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"ALL CHRISTIANS TO ACTION STATIONS!! "

An outline study of Jude – an important little book for today, by Rev Ivan Foster.

Part 8: The believer, a vivid contrast in a day of apostasy

"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 1:20-23.

The believer is ever to be a contrast to the worldling, but that contrast is never more obvious than in a day of darkness and apostasy. The stars are always shining in the heavens, but it is only when the sun sets that their presence becomes obvious!

So far in this epistle, Jude has stressed the character and nature of the enemy about whom he would warn us, the "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," verse 4. In the four verses we wish to consider in this study, verses 20-23, the emphasis is upon the response of the believer to this wicked invasion.

It is the ongoing duty of the believer to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," 2 Peter 3:18. Never is there a greater need for such spiritual increase than in a day of apostasy.

In nature, the creatures living in cold climates prepare for winter by eating as much as they can before the onset of the bitter cold, in order to store within their bodies the resources they need to face the dark and frigid days approaching.

We may learn from this. The verse we have quoted above from Peter's second epistle is set in the context of his warning of days of scoffing which will come upon the church. "This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: that ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour: knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts," 2 Peter 3:1-3. It is in the light of their approach that Peter urges believers to prepare for that onslaught. "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," 2 Peter 3:17-18. Increase in holiness ought to be our response to apostasy. That which would separate us from the Lord ought to prompt a more resolute clinging to Him.

In these verses we ought to note that :

I. ADVANCING IN HOLINESS IS A PROGRESSIVE WORK

"But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith," verse 20.

1. 'Building up' is a gradual, progressive activity. "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon," Psalm 92:12. "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby," 1 Peter 2:2.

Full growth in nature or in grace is not achieved overnight. It is a gradual work.

2. Growth in grace is detectable. We can measure growth. Advancement in grace will likewise be measurable. "Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of



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God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord," Acts 11:22-23. The grace of these believers in Antioch was discernible to the eye! Likewise, it was the case with the apostles Peter and John when they were examined by the Jewish leaders. "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus," Acts 4:13. The grace of the Lord Jesus was evident in their lives!

3. It is the only antidote to worldliness and sin. A weak and sickly church will fall easy victim to sin and the attack of the devil's agents. The saint must be weakened before he can be attacked. By weakened I mean the saint must separated from the One Who is his strength. "The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower," Psalm 18:2. While believers abide close to Christ and daily partake of His grace, they are impervious to Satan's attacks. Like Job, they will have a hedge about them which will frustrate the devil's attempts to destroy. "Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land," Job 1:10.

It is imperative that the people of God TODAY turn from their backsliding and carelessness and seek the Lord for His blessing and grace whereby they will be fortified against the onslaught of apostasy and wickedness that is increasingly assailing the church.

It is everywhere acknowledged that there is a slipping backwards and a decline in standards amongst God's people. I can never understand why this truth is so readily acknowledged in conversations amongst Christians but is greeted with anger and indignation when preached! I think that the godly and earnest believer is very concerned about this matter and converses with those of like mind, seeking God's answer to this decay but the carnal in the pew object strongly when it is proclaimed.

Earnest souls must ignore the carnal protests and bear whatever reproach is directed at them and press on in their search for God's blessing and seek to encourage others to join them in their endeavours.

II. NOTE THE PLACE THAT PRAYER HAS IN 'GROWING IN GRACE'

"But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost."

1. There can be no spiritual growth without prayer. Sadly, I have heard it reported from every quarter that there is a great decline in the prayer meeting. The numbers attending are smaller. The fervency and zeal displayed in prayer are much weakened. The importance of it in the plan of God is much undervalued and misunderstood.

This must change if we are to see the correct response to the attack by the 'creepers' and the work of God revived.

2. There can be no prayer without the Holy Ghost. "Praying in the Holy Ghost."

Acceptable intercession can come only from the motions of the Holy Ghost within our hearts. How we need to ask for His help as we approach God's holy throne.

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints," Ephesians 6:18. That is our duty, our obligation.

There is a wonderful promise given by the Lord regarding the turning again of Israel from her darkness and rebellion unto God and crying unto Him in prayer. It is found in Zechariah 12:10. "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn."

Here we are told from whence comes this cry of repentance. This cry of Israel has its origins in the fountain



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of all true prayer - the moving and unction of the Holy Ghost.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 21, paragraph 3, states: "Prayer, with thanksgiving, being one special part of religious worship, is by God required of all men: and that it may be accepted, it is to be made in the name of the Son, by the help of His Spirit, according to His will, with understanding, reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love, and perseverance; and, if vocal, in a known tongue." Note the little phrase: "by the help of His Spirit."

There can be no prayer without the help, the assistance of the 'Blessed Paraclete' Who has been sent by our Saviour to stand alongside us and aid us in all our spiritual endeavours. "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter (parakletos - one who pleads another's cause before a judge), that he may abide with you for ever," John 14:16.

He has been sent to aid us, but how many believers would vainly seek to live without His aid and comfort? He, in His fulness, is absent from our prayer meetings. How I look back with joy upon prayer meetings which took place long ago when the believers were 'liberated' to pray with unction and power, aye, to touch the very throne of God and see mighty answers to our cries.

We must seek to see such again! We need to seek God for the pouring out again of His Spirit. The days of the apostles were days of numerous and repeated outpourings of the Holy Ghost. We should desire after that again.

III. WE ARE TO KEEP OURSELVES IN THE 'LOVE OF GOD'

"Keep yourselves in the love of God," verse 21.

We are to 'keep' (watch and observe that we maintain) ourselves in the love of God. We have an obligation to love God and to maintain our love toward Him.

It is the first of all commandments. "And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment," Mark 12:28-30.

Our chief duty is to love God above all things. The individual or the church is not right or walking with God if not constant in their love and affection for Him. We must see that we are very prone to fail in this duty.

*O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let that grace, Lord, like a fetter
Bind my wandering heart to Thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, O take and seal it,
Seal it from Thy courts above.*

('Our Own Hymnbook', number 195.)

These words of Mr Robert Robinson (1735-90), are so very true and have been quoted by the aching heart of the earnest believer. Very early in the Apostolic age, we find the Saviour addressing these words to a church which had been in the front rank of spirituality and holiness. "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love," Revelation 2:4. That church was Ephesus. Within thirty-odd years of its beginnings in Holy Ghost power (Acts 19:1-12), we find that they have 'left' (forsaken) their first love.



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If we are to maintain spiritual health and fitness we must maintain a close heart attachment to the Saviour.

The victorious church is that body of saints which follows hard after the Lord. They walk in the light of His smile, His countenance looking down upon them approvingly.

The psalmist seeks a restoration of just such a walk with God in Psalm 80:3. "Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved." The shining of God's face down upon His people will assure them of victory. "We shall be saved" says the psalmist. The word "saved" means "made safe, delivered, made victorious." We shall be under the umbrella of God's protection and favour.

It means just what the Church of Christ needs to experience today. It is the medicine our souls, our denomination so urgently need.

IV. CONSIDER THE DISPOSITION THAT EACH BELIEVER SHOULD MAINTAIN

"Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life," verse 21.

There is to be a 'looking' an 'inclining of the eyes toward' that day when the mercy of Christ will be revealed and His people will enter into eternal life. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ," Titus 2:11-13. In the midst of our efforts at "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." We should also ever be "looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

Where there is an absence of a true desire after holiness there will be a carelessness regarding prophetic matters. The two go together!

1. Surely it is true that today ever so many of the people and the pulpits have lost that vision! I sat and listened recently as a man of God who is busily engaged in the Lord's vineyard, lament that hearing a sermon on the return of Christ is a rare thing indeed. This is sad and it tells us much about the state of the church.

"Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept," Matthew 25:1-5. This is the state of the church, as described by Christ, in the days that will develop at the end of the age. The last but one verse in the previous chapter says: "The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of," Matthew 24:50. Chapter 25 opens with "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins." So, it is in the days just before the return of Christ that the kingdom of God will be like the actions of these 10 sleeping virgins.

The professing church is asleep today, especially regarding the return of the Lord and the development of the great apostasy.

2. Few see in the most wicked developments around us the descent into the final apostasy. All too many ministers are happy to ignore the warnings of Christ regarding the last apostasy and to acquaint themselves with the "signs of the times"! The commencement of the Second World War found the United Kingdom in a state of unreadiness, as a result of the criminal neglect by the political leadership of the country to pay any heed to the clear evidences of what it was Hitler was planning and the direction in which he was moving affairs in his country. Indeed, the one political figure who sounded a warning about what it was Hitler was planning and the resultant need for the United Kingdom to ready itself, was Winston Churchill. In the criticism, the lampooning he faced from the political leadership, I find a very definite likeness to the foolish comments of those who ignore the prophecies of Scriptures and mock those who seek to study them



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3. Such critics are to be pitied but more to be pitied are the poor flock under their negligent ministry! The failure to act as watchmen and keep the people of God informed of the fulfilment of God's Word can produce only the situation depicted amongst the flock in Matthew 25:5, - "they all slumbered and slept!"

Nothing will sustain the faithfulness and the loyalty of Christians to Christ and His Word like a constant presenting to them of the revelation given us of God regarding the last days. Some 2000 years ago, Paul the apostle wrote: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come," 2 Timothy 3:1. If such preaching was relevant 2000 years ago, how much more relevant it is today! Yet, how little of it we hear. This absence cannot be of God!

Dear Christian, study to inform yourself of what God's Word tells us will unfold at the close of this age and so be informed of the truth that the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Do this in your own study times should ministers fail to fulfil their obligations to teach you.

One final thing:

V. GOING ON WITH GOD, WATCHING FOR CHRIST'S RETURN ARE EVER LINKED TO SOUL-WINNING

"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," verse 22.

1. A slumbering church is not a soul-winning church. The awareness of the approach of God's judgment awakened, belatedly, Lot to the danger his children were in. Had he known the mind of God, he would not have been so careless, so content in the environs of Sodom.

The evidence of worldliness, the sense of carelessness abounding today amongst Christians and the decline in soul-winning can be traced directly to a blindness amongst believers to the near approach of Christ's return.

Jude says that in the face of the onslaught of the creepers and their depraved teachings we ought to be engaged diligently in building ourselves up in our holy faith, in prayer, keeping ourselves in sweet harmony with God, watching for Christ's return AND engaging in the task of rescuing the perishing souls around us caught up in this end-time wickedness.

Where you find an absence of any one of these elements of true religion you will find an absence of all.

There is little soul-winning taking place because the other elements of Jude's exhortation in verses 20 and 21 are missing and neglected.

2. We must never let our detestation of the sins of this age deter us from seeking to rescue sinners from their grip. We are to have compassion or mercy. I am sure that this refers to backsliders primarily but it also refers to sinners. Our stomachs turn at the wickedness of many today. But remember just how offensive must have been the actions of the thief on the cross or Saul of Tarsus (later to be Paul the apostle) to the One Who is of "purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity," Habakkuk 1:13. What we see of men's sin today is dim indeed in comparison to what the Lord could see of the men we have referred to and yet He had compassion on them and millions more.

Likewise, we must try and show compassion.

I think that the words: "making a difference" would indicate the need for discernment and discrimination. There are some whose sin is so vile and their defiance of God so great that we must imitate the Saviour and remain silent to them, Matthew 27:12.

3. The business of rescuing souls is set before us. "And others save with fear, pulling them out of the



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fire, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." A wholesome fear of the contamination that attaches itself to sinners is to be observed. We are to engage in their rescue with an awareness of the corruption that fills their lives. We are to loathe their sinfulness while engaging in this act of compassion toward them. We are to 'hate' or 'detest' the defilement of their lives and seek to avoid at all cost being contaminated by it. As the filthy rags of a rescued vagrant, a down-and-out, are to be removed and burned, even so should our attitude be to the former ways of the rescued sinner.

None loathes sin more than those who would rescue others from it!

Here then in these four verses we have the cure, the remedy for today's malady within professing Christendom.

God help us to take heed to what is here written by Jude by divine inspiration and apply the ointment liberally to our ailments.

The Lord bless you.

Ivan Foster.

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