

Jude 1–6

A Ministry in the Word

Scripture Reading

Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called: mercy unto you, and peace, and love, be multiplied. Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not. And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

The Character of the Epistle

Jude is one of the later epistles, written when those things he describes were already at work within the sphere of Christian profession. While 2 Peter addresses God's governmental ways with the world in general — bringing in the flood of Noah and looking at unrighteousness broadly — Jude is concerned with what is happening within the sphere of what would be called orthodox Christendom. Not the openly cultish denial of Christ found in sects of perdition, but the internal corruption of what professes to be Christianity. These are men who have crept in unawares — into the sphere of profession, into what passes for

the church — and have changed its character from within.

Jude had originally intended to write about the common salvation — something that would have been more pleasant to communicate. But he was obliged by the Spirit of God to turn to another subject. What we have in Jude, therefore, is not what Jude chose to write but what the Spirit of God constrained him to write. And the very constraint indicates the urgency: the state of affairs demanded this ministry rather than another.

Called, Beloved, Preserved

Before entering into the description of the corruption, verse 1 establishes what is sovereign and secure. Darby's rendering gives the order: called, beloved in God the Father, preserved in Jesus Christ. These three things are all on God's side — His calling, His love, His preserving power. Peter says the saints are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. The keeping is God's. The preservation in Jesus Christ is His work, not the result of the believer being a little wiser or more discerning than his neighbours.

The salutation — mercy, peace, and love — is addressed to individuals, not to an assembly. Mercy is never addressed to an assembly as such in the New Testament; it speaks to individual need. And there is an order in these three: in the object of mercy, there is peace in the soul, and then love finds its right place as the fruit. Grace and mercy are distinct: grace looks to God as its source, mercy looks to the need of those upon whom it is conferred.

Earnestly Contend for the Faith Once Delivered

Verse 3 presses what the state of things demands: *earnestly contend for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints*. The faith here is not the act of believing but the body of truth — the definite content of what has been entrusted

to the saints in Scripture. And it was delivered once for all. There is no further delivery awaited, no development that adds to it. The contending is the maintaining of what was originally given, against the constant work of those who seek to alter and modify it.

Conscience is the real inlet of truth into the soul. When truth engages the conscience, it becomes a living possession — something that is held because it has been worked into the soul by God's Spirit, not merely received intellectually. It is when truth has not penetrated the conscience that it sits loosely and is easily given up when pressed. The Lord's dealing with the woman at the well in John 4 illustrates this: step by step He addressed her conscience, and it was when her conscience was engaged that the truth became real to her. That is the kind of holding of the faith that makes earnest contention possible.

Ungodly Men Crept In — Three Leading Defections

Verse 4 names what these men do: they turn the grace of God into licentiousness, and deny the only Master and Lord Jesus Christ. Their denial is not necessarily verbal — it is the meaning of their conduct. The abuse of grace to engage in self-indulgence takes many forms within Christendom; the confessional system, where absolution is received as a licence to repeat the same sin, is one prominent example. The remedy is given in Galatians 5:13 — called unto liberty, but not liberty as an occasion to the flesh.

Verses 5, 6, and 7 then give three examples from Scripture that illustrate the leading principles of this defection. Together they form a three-fold cord, and only God can deliver from the power of such a combination. The root of all three is unbelief.

First: the people saved out of Egypt (verse 5). They were called out and set apart, as with a typical redemption. But unbelief in the face of God's great deliverance was their ruin. They despised the pleasant land; their souls loathed the light

bread. They wanted to go back. They believed not, and were destroyed. The carcasses of most were strewn in the wilderness, as Hebrews presses. Unbelief in the face of grace is the starting point of the downward course that Jude traces.

Second: the angels which kept not their first estate (verse 6). This refers to the events of Genesis 6, where the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men — not to the original fall of Satan and his angels, since if that were the meaning, all the fallen angels would be in those everlasting chains, and we know from Scripture that many still roam at large. The argument that the Lord said the angels in heaven neither marry nor are given in marriage — which omits the words *in heaven* — does not disprove this reading. This is the leaving of God's appointed place and order — the stepping outside of the boundaries God has set. That is the second great principle: disordering God's order.

Everlasting Chains Under Darkness

These angels are reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. They are a distinct class from Satan and the fallen angels who did not leave their first estate. The chains are described as everlasting — not because they are physical chains binding spirit beings in some literal sense, but because the language of restraint is used: they cannot move as they were moving before. The darkness that surrounds them is a foretaste of the judgment reserved for them — what the wandering stars will receive in fullness at the last: the gloom of darkness forever.

The judgment of the great day does not require compression into a literal twenty-four-hour period. The day of the Lord is not a day in that sense; the day of God is not a day in that sense. It is the epoch of God's final reckoning, from which emerges the eternal state. And the word eternal, which appears here and in verse 7 in connection with the fire, and again in verse 21 in connection with eternal life, is not to be treated differently in its negative uses from its positive

ones. To remove eternal from the punishment while retaining it for the life is special pleading, not interpretation.

— *Study ends* —