

Jude 18–25

A Ministry in the Word

Scripture Reading

How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit. 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. Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

The Last Time — Already Present

The last time or last hour is not a fixed calendar date but a moral epoch — the era of the church's fall from its first standing. When John wrote *it is the last hour* in his first epistle, he was already within it. Jude too looks at the mockers of verse 18 not as a distant future eventuality but as persons already present: certain men crept in unawares (verse 4), already there. The last time is the whole period that runs from the fall of the church from its apostolic standing to the full apostasy that will develop after the rapture. We are within it still.

The book of Revelation is itself a witness to this: it was written because the church had already fallen. In Revelation 2 and 3, the Lord Jesus takes the position of a judge addressing what professes His name — not the picture we

have in Paul's epistles of the Head of the body building it up in love. Each of the seven letters presents the Lord in a character consonant with the state He is addressing. And each marks what meets His approval within that state, while pressing what does not answer to what He is. The falling away spoken of by Paul, the Antichrist connected with it by John, the corruption of the profession described by Jude — these are different facets of the same development, each writer pressing the aspect that belongs to his own line of truth.

These Who Separate Themselves — Natural, Having Not the Spirit

Verse 19 describes those who separate themselves, are sensual — Darby has *natural* — and have not the Spirit. They set themselves apart as a special class. The clerisy that arose in the church — the professional Christian, the one who makes a distinction between himself and the ordinary believer — falls naturally under this description. Separation is not wrong in its right place, but when it becomes a principle of self-exaltation, a way of constituting oneself a distinct order, it is the very thing condemned here. And such persons are natural — not born of the Spirit — and have not the Spirit. No external position, however elevated within the sphere of profession, confers what only God can give.

But Ye, Beloved — Four Things for an Evil Day

From verse 17 onward, Jude turns from characterising the evil to equipping the beloved for the midst of it. Four things are set before the reader, and they belong together as a complete provision for the day in which we live.

First: *building up yourselves on your most holy faith*. The faith once for all delivered to the saints (verse 3) is the foundation — God's word as given through the apostles, settled in heaven forever, untainted by any corruption however much evil may pervert its unfolding in Christendom. The truth has a sanctifying power: *sanctify them through thy truth* (John 17:17). We build on it by

remembering it, receiving it into the conscience, and living from it. It is called most holy because it comes from God and has the character of God stamped upon it.

Second: *praying in the Holy Ghost*. The Holy Spirit indwells every believer — and prayer in His power is the resource of dependence in a day when so much around us is dark. This is not any particular form of prayer or any particular spiritual gift — it is prayer that flows from and is governed by the Spirit of God, as distinct from what flows from the self and its wishes.

Third: *keep yourselves in the love of God*. This is not keeping God loving us — that is His own unchanging character. It is maintaining the conscious sense that God loves us — dwelling in the sunshine of His love, not drifting from it. The Lord said: *if ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love* (John 15:10). The keeping of His word and the enjoyment of His love are not separate things. And the four things Jude gives — remember, build, pray, keep — are themselves inseparable.

Fourth: *looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life*. This is the hope set before us — not merely a future event to be noted on a prophetic chart, but a mercy. In Jude's context, that word is exactly right. To be delivered out of the scene of things that this epistle describes — the corruption, the mockers, the great swelling words, the spots in the love feasts — and to be taken to the Father's house where the Lord is: that will be a mercy. We already have eternal life as a present possession — John's writings press that. But Paul and Jude characteristically look to the fullness of it still ahead: the transformation of the body, the completion of all that God has given us in Christ, the eternal enjoyment of His presence. That is what we are looking for.

Compassion, Fear, and Discernment — Service While Waiting

While awaiting the mercy of the Lord's coming, the believer is not passive. Verses 22 and 23 describe the priestly discernment needed in dealing with those who are in various degrees of danger.

Darby's footnote and Kelly's rendering both suggest that the verse is better understood as three categories: some who dispute, who are to be corrected; some who are to be saved with fear, pulled out of the fire; and others, toward whom pity is to be shown with fear, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. The garment speaks of how a person presents himself — and a presentation spotted by the flesh is not something to be tolerated as though it were acceptable in Christian fellowship. A spot defiles. The lamb of God was without blemish and without spot. The church is to be presented without spot or wrinkle. And in our associations, the garment spotted by the flesh is to be hated, not embraced in a spirit of broad-minded tolerance. This requires discernment — to distinguish where a person is, what kind of help they need, and how near one can safely go to pull them from danger without being drawn into it.

The Doxology — Him That Is Able

The epistle closes where it must close — with God. After all the description of corruption and ruin, after the solemn warnings and the careful equipping of the beloved, Jude breaks into praise. And the praise is addressed to the one who is *able to keep you from falling* — or as Darby renders it, able to keep you without stumbling — *and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.*

The keeping is His. The presenting is His. The faultlessness in which we will stand before His glory is not our achievement — it is His work. And it will be with exceeding joy: His joy in presenting us, and our joy in being presented. The whole epistle has gone down, down, down — the corruption, the defection, the judgment reserved — and now it comes up to this: faultless before the presence

of His glory with exceeding joy.

To the only God our Saviour — Darby omits *wise*, following the better manuscripts — through Jesus Christ our Lord. Glory, majesty, dominion, and power — before all time, and now, and to all the ages. Amen. The expression reaches back before creation and forward beyond all ages of time into eternity itself — not endless time, but the absence of time altogether, the mode in which God dwells, described in creaturely language because we have no other language to use. William Kelly renders it: before all time, and now, and ever — which catches the backward reach into eternity past and the forward reach into eternity to come.

It is fitting that Jude ends here. The epistle that was written because the state of things demanded it, that traced the moral descent of corruption within Christendom, that cited Enoch's prophecy of coming judgment — closes not with the judgment but with the Saviour God, not with the darkness reserved for the wandering stars but with the exceeding joy of the faultless presentation, not with what man has done but with what God is able to do. That is where faith rests. And that is where Jude leaves us.

— *Study ends* —