

Prayer - Jude 24, 25, Part 1

by A.W. Pink

Jude's prayer is a paeon of praise to God's preserving power and a reminder of the importance of keeping oneself in the love of God, which is a means of preserving oneself from apostasy.

Topics: "Apostasy", "God's Preserving Grace"

Description

A.W. Pink emphasizes the significance of Jude's prayer in the context of the somber warnings against apostasy within the Church. He highlights the dangers posed by false teachers who distort the grace of God, leading many astray, and contrasts this with the assurance of God's ability to keep believers from falling. Pink urges Christians to actively contend for their faith and maintain their love for God, while also addressing the need for vigilance against the creeping corruption in the Church. The sermon concludes with a powerful reminder of God's preserving grace amidst the challenges of faith.

Transcript

The prayer that is now to engage our attention is a particularly arresting one, but its beauty and blessedness appear even more conspicuously when it is examined in connection with its somber background. It concludes the most solemn Epistle in the New Testament, one that is to be read with fear and trembling, but that is to be put down with thanksgiving and praise. It contains a most awful description of graceless professors of Christianity, of those trees who appeared to give much promise of fruit to God's glory but whose leaves soon dropped off and who quickly withered away. Its theme is apostasy, or, more specifically, the corrupting of much of the visible Church and the resulting ongoing corruption of an apostate Christendom. It presents a picture that all too tragically depicts things as they now are in the religious realm, in the majority of so-called "churches" at large. It informs us as to how the process of declension begins in reprobate professors of religion and how it works itself out until they are completely corrupted. It delineates the characters of those who lead others astray in this vile work. It makes known the sure doom awaiting both leaders and those who are led into apostasy. It closes with a glorious contrast.

Many Pervert the Gospel of Free Grace into a License to Sin

The Lord Jesus gave warning that the sowing of the good seed by Himself and His apostles would be followed with the sowing of tares in the same field by Satan and his agents. Paul also announced that, notwithstanding the widespread successes of the Gospel during his lifetime, there would be "a falling away" before the man of sin should be revealed (2 Thess. 2:3). That "falling away," or the apostasy of the

visible Church corporately considered, is depicted by the Spirit in some detail through the pen of Jude. As Christ Himself had intimated, the initial work of corruption would be done stealthily, "while men slept" (Matthew 13:25), and Jude represents the evildoers as having "crept in unawares" (v. 4), that is, having slipped in secretly or surreptitiously. They are spoken of as men who were "turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ." That is to say, while pretending to magnify free grace they perverted it, failing to enforce the balancing truth of holiness; and while professing to believe in Christ as a Savior they refused to surrender to His Lordship. Thus they were lustful and lawless. In view of this horrible menace, the saints were exhorted to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (v. 3). In this context, faith signifies nothing less than the whole counsel of God (cf. Acts 20:27-31).

That exhortation is enforced by a reminder to three fearful and solemn examples of the punishment visited by God upon those who had apostatized. The first is that of the children of Israel whom the Lord saved out of Egypt, but who still lusted after its fleshpots; and because of their unbelief at Kadesh-Barnea a whole generation of them were destroyed in the wilderness (v. 5; cf. Num. 13;14:1-39, especially vv. 26-37). The second is the case of those angels who had apostatized from their privileged position, and are now "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day" (v. 6). The third is Sodom and Gomorrah, which, because of their common indulgence in the grossest form of lasciviousness, were destroyed by fire from heaven (v.7; cf. Gen. 19:1-25). To which the apostle adds that the corruptors of the visible Church "defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities," being less respectful to their superiors than Michael the archangel was to his inferior (vv. 8, 9). He solemnly pronounces the Divine sentence: "Woe unto them!" (v. 11). Without the slightest hesitation, he likens them and their works to three characters of evil notoriety: by "the way of Cain" we are to understand a flesh-gratifying, natural religion that is acceptable to the unregenerate; by "the error of Balaam for reward" a mercenary ministry that will pervert the pure "doctrine of true religion for the sake of filthy lucre" (Calvin); and by "the gainsaying of Korah" a despising of authority and discipline, an effort to obliterate the distinctions that God has made for His own glory and for our good (Num. 16:1-3).

Jude Gives Clear Indication that These Falsifiers Are Within the Churches

Other characteristics of these religious evildoers are given in figurative terms in verses 12 and 13. It should be particularly noted that they are said to "feast with you" (the saints), which supplies further evidence that such hypocrites, deceivers and self-deceived, are inside the churches. In the second half of verse 13 through verse 15 their doom is pronounced. For backsliders there is a way of recovery; but for apostates there is none. In verse 16 Jude details other characteristics of false brethren, which traits are sadly conspicuous in many professing Christians of our own day. Then Jude bids God's people to remember that the apostles of Christ had predicted there should be "mockers [or "scoffers," no. 1703 in Strong and Thayer (2 Peter 3:3)] in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts" (vv. 17, 18). By "the last time" is meant this Christian or final dispensation (see 1 Peter 4:7; 1 John 2:18), with a possible reference to the climactic culmination of evil at its end. Next, Jude appeals to those to whom he is writing, addressing to them a number of needful and salutary exhortations (vv. 21-23). He ends with the prayer that we are now to ponder, concluding the most solemn of all the Epistles with a more glorious outburst of praise than is elsewhere to be found in them.

Jude's Concluding Paean to the Triumphant Grace of God

"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." Let us consider four things in our study of this prayer: (1) its general background; (2) its more immediate connection; (3) the reasons that moved Jude to pray thus; and (4) the nature and Object of this prayer.

First, let me add something more to what has already been said, in a general way, upon the background of this prayer. It seems to me that, in view of what had been engaging the mind of the apostle in the previous verses, he could not restrain himself from giving vent to this paean of praise. After viewing the solemn case of a whole generation of Israel perishing in the wilderness because of their unbelief, he was moved to cry out in gladness, "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling." As he contemplated the experience of the sinless angels who fell from their first estate, he could not but tremble; but when he thought of the Savior and Protector of His Church, he burst forth into a strain of adoration. Jude found great comfort and assurance in the blessed fact that the One who begins a work of grace within those given to Him by the Father will never cease from it until He has perfected it (Phil. 1:6). He knew that were it not for everlasting love and infinite power, our case would yet be the same as that of the angels who fell, that but for an almighty Redeemer we too must enter everlasting darkness and endure the suffering of eternal fire. Realizing that, Jude could not but bless the One whose protecting hand covers each of those purchased by His blood.

Jude Balances a Fearful Consideration of Apostasies with Confident Praise to a Preserving God

After making mention of those fearful examples of falling, it is highly probable that the thoughts of the penman of this Epistle turned to another one much more recent, and which had come beneath his own immediate notice. It is quite possible that, when our Lord sent forth the twelve, "Judas [Jude] the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot" were paired together (Luke 6:16, brackets mine; 9:1-6)--the great apostate "son of perdition" (John 17:12) and the one who was to write at length upon the great apostasy! It scarcely admits of doubt that as Jude's mind reverted to the traitor it made him exclaim with added emphasis, "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling... be glory... both now and ever." He had probably respected Judas Iscariot as his fellow apostles had, and perhaps had heard him ask along with the others, "Lord, is it I?" in response to Christ's statement that one of their number was about to betray Him. And no doubt he was shocked when Judas Iscariot began to openly reveal his true character. For immediately after receiving the sop that Jesus had dipped in the dish for him and hearing a woe pronounced upon himself, Judas hypocritically repeated the question, "Master, is it I?" then went forth to do that most despicable deed for which he had been appointed (John 6:70; Matthew 26:20-25; John 13:21-30; Ps. 41:9; John 17:12). He could not but be aware that in remorse the traitor had hanged himself: and I believe that the shadow of his awful doom fell upon Jude as he penned this Epistle.

But Jude did not suffer these sad contemplations to sink him into a state of dejection. He knew that his omniscient Master had foretold that a rising tide of evil would spread through the visible Church, and that however mysterious such a phenomenon might be there was a wise reason for it in the Divine economy. He knew that however fiercely the storm might rage there was no occasion to fear, for Christ Himself was in the ship who had declared, "and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world [or "age"]" (Matthew 28:20, brackets mine). He knew that the gates of hell could not and would not prevail against the Church (Matthew 16:18). Therefore he lifted up his eyes above this present evil age and gazed by faith upon the enthroned Head and Preserver of the Church, rendering worship to Him. That is the all-important lesson to be drawn from the background of this prayer, and why I have dwelt so long upon it. Fellow

Christians, let us duly heed it. Instead of being so much occupied with conditions in the world, with the menace of the atomic bomb, with the deepening apostasy, let our hearts be increasingly engaged with our beloved Lord; let us find our peace and joy in Him.

God's Promise to Keep Us from Falling Is Connected to Our Duty to Keep Ourselves

Let us now consider the more immediate connection of this prayer. On former occasions we have seen how helpful it was to attend closely to the context. It is necessary to do so here if the balance of truth is to be maintained and a proneness to antinomianism is to be checked. It is not honest to lay hold of the promise implied in this prayer, "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling," unless we have first given heed to the commandment of verse 21: "Keep yourselves in the love of God, ..." (ital. mine). The precepts and promises may be distinguished, yet they are not to be separated. The former make known our duty, while the latter are for our encouragement as long as we genuinely and earnestly seek to perform the same. But one who neglects his duty is entitled to no comfort. After describing at length the beginning, the course, and the end of the apostasy of the visible Church, the apostle adds seven brief exhortations to the saints in verses 20-23. These call for the exercise of faith, prayer, love, hope, compassion, fear, and godly hatred. These exhortations are means to preserve us from apostasy. Calvin began his comments on these exhortations by saying this:

He shows the manner in which they could overcome all the devices of Satan, that is, by having love connected with faith, and by standing on their guard as it were in their watch-tower, until the coming of Christ.

The Proper Use of Precepts, Warnings, and Comforting Doctrines

Let us give reverent attention to the faithful words of Adolph Saphir on this life-or-death subject:

There is a one-sided and unscriptural forgetfulness of the actual position of the believer (or professing believer) as a man who is still on the road, in the battle; who has still the responsibility of trading with the talent entrusted, of watching for the return of the Master. Now there are many bypaths, dangers, precipices on the road, and we must persevere to the end. Only they who overcome and are faithful to death shall be crowned. It is not spiritual but carnal to take the blessed and solemn doctrines of our election in Christ and of the perseverance of the saints, given us as a cordial for fainting hours and as the inmost and ultimate secret of the soul in its dealings with God, and place them on the common and daily road of our duties and trials, instead of the precepts and warnings of the Divine Word. It is not merely that God keeps us through these warnings and commandments, but the attitude of soul which neglects and hurries over these portions of Scripture is not childlike, humble, and sincere. The attempts to explain away the fearful warnings of Scripture against apostasy are rooted in a very morbid and dangerous state of mind. A precipice is a precipice, and it is folly to deny it. "If we live after the flesh," says the apostle, "we shall die." Now, to keep people from falling over a precipice, we do not put up a slender and graceful hedge of flowers, but the strongest barrier we can; and piercing spikes or cutting pieces of glass to prevent calamities. But even this is only the surface of the matter. Our walk with God and our perseverance to the end are great and solemn realities. We are dealing with the living God, and only life with God, and in God, and unto God, can be of any avail here. He who brought us out of Egypt is now guiding us; and if we follow Him, and follow Him to the end, we shall enter into the final rest.

It is outside my intended scope to give here a full exposition of the precepts found in verses 20-23, yet a few remarks are needed if I am to be faithful in observing the inseparable link that exists between them

and our text. Duty and privilege must not be divorced, nor dare we allow privilege to oust duty. If it be the Christian's privilege to have his heart engaged with Christ in glory, it must be while treading the path that He has appointed and while engaged in those tasks that He has assigned him. Though Christ is most certainly the One who keeps him from making shipwreck of the faith, it is not apart from the disciple's own earnest endeavors that He does so. Christ deals with His redeemed as responsible creatures. He requires them to conduct themselves as moral agents, putting forth every effort to overcome the evils that menace them. Though entirely dependent on Him, they are not to remain passive. Man is of an active nature, and therefore must grow either better or worse. Before regeneration he is indeed spiritually dead, but at the new birth he receives Divine life. Motion and exercise follow life, and those motions are to be directed by the Divine precepts. Hear the words of our Lord:

He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

How these words must have reechoed in Jude's memory as he wrote this Epistle (see John 14:2 1, 22).

Seven Exhortations to a Life of Holiness

"But ye, beloved [in contrast with the apostates of the previous verse], building up yourselves on your most holy faith" (v. 20, brackets mine). Truly, as Paul says, "the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his" (2 Tim. 2:1 9a). Yet God requires that we wholeheartedly concur with Him, by our own endeavors, in His purpose for electing such as we to eternal salvation, namely, our entire sanctification (1 Thess. 4:3). For in the same verse Paul declares, "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (1 Tim. 2: 19b). Therefore, we are to be solicitous about our growth and to exercise care both over ourselves and our fellow believers. It is not sufficient to be grounded in the faith; we must daily increase therein more and more. To grow in faith is one of the appointed means of our preservation. We build up ourselves on our faith by a deepened knowledge thereof. "A wise man will hear, and will increase learning"; says Solomon (Prov. 1:5). We build up ourselves on our faith by meditating upon its substance or contents (Ps. 1:2; Luke 2:19), by believing and appropriating it, by applying it to ourselves, and by being governed by it. Observe that it is a "most holy faith," for it both requires and promotes personal holiness. Thereby do we distinguish ourselves from carnal professors and apostates. "Praying in the Holy Ghost." We are to fervently and constantly seek His presence and Divine energy, which can supply us with the strength of will and affections that are necessary in order to comply with these precepts.

"Keep yourselves in the love of God" (v. 21). See to it that your love for Him is preserved in a pure, healthy, and vigorous condition. See to it that your love to Christ is in constant exercise by rendering obedience to Him who said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). "Keep thy heart with all diligence" (Prov. 4:23, ital. mine), for if your affections wane, your communion with Him will deteriorate and your witness for Him will be marred. Only as you keep yourselves in the love of God will you be distinguished from the carnal professors all around you. This exhortation is no needless one. The Christian is living in a world whose icy blasts will soon chill his love for God unless he guards it as the apple of his eye. A malicious adversary will do all he can to pour cold water upon it. Remember the solemn warning of Revelation 2:4. Oh, that Christ may never have to complain of you or me, "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love" (ital. mine). Rather, may our love "abound yet more and more" (Phil. 1:9). In order thereto hope must be in exercise, "looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (v. 21). Verses 22 and 23 make known our duty, and what is to be our attitude, toward

those of our brethren who have fallen by the way. Toward some we are to show compassion, who by reason of tenderness can stand only mild rebukes and admonitions; whereas roughness would only drive them to despair and the postponement of their penitent looking to Christ. But others, who differ by temperament, or by reason of hardness of heart, require strong rebukes for their recovery, with frightening warnings concerning God's judgment against obstinate sinners who hold out against His threats and overtures of mercy. These we are to "save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh."

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