.

## V. “And Now” (Jude 24-25)

**Now to Him:** Jude closes the letter with a famous *doxology* (a brief declaration of praise to God). Jude’s doxology reminds us of God’s care and of our destiny.

**Who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless:** Jude’s message of warning and doom might have depressed and discouraged his readers. Perhaps his original readers thought that with so much false teaching and immorality around, very few Christians would ever reach heaven. Here he reminds them that the answer lies only in the power of God.

He **is able to keep you**, and you aren’t able to keep yourself.

In mountain climbing, the beginning hiker attaches himself to the expert so that if he loses his footing he won’t stumble and fall to his death. In the same manner, if we keep connected with God, we cannot fall. He keeps us safe.

By comparing passages of Scripture, we also find out who is really responsible for our safe keeping. Jude began the letter by addressing those who are *preserved in Jesus* (Jude 1). Then he encouraged Christians to avoid dangerous men and to keep themselves *in the love of God* (Jude 21) Here at the end he concluded with the recognition that it is ultimately God who keeps us from stumbling and falling. Paul put the same idea in Philippians 2:12-13: *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*

Keeping us spiritually safe *is* God’s work. But you can always tell the people He is working in, because *they* are working also. God doesn’t call us to simply let the Christian life happen to us and He doesn’t command us to save ourselves. He calls us to a partnership with Him.

Notes collected and developed by Ethel Williams

**Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy:** As God is faithful, we won't have to slink shamefacedly into the presence of God. We can be presented before Him with **exceeding joy**.

**To the only wise God, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever:** This all reminds us of God's wisdom, glory, and power. Jude isn't trying to say that we can or should *give* these things to God. When we acknowledge and declare the truth about God, it glorifies Him. We aren't giving God more **majesty** or **power** than He had before; we are just recognizing and declaring it.

**Both now and forever:** This could also be translated "unto all the ages." This is "as complete a statement of eternity as can be made in human language." (Robertson) Our victory, our triumph in God, is forever.

There is serious deception in the world and often among those called Christians. There are enemies of the gospel who have infiltrated the church. Yet despite the greatness of the threat, God is greater still. He wins, and if we will only stay with Him, we are guaranteed victory also.

Jude is a book full of warning, but it closes with supreme confidence in God. Dangerous times should make us trust in a mighty God.

### Lesson Summary

In this week's lesson, Jude is writing to encourage believers to contend for the faith and to be mindful of the false teachers and scoffers who will arise. Here are some lessons that can be learned from this passage:

1. **Remember the teachings of the apostles:** Jude urges believers to remember the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. This reminds us to hold fast to the teachings of Scripture and the traditions established by the apostles, which provide a solid foundation for our faith.
2. **Build yourselves up in your most holy faith:** Jude encourages believers to grow in their faith, emphasizing the importance of spiritual growth and maturity. This involves prayer, studying Scripture, fellowship with other believers, and applying biblical truths to our lives.
3. **Keep yourselves in the love of God:** This reminds us to live in a way that is pleasing to God, following His commandments, and walking in love towards Him and others.
4. **Wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ:** Jude reminds believers of the hope of the second coming of Christ, encouraging them to be patient and steadfast in their faith, knowing that Christ will ultimately bring justice and redemption.

5. **Have mercy on those who doubt:** Jude urges believers to show compassion and understanding towards those who are struggling in their faith, encouraging them to help strengthen and restore them.
6. **Save others by snatching them out of the fire:** Jude encourages believers to be proactive in sharing the gospel and rescuing others from the destructive influence of false teaching and sin.
7. **To Him who is able to keep you from stumbling:** Jude closes with a doxology, acknowledging God's power to keep believers from falling and presenting them blameless before His presence with great joy. This reminds us of our dependence on God and His faithfulness to preserve us in our faith.

The lessons in this Quarter, “Examining Your Faith”, continue to emphasize the importance of standing firm in the faith, growing in spiritual maturity, showing love and compassion to others, and placing our ultimate hope in the return of Christ.