

Jude - Doing Something Constructive

by Mariano Di Gangi

Mariano Di Gangi's sermon on Jude emphasizes the need for Christians to build their faith, pray in the Holy Spirit, and remain steadfast in God's love while anticipating Christ's return.

Duration: 25:18

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the contrast between Christians and non-Christians who pretend to be Christians. He warns the believers about the dangers of being led astray into false doctrine and deviating from the path of righteousness. The preacher emphasizes the importance of contending earnestly for the faith that was once delivered to the saints. He encourages the believers to build themselves up in their most holy faith, pray in the Holy Spirit, and keep themselves in the love of God while waiting for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ to bring them to eternal life. The sermon is based on the letter of Jude, where the author reminds the believers of the warnings given by the apostles about scoffers in the last times.

Transcript

On these Sunday mornings in the month of August and continuing through Labor Day Sunday, we've been studying the little but powerful letter of Jude, the brother of Jesus. We've noted how that in the beginning of this letter, the author describes himself as a servant of Jesus Christ, and that is the most noble epitaph that could ever be put on anyone's tombstone, a servant of Jesus Christ. Recognizing that we belong to him in virtue of our creation, recognizing that we are dependent upon him in virtue of his providence, recognizing that we belong to him because we have been bought with the price of redemption in terms of his precious blood, we are his men, his women, to be his servants.

Then Jude lets us in on a secret. He had planned to produce a very lengthy, thorough, compendious treatise on Christian doctrine. That project, he said, will have to be shelved because there's an immediate need that must be addressed.

You are in danger of being led astray into false doctrine. You are in danger of deviating from the right path of duty and righteousness. And so instead of writing a lengthy treatise, I'm firing off a short, sharp telegram to put you on the alert to contend earnestly for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

Now we come to another group of verses in the letter of Jude. Jude, beginning at verse 17, he says, But dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. They said to you, In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires.

These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit. But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

Two things that we ought to notice in our text for today. The first is a contrast and the second, a command. But lest you think that you'll be going home within the next five or six minutes, let me tell you that there are four points under each of those two.

First of all, the contrast. But you, dear friends, he says in verse 20, he is contrasting Christians to non-Christians who masquerade as Christians. Notice what he says in terms of contrast.

He speaks of those who are scoffers. They are unteachable. Why? Because they have such a high opinion of themselves that instead of subjecting their minds to the teaching of the Word of God, they take the Word of God and subject it to their own faulty logic.

And they pick and choose only the things that are conformable to their own pettiness and prejudice. Unteachable people with a very high, proud, arrogant estimate of themselves who will not submit to the Scripture, but who will sift the Scripture through their own narrow filters and accept only what confirms their prejudices. Unteachable.

Are we shocked that there are people in our day who blatantly and blasphemously contradict the sacred truths of our Judeo-Christian tradition as it is given in the voice of the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New? We may be displeased, but we shouldn't be shocked. We shouldn't be startled. We shouldn't be stunned.

We should not be taken unawares, because that is precisely what the apostles had predicted. They said in the last days in the wind-up of human history, you're going to notice a greater and greater unwillingness of men and women to take the Bible seriously in deciding their path of morality, and who will choose to go their own way and scrap the Bible, being unwilling to be fettered in any way by a word that comes from God. Unteachable and ungodly.

It's exactly what one should expect. If they are scoffers at the teaching of Scripture, then they will give vent to their ungodly desires. The attitude of the mind toward the Word of God will have an impact on the course of conduct that we will follow from day to day.

If you revere Holy Scripture, you will want to let it shape your life. If you despise Holy Scripture, you will live as you please and fulfill the Word of Isaiah. We have turned everyone egocentrically to our own way, and isn't that the curse of the latter half of the 20th century? Unteachable, ungodly, uncooperative.

Here are people who have no sense of community. Here are people who will not see themselves as members of a body. Here are people who, if they cannot get their own way, will pick up their marbles and bolt.

Here are people who simply will not abide by those things which make for the peace and purity of the people of God. They are deviants, and they draw others away with them and disrupt the unity and the

purity of the church. And they are unspiritual.

Well, they have a spirit all right, but it's not the Holy Spirit. This, after all, is one of the distinguishing marks of the Christian, according to Romans chapter 8 and verse 9. If any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, he doesn't belong to Jesus Christ. In other words, he still needs to be converted and born again.

And so instead of the beautiful blossom of the fruit of the Spirit, what you have is that ugly catalog of corruption. The works of the flesh, unteachable, ungodly, uncooperative, unspiritual. God's people are to be a total contrast to all that, and that is why Jude says, but you, dear friends, and he points us to the contrast, but we should be aware of it and follow a different direction.

Now we come to the command, and here is where the major emphasis, the positive emphasis, must fall. Notice how he tumbles one verb on top of another, and there are four of them here. He says, but you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith, pray in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

It bristles with verbs, four of them in just a short compass, and each of them of great significance. Build yourselves up. In your most holy faith.

Very few of you know it, but it's true that before the Lord put his hand on my shoulder and redirected me into the Christian ministry, I was wondering about pursuing a career in art and even dabbled for a while with the idea of going into the field of architecture. That is now ancient history, almost to the rubble level of archaeological research. But I've always been fascinated by church architecture and what men have devised in their minds and built with their hands.

Byzantine structures, common in the East. Romanesque structures with their rounded arches and massive walls to protect the ceiling. Gothic structures with magnificent stained glass made possible because now the weight of the walls is redistributed and carried out by flying buttresses.

Baroque architecture, extremely ornate, representing an effort of the Church of Rome to captivate people by the senses and draw them back after the Reformation. One of the most wonderful bits of architecture that I have ever seen was in the capital city of Nepal, up in the Himalayas, in Kathmandu. And there you had a congregation of Christians who were materially poor but spiritually rich and had no debt.

How did they do it? Because every week an offering would be received for the work of the gospel and for the building project, and depending on what came in in the offering, another row of bricks would be added, and then another row, and another row, and the windows were left hollow until they could afford to fill those in as well. I'm fascinated by church building, but the building that goes on here is the building of men and women, for each of us is to be a temple of the Holy Spirit. Each of us is to be a sacred shrine edified on a solid basis or foundation.

We are to be built up on our most holy faith. How many of us are still at the basement level? How many of us have just begun to erect the walls? How many of us still have open spaces where there should be windows? How many of us have a roof put on to crown the whole achievement? We need to build ourselves up on our most holy faith. There is no other basis, there is no other foundation, but our most holy faith revealed in the writings of the prophets, climaxed in the teachings of the apostles.

We need to base ourselves on our most holy faith. Why is it called our most holy faith? First, because it comes from a holy God, and second because it aims at producing a holy people. Let's build ourselves up

on our most holy faith.

How can we do this? Many years ago, one of my favorite Dutch professors at Westminster Theological Seminary, incidentally those who were in Dutch were Scottish so I was well taught, one of my Dutch professors put it this way. He said there are two basic ways of growing in your knowledge of the truth. First, he said, apply yourself to the word of God.

Study it thoroughly, carefully. Second, apply the teaching of the word of God to yourself. That is more difficult, but unless we do that we won't really build and we will never grow.

Build yourselves up on your most holy faith by knowing the scriptures and by translating them into the language of daily living. Apply yourself to the Bible, apply the Bible to yourself. That is the way to build, that's the way to grow.

Second, pray in the Holy Spirit. What is prayer? Any of you can remember as far back as the Westminster Shorter Catechism and question 98 ought to be able to tell me that. Prayer is an offering up of our desires to God for things agreeable to his will in the name of Jesus Christ with the confession of our sins and the thankful acknowledgement of his mercies.

There you have a magnificent, clear, clean, brief, pointed definition of what prayer is. And we are to pray in the Holy Spirit. Does that conjure up fervent fanaticism, something unpresbyterian in your minds? Praying in the Holy Spirit, what sort of thing is this? Let me say that apart from the Holy Spirit, we can't really pray.

Why? Well, according to Romans chapter 8 verses 14, 15, and 16, we are told that as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the children of God. And the Spirit who leads the children of God works upon their hearts and minds and assures them that they belong to God's family and that they can go to the awesome, almighty King of the universe and speak to him in terms of childlike simplicity and in terms of genuine endearment. That would be blatant audacity unless the Holy Spirit would lead us and encourage us to ask that we might receive, to seek that we might find, to knock that it might be opened unto us.

And continuing in the eighth chapter of the letter to the Romans in verses 26 and 27, Paul states that even when we do not know how to pray, even when our lines are confused and we do not have a sense of clear priorities to know for what we should pray, if we let the Holy Spirit help us sort things out, he will intercede for us and he will show us the matters of priority for which we should earnestly pray. Build yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love.

This week in all my 43 years of pastoral ministry, I experienced one of the most moving moments that I can ever remember at the bedside of a patient known to many of you, Ruth Brown. There was a mother who for the love of her son has donated a vital organ that can literally have an impact of changing and lengthening a son's life. Love expressed in costly giving.

You and I are to keep ourselves in the love of God. You and I must ever be aware of the great love that God has shown toward us. This is not something vacuous, this is not something for a God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, or as Paul puts it in the letter to the Romans, God spared not his own son but gave him up to atone for the sins of us all.

And you and I must keep ourselves in the love of God. You and I must never forget what God has done for us in giving that which was costliest and dearest to him in giving his son for our salvation. How do we keep ourselves in the love of God? How do we remind ourselves of those mercies which are new every

morning? By hearing and singing the story of the gospel.

May we never become so used to the scriptures. May we never become so jaded in our taste as to yearn for something sensational and spectacular and to be tired of the old old story of Jesus and his love. It is by reading the gospel and by singing the gospel that we are kept in the love of God because these things remind us of what he did when he gave in love.

We do so when we gather together around the Lord's table and break bread and drink of the outpoured fruit of the vine, for we do this in remembrance of him who loved us with a love that was stronger than death. To absent oneself habitually from the table of the Lord is not at all to keep oneself in the love of God, but to disregard that love and run the risk of despising it. We keep ourselves in the love of God by responding to his love with obedience to his commands.

We love him because he first has loved us. Build, pray, keep, one thing more, wait for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ to bring us to eternal life. I believe that Jesus Christ will come again.

When this will be or how this will be and all the details of eschatology and the intricacies of prophecy, that he has not revealed to me, but he does say in scripture that he will return. We have the promise of his coming, and when we think of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, does that fill us with anticipation or does it shake us with apprehension? Will he come to judge the living and the dead and to weigh us in his balances and find us wanting? If so, the advent means apprehension. But if we follow out the command of Jude, we will wait with eager longing, not apprehension, but anticipation for the coming of the Lord Jesus who will reveal his mercy to us, and it's mercy that you and I need.

We need mercy because of our frailty. Yesterday I went over to Guelph and into St. Joseph's Hospital and there visited with Ruth Taylor who has had a serious relapse, and there she is, frail, helpless, wired up all over the place in the intensive care unit. Our frailty, how we need his mercy.

He knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust, and he treats us in loving kindness and in mercy. But mercy is needed not only because of our frailty, it is needed especially because of our fallibility. We need mercy because we are sinners.

We need mercy because we should be punished. We need mercy because we are under the judgment of God, and only the mercy of God can wipe away the slate and cancel our condemnation and bring us back into a right relationship with the Lord. And so each of us, like that penitent publican in the shadows of the temple, must beat his breast with a bowed head and say, God be merciful to me, a sinner.

And the mercy of God will be revealed to us in a climactic and crowning way when Christ comes again, because then this frail body of ours will be raised from the dead and made like his own resurrection body. And then this fallible spirit of mine will be finally and forever cleansed and perfected in the likeness of my Lord. Is it any wonder that we should look with eyes of hope and with eager expectation for the return of him who will deal with our frailty through resurrection and deal with our fallibility through perfection to his likeness? The contrast is clear.

The commands are equally clear. May the spirit who by his inspiration caused these words to be written inscribe them upon our hearts, and then enlightening our minds and strengthening our wills, enable us to obey what he has commanded. Let us pray.

Spirit of the living God, work within our hearts. Help us to build ourselves up on our most holy faith, to be progressive Christians. Forbid that we should remain in a state of arrested spiritual development.

Help us to pray with the encouragement that you, the spirit of God, alone can give. Help us with eyes of hope to look for the return of our merciful Savior, Jesus Christ. Help us, O spirit of God, that having applied ourselves to the study of the scriptures, we may now apply these scriptures to ourselves.

In Jesus' name, amen.

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