

JUDE

A Commentary

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JUDE

Chapter 1

1. Who was Jude? Commentators down the years have made a number of suggestions but the consensus is that he is no less than the brother of our Lord Jesus Christ; to be exact, the half brother because his father was Joseph whereas Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit. Matthew records that the people of Jesus' home town, Capernaum, were offended by him saying, "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?" [Mat 13:55] and Mark records the incident in 6:3.

Why then, if this is so, does he not state it clearly? Because his attitude has changed from unbelief (Mark 3:21, John 7:5) to devoted service. His conversion is complete and far from seeking to claim prestige he humbly acknowledges his indebtedness to Jesus. He, like any other Christian, is a servant of Jesus Christ.

He is also the brother of James. As there is no other description almost certainly he is referring to the James best known to Christians of the time – the leader of the Church at Jerusalem who, it is generally accepted, was indeed the brother of our Lord. It shows something of Jude's spirit and character that he is content to be known as a servant and play second fiddle to his more famous brother.

In stating to whom he is writing Jude gives a brilliant description of who and what a Christian is. Someone called by Jesus to follow him. It is a personal and individual call. Being born into a Christian family is a great privilege but it is not enough. It is a truth that God has no grandchildren, only children. Each needs to be born again of the Holy Spirit into a personal relationship with Jesus.

There is some doubt about the original text. The KJV puts the calling as the third of the three elements (but the New KJV puts it at the end). Both of those versions translate 'sanctified' instead of 'beloved' (the two words in the Greek are similar). Until about 30 or 40 years ago preachers stressed the sinfulness of human beings to the extent of worthlessness. Since then there has been a rediscovery of the love of God as a father loves his child. The phrase 'The Fatherhood of God' is common currency. We need a right balance. We are indeed loved infinitely by God and we can never destroy that love, whatever we do; we are so precious to him and, strange as it may seem, he, the Almighty Creator, delights in us. However, we must never presume on or violate that love because he is also a righteous God and cannot tolerate sin. He will forbid the unrepentant sinner from entering the kingdom heaven – loving him even as he does so.

Translations vary as to whether we are kept 'in', 'by' or 'for' Jesus Christ. Whichever is correct the Christian is not alone in the struggle to live as God desires, we are kept. It is a two way operation. With trapeze artists they grasp each other's wrists, each holds onto the other. We have to choose to hold onto Christ; he has already chosen to hold onto us. Probably the thought is that Christians are kept for the return of Christ. Green has the interesting comment that the word 'in' may have been misplaced and originally there was a gap so that the same letter could be given to different churches and the place name would be filled in as appropriate so that it would read "to those in....".

2. It is easy to pass over this verse as a form of thoughtless social greeting but it is a means or channel of blessing. What do we really desire for those to whom we write? Would it occur to us to ask for mercy for them? We are saved only because God is merciful and even

now as believers we still fail and are in need of his mercy. Today it would seem like a criticism to suggest that someone needs mercy but it is true nevertheless.

So many people, particularly in the West, live stressful lives. That may sound strange when we have so much material wealth compared with those who live in areas of famine and want – but theirs is a different form of stress; often they show a dignity even in their need. The common understanding of peace is the absence of anything which disrupts or disturbs. That is the world's peace. Jesus brings a peace which transcends the outward circumstances in which we live.

Much of that peace depends upon our having the inner security of knowing who we are; we belong to God who loves us infinitely. The love of another gives us a sense of well-being; when that other is the Creator of all that is....! Secure in our own self-worth, we are no longer constantly demanding love from others; being loved ourselves sets us free to offer love to them. Jude desires mercy, peace and love may overflow in abundance.

3. Apparently Jude was planning to write a document – possibly a treatise – expounding the Christian Faith. We do not know whether he had actually started on this or not. Barclay believes he had and actually laid it aside in order to write this letter, whereas the NRSV has, while eagerly preparing to write to you. Whatever the truth of that may be, news had reached him of a serious situation that had arisen and he feels it is essential that he should write this letter of urgent warning. The New Testament letters are written for a purpose, something triggers them; they are not simply an exchange of news to maintain contact.

Jude differentiates between 'salvation' and 'the faith'. The former relates to the living of life and the latter the belief system which underlies it. Salvation embraces so much; it is the life of the Kingdom of God and it gives us purpose, wholeness and wellbeing; it directs our standards of integrity and morality and influences our attitude and behaviour. We are individuals and our experiences will vary but we share a common life in the Kingdom; we are a community of people who belong to God.

From its context we understand that Jude makes a distinction between personal faith in the sense of trust, and those facts which together make up the belief system which unites all those who hold to them i.e. THE Faith. These facts are comparatively few but they are essential and are set forth in the Christians creeds. There may be wide variation in the implementation of these essential truths e.g. baptism is essential but how it is administered and whether it may embrace infants or only those able to confess faith for themselves is debateable without violating the unity of those who hold to 'The Faith'. Those essentials are not options they have been entrusted '*once for all*' to the saints, that is to the body of believers. 'The Faith' has been handed down to us and we have to preserve and pass it on to the next generation without adulteration.

4. Jude now explains what has given rise to his grave concern. Apparently the membership of his readers has been infiltrated by some men with dangerous teaching. It is not persecution from outside the Church, it is false teaching within it which is far more insidious because whereas the former often has the effect of strengthening the faithful, the latter weakens them. The word Jude uses, *pareisduno*, is literally to 'enter in by the side; to creep in stealthily' (Vine).

There is a problem about the condemnation of these men having been written about because Jude does not state what he has in mind. Some believe he is referring to 2 Peter

2:3 but that is hardly 'long ago'. However, that translation of palai may mean no more than 'already'. There is also doubt about whether 2 Peter precedes Jude or vice versa.

To describe these men as godless, asebes, means more than agnostic or even atheistic, it implies that they were actively working against God. The NIV 'licence for immorality' is translated 'lasciviousness' in KJV. Vine says that aselgeia 'denotes excess, licentiousness, absence of restraint, indecency, wantonness'. The implication is that although they may have entered the Christian fellowship by stealth, they make no attempt to hide their lifestyle; they are utterly shameless. Almost certainly these men were promoting a form of Gnosticism which held that matter was intrinsically evil; and so the body was evil. This led them to say that it was unimportant what a person did with his body because it was totally separate from what is spiritual. It may be also that they were using the fallacious argument that because God is so gracious in forgiving sin then the more we sin the more grace there is. Paul refutes this in Romans 6:1 ff.

To say that they deny Jesus Christ does not mean that they deny he ever existed, rather his unique position, role and work. There were different strands of Gnosticism; some claimed that Jesus was no more than a man upon whom the Spirit descended at his baptism and from whom he departed before the crucifixion. If such teaching with its consequence of immoral behaviour were allowed to exist within the Church it would rapidly collapse and the Faith would become discredited. No wonder Jude was anxious to get his letter to them immediately to warn them to hold to the faith as once delivered to them (v.3)

5. In commenting on these next 3 verses both Barclay and Green take the view that Jude is addressing his opponents, these must be the false teachers. Surely that is not so; he refers to his readers as 'dear friends' and warns them to beware these godless men. His aim is to warn the true believers not to be led astray. He gives three illustrations from the past of how those who rebelled against God were rejected by him when they ceased to trust and follow him and his ways.

The text is uncertain here in its detail, but its basic truth is clear. First, is it, "You all knew this" or "You knew all this" or "You knew this once for all?" NIV and REB have "You already know all this". I believe it was William Temple who said, "We learn best what we already know". The greatest failure of so many of us believers is not that we do not know what we should do, but that we do not do what we know.

The first illustration is the case of the People of God being led from slavery to the Promised Land. God brought them safely through the Red Sea and destroyed the Egyptians who were chasing them yet when they reached the borders of the land they refused to enter for fear of the people who were already occupying it. Of those over twenty years old only Joshua and Caleb (who had urged the people to trust God) actually entered the land; the rest perished in the wilderness.

6. The second illustration Jude uses relates to angels. Most Christians today give very little thought to angels. We are content to read of them in Scripture and few of us question the reality of their role there; but we have very little understanding of just who they are and what they do. It would be arrogant of us to assume that material beings, and especially we humans, are the only beings God has created and Scripture speaks of angels, archangels, cherubim, seraphim and 'spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms' (Eph.6:12). It seems that Jude is here referring to information recorded in the Book of Enoch which was known at the time and parts of which he appears to quote verbatim. He refers also to the very strange passage in Genesis 6:1-4 where some angels (sons of God) are reported as lusting after human women and, presumably leaving their station and role in the heavenly

realms, married them and had children by them. So even the angels, when they transgressed, have been kept in chains and will be judged on the 'great Day' – the day when Jesus has destroyed all dominion, authority and power other than that of God himself and hands over the kingdom to God the Father (1 Cor.15:22).

7. The third illustration is the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. Both Barclay and Green point out that this had a profound effect upon the people of God throughout the whole of the Old Testament. Here the reference is not so much to those who had believed in God and then fell away, but to his judgement on those who flout his ways. In the present culture where homosexuality is accepted as natural to a substantial minority some would argue that this incident is not so much a condemnation of homosexuality as the violation of the laws of human rights (and also hospitality). The mob demanded that the two 'angelic beings' be brought out to them i.e. against their will. However, there is a very strong indication in the wording used by Jude that these people were indulging in unnatural lusts (NIV has "sexual immorality and perversion").

In the area of these towns there was the likelihood of a build up of gasses and an explosion and it seems that it was this which caused their destruction. It is very likely that Jude is drawing attention to the link between the means of destruction of these towns and the final judgement of hell fire.

The heart of the Christian Faith is that although we may have failed miserably yesterday that can be forgiven; we can be restored in our relationship with God and succeed today. But there is another side to that wonderful truth which is not taught so clearly. We may have succeeded in keeping the faith yesterday but fail today. We must guard our relationship with the Lord.

8. Jude calls these dangerous interlopers 'dreamers'. Is this in the sense of day-dreamers out of touch with reality? Or is he referring to a claim on their part that they have received some divine revelation (cf .Acts 2:17 where old men dream dreams)? It seems that they practise immorality (see note on v.4) and give themselves over to satisfying their lusts.

The problem is that they accept no authority, being subject to no one and nothing but their own opinions. In addition they insult angels. Just what does this mean? Is it referring to good angels or bad? We may feel that it would not be wrong to speak ill of fallen angels but in the next verse Jude makes the very point that this is wrong. Perhaps it means only that they did not believe that angels exist, but it seems that Jude is making a stronger point than that.

9. We do not know where Jude obtained the information which he now reveals; certainly it is not elsewhere in our Bible. Green refers to the apocryphal book, Assumption of Moses, but says the information Jude quotes is not contained in that.

In order to appreciate the point Jude is making we need to understand that the Bible speaks of a hierarchy of angels within the unseen spiritual realm. The book of Daniel lifts the curtain on this realm. Daniel was a man who walked closely with God and who had many visions. On one occasion he had a revelation which he could not understand, so he fasted and meditated in order that he might receive the interpretation of it. After three weeks he had another vision, this time of a heavenly being who recounts a strange story. He says that he was dispatched on the very first day that Daniel sought the explanation in order to reveal it to him. However, he was delayed in the spiritual realm by 'the prince of the Persian kingdom' for twenty one days and apparently he would not have reached Daniel even then had not 'Michael, one of the chief princes', come to help him (Daniel 10 vv. 1-14). A few verses later he adds some other interesting information:

"Soon I will return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece will come... (No one supports me against them except Michael, your prince.) (Dan 10:20/1)

and that last phrase is amplified later:-

"At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise..." (Dan 12:1)

Here we have the assertion that there are angels or spiritual princes who are in some way responsible for different nations in the world. The one who cares for the people of Israel is an archangel named Michael. Apparently some of the angels have rebelled and have joined the Devil in opposing the Holy God who created them.

We find the same picture taken up in the Book of Revelation:

And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. [Rev 12:7/8]

And, lest there should be any doubt about the identity of the dragon, the writer goes on - The great dragon was hurled down - that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. [Rev 12:9]

If we trace this study of Satan and angels through the bible we see that there is a carefully detailed hierarchy. Apparently individuals have 'guardian' angels:-

See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. (Mat 18:10)

and so do Churches:-

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:... (Rev 2:1)

(see also 2:8, 12, 18, 13:1, 7, 14)

We have already seen that nations have their princes and there is also a more senior prince still; the prince of this world:-

Now is the time for judgement on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. (John 12:31)

(see also John 14:30, 16:11 and also 2 Cor. 4:4, Eph. 2:2 and 1 John 4:4. From the context of these references there can be no doubt that the prince of this world is Lucifer now known as Satan.)

Remember the context of this verse in Jude; he is warning his readers against godless men who reject authority and slander celestial beings. His argument is that these are mere men who are doing this whereas even the archangel Michael would not himself dare to make accusations against Satan, but said "The Lord rebuke you." The point being, apparently, that although Michael was an archangel, he was responsible for only a nation (albeit it that nation is God's own people, the Jews) whereas the devil had been appointed the prince of the whole world and was thus senior to him. If even the archangel Michael would not rebuke Satan, although the latter is in opposition to God, how much more careful these godless men should be not to despise genuine authority.

10. Because these men are godless and unspiritual (v.19) they do not understand the spiritual realm (1 Cor.2:14) and speak disparagingly against all that is associated with it.. They do not realise their own ignorance but assume that they are wiser than others. In every age there are those who claim that they are 'free' and not bound by what they claim are human laws because they obey the higher law of nature. In fact they are subject to their fallen natures and are no better than unreasoning animals which follow their

instincts. Indeed, human fallen nature is more depraved than the instincts of animals. Eventually, of course, their lust, gluttony, greed etc. will destroy them.

11. So Jude pronounces the doom of these godless men and likens them the three Old Testament characters. The first is Cain who murdered his brother Abel. Traditionally in the history of Israel more is attributed to Cain than we read in the Bible. He became associated with all that is unrighteous in contrast to Abel who is the figure of all that is righteous. Both Barclay and Green quote the Jerusalem Targum where Cain is depicted as saying, “there is neither judgment nor judge; there is no other world; no good reward will be given to the good and no vengeance taken on the wicked; nor is there any pity in the creation or the government of the world.” Such a view means that a person will follow his or her own desires without fear of consequence.

The second is Balaam. He is a strange, controversial and unpleasant person. God used him as a prophet but his character was badly flawed. Although initially he resisted Balak’s attempts to persuade him to curse Israel, eventually he was responsible for encouraging the Israelites to worship Baal (Number 31:16). His great sin was not simply how he lived his own life but that he was responsible for leading others astray – the very thing Jude feared was happening amongst his readers and why he was writing to warn them against these godless men.

The third is Korah whose story is told in Numbers 16. He opposed Moses and Aaron and claimed he understood God’s attitude to Israel better than they, not recognising their god-given authority. What is more, he gathered others around him and led them astray also. God separated them from the rest of the people and destroyed them.

Jude regards these godless men as repeating the errors of the three Old Testament characters he has listed and sees them suffering the same fate.

12. The passion of Jude’s feeling about these men is vividly stated as he launches into a description of their deceit and rebellion against the truth and the danger this causes the fellowship of believers.

First he refers to the love feasts. In the early church the members would meet (if possible on the Lord’s Day) for a communal meal. Everyone would bring what they could and share it. Obviously the poorer members would be able to bring little compared with the rich and there would be the joy of the better off being able to help their poorer brethren and the latter would enjoy a good meal. Unfortunately, as time went on, divisions occurred. Paul deals with this problem in 1 Corinthians 11:20-22, and there is a similar situation covered in 2 Peter 2:13 ff.

There are two similar words in Greek; *spilos*, a spot or blemish and *spilas* a rock or reef covered by water. Here Judas uses the latter but most translations refer to these men as blemishes. Nevertheless, Jude may well mean that these men are treacherous snares who may shipwreck the faith of believers. He says that they join in the feasts fearlessly (literal). Modern translations probably convey the meaning better with “without the slightest qualm (NIV); and “shameless carousals” (REB). Ezekiel 34:8 refers to shepherds who “*did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock*”. Similarly these men exploit others. Throughout the history of the Church there have been leaders who seek material gain for themselves rather than the welfare of those committed to their charge.

Jude now draws on another picture – clouds which would seem to promise much needed rain but which pass overhead driven by the wind without providing any rain at all. Green

adds the helpful comment, “they merely serve to hide the sun”. Then yet a further illustration - trees which yield no fruit. There is a difference of opinion as to how to translate *phthinopprinos*, which is a combination of *phthino*, to waste away, and *opora*, autumn. A.V. translates somewhat clumsily as “whose fruit withereth, without fruit”. It is probably better to take it as meaning being without fruit at the time of harvest; “*trees fruitless in autumn*” (*REB*). Of course, we are reminded of the incident when Jesus cursed the barren fig tree (Mark 11:13 ff.) and the parable of the fig tree (Luke 13:6). Jude’s claim is that these men produce no fruit in the lives of others.

The reference to being uprooted and twice dead is difficult because it seems to imply that the judgment on them has already been carried out. Jude may have in mind that, along with everyone else, these men were dead in their sins but heard the gospel and became believers. However, they then rebelled against the truth and lost their place in Jesus (were uprooted) and so they are dead in their sins for a second time.

13. Jude continues his vivid descriptions of these men by likening them to the waves of the sea whipped up by a storm. Barclay links the picture to the Dead Sea where the waves, being so heavily impregnated with salt, leave devastation on the shore, destroying the trees etc. That probably goes further than the picture Jude has in mind, but the foam and spume stirred up by a restless sea convey a dramatic critic of these men.

The final picture Jude gives of these men is to compare them to stars which have lost their way. To us this seems to be a very obscure illustration but it would be very understandable to his intended readers. He is referring to the Book of Enoch (indeed he states this in the next verse) which was very popular at the time even though it does not appear in the canon of our Scriptures. Enoch refers to stars which do not obey God and which disappear into darkness. Green says that these are what we call ‘shooting stars’. It may well be that the stars represent angels (in this case fallen angels) – see Revelation 1:20. However obscure the details may be Jude’s intention is clear – these men are speeding towards a terrible judgement.

14-15. Here Jude quotes almost verbatim from the Book of Enoch. There is no need to study the prophecy word for word here; the general import is clear. What is more important is the fact that Jude uses the book of Enoch as he might use a book of the Old Testament. Jerome claimed that Jude should not be regarded as Scripture because he uses an apocryphal book to back up his argument. Both Barclay and Green dismiss this view, saying that Jude is simply using Enoch, which was well known to his readers, as a means of communicating his warning.

16. The word Jude uses for grumblers is the one used of the Israelites in the wilderness who ‘murmured’ against Moses; the Greek is the wonderful sounding word *gongustes*. These godless men as well as rebelling against the church leaders no doubt complained about them also. The other word, which NIV translates as ‘fault-finders’ (and ‘The Message’ as ‘bellyachers’), is *mempsimoiros* are those for whom nothing is ever right and they are dissatisfied with everything. A TV advertisement for a particular car depicted a mother-in-law who dismissed everything as in the wrong place, out of date, the wrong colour or the wrong design (with the exception, of course, of the car about which she said nothing); she is an excellent illustration of what Jude is describing.

Jude continues with his attack on these men. Their policy is “My will not God’s be done”, following their own desires and lusts, and, like many people convinced of their own importance, they exhibit the paradoxical behaviour of boasting about themselves yet

toadying to those who, they believe, may be able to bring some influence of benefit to themselves.

17-19. When things go wrong, when the Church is under attack and false prophets arise, it is possible that some believers will be shaken in their faith. Why doesn't God act? Has he been taken by surprise? Jude reminds them that the apostles had given warning that such things would happen. We do not know whether these warnings were simply handed on orally or were written down because no such writings have survived. They predicted that there would be scoffers, *empaiktes*, just as there had been of Jesus at his crucifixion. For their attitude see the note on v.4.

The reference to 'the last times' refers to the period between the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the return of Jesus. All who have lived since the coming of the Holy Spirit have been in the last days and scoffers have arisen in every age. The particular danger is not from those who profess no faith but rather those who do but depart from the teaching 'once delivered to the saints' and who believe that they have superior knowledge. They mock those who truly seek to follow the way of Jesus and give way to their own lusts.

There is a tightrope to walk here. Living, as we all must, within a particular culture at a particular time, it is not easy to see its flaws. For many years Christians used Scripture to support the system of slavery (Paul taught slaves to respect and serve their masters). Wilberforce and his colleagues were attacked for their enlightened views. Now we believe that they were right. In our times there are believers who argue for the blessings of same-sex marriages and the ordination of practising homosexuals as Bishops. Many of these genuinely believe that they are showing the love, compassion and mind of Christ on these matters and that they are leading the way for the whole Church to follow into the truth they believe they have seen. Yet to other believers these people are simply mocking the way of Jesus and "following their own ungodly desires". And so the pushing forward of these 'reforms' causes divisions. This is the next point Jude raises (19)

It may well be that the way in which they caused division was to separate themselves from those they considered less well informed than themselves. Barclay well makes the point that these men probably adopted the Greek philosophy of seeing human kind as tripartite: body; soul (which was common to all life including animals and even plants); and spirit, which only the initiated (amongst whom they included themselves) possessed. Obviously this would cause division. (Note: many Christians would also hold to our being tripartite beings but give a different interpretation *to the terms 'soul' and 'spirit.'*) Jude says that the truth is the reverse of what they claim – it is they who are subject to their fallen natures and do not have the Spirit.

20. Jude has exhausted his tirade against these godless men and ends his letter on a positive note, giving advice which will protect his readers from falling for false teaching. They are to build themselves up in the most holy faith. As Barclay says, "the faith we hold is not merely someone's personal opinion," it is THE faith, once for all entrusted to the saints (v.3-see note). It is holy in the sense that it is set apart from any other faith. Again to quote Barclay, "It is not man-made but God-given; it is not opinion, it is revelation; it is not guessing, it is certainty". It is life and it changes the lives of those who accept it.

He exhorts them to pray in the Holy Spirit. Scripture differentiates between praying in the Spirit and praying with the Spirit. The latter is to pray in tongues when the prayer may well not know exactly what it is he or she is praying (1 Cor. 14:13:17). To pray in the Spirit is to be guided by him as to what to pray about and how to pray for it. It is to be in such

communion with God that our thoughts, desires and hopes coincide with his; it is to have the mind of Christ (1 Cor.2:16).

21. One of the greatest and most astonishing truths of our faith is that the Almighty God, the supreme and only Creator, delights in us. He enjoys our company and longs for more of it. Many earnest believers seem to find this too difficult to accept; they are so conscious of their failure. The wonder is that we can still fail, yet God loves us infinitely. It is when we appreciate this truth and accept it fully – God’s infinite love for us – that we are more likely and able to respond with a greater love for him and, therefore, a greater desire to please him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. [1 John 4:10] See note on v.1. Jude is making the point that the initiative is God’s; he first loved us; but we have a responsibility to respond to that love and keep ourselves within it which involves our keeping his commandments. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. [John 15:10].

Jude speaks of the Lord bringing us to eternal life. But doesn’t the believer have eternal life already? Yes, from the moment we commit our lives to Jesus, accepting him as our Lord and Saviour. Nevertheless, we have not yet gained our inheritance in full; we are not yet in heaven. We are still on the journey. This sentence has been typed on a computer; it is there, complete, but it will not be preserved on the hard disc until the ‘save’ icon is clicked.

22-23. The text of these verses is not certain; different manuscripts give different readings. It may be helpful to quote a variety of translations:

And have mercy on some who are wavering; save others by snatching them out of the fire; and have mercy on still others with fear, hating even the tunic defiled by their bodies. (NRSV)

There are some doubting souls who need your pity. Others you should save by snatching them from the flames. For others your pity must be mixed with fear; hate the very clothing that is contaminated with sensuality. (REB)

When there are some who have doubts reassure them; when there are some to be saved from the fire, pull them out; but there are others to whom you must be kind with great caution, keeping your distance even from outside clothing which is contaminated by vice. (Jerusalem Bible)

And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh. (NKJV)

Snatch some from the fire, and have mercy on the waverers, trembling as you touch them, with loathing for the garment which the flesh has stained. (Moffatt)

There is some doubt as to whether there are three groups or two (the last two translations quoted above limit it to two). Most translations go for three but even then there is a dispute about the first clause. The NKJV takes one view but is obscure. The others quoted above vary between ‘having mercy or pity on’ and ‘reassuring’ the doubters. Barclay makes his own translation which makes excellent sense and is worth quoting in full:

Some of them you must argue out of their error, while they are still wavering. Others you must rescue by snatching them out of the fire. Others you must pity and fear at the same time, hating the garment stained by the flesh.

Green goes into the matter in some detail and his views support Barclay. It will be recognised that the overall meaning is clear whichever translation is correct but they vary considerably in detail. Following Barclay and Green we may say that there are some would-be believers who are attracted to doctrines which may appear attractive but which lead to heresy. Jude says that these people should be handled very sensitively; not in a domineering but with a winsome manner, carefully reasoning for the truth. Others may be much further down the road of error – possibly leading others astray also. With such there is a need for stronger action. There may be need for some form of restrictive discipline by the church (or individual, perhaps a parent) until the offender falls into line with sound teaching and doctrine.

With regard to the third clause, the following instruction is given in Leviticus:

If any clothing is contaminated with mildew--any woollen or linen clothing, any woven or knitted material of linen or wool, any leather or anything made of leather-- and if the contamination in the clothing, or leather, or woven or knitted material, or any leather article, is greenish or reddish, it is a spreading mildew and must be shown to the priest. The priest is to examine the mildew and isolate the affected article for seven days. On the seventh day he is to examine it, and if the mildew has spread in the clothing, or the woven or knitted material, or the leather, whatever its use, it is a destructive mildew; the article is unclean. He must burn up the clothing, or the woven or knitted material of wool or linen, or any leather article that has the contamination in it, because the mildew is destructive; the article must be burned up. (Lev.13:47-52 NIV)

Very probably this passage was in the mind of Jude but he uses it metaphorically as does the Book of Revelation; Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. [Rev 3:4] The Church adopted this vivid picture of the new life and originally the newly baptised were clothed in fresh white robes as they came up out of the water. As an illustration of the application of Jude's warning for us today we have only to think of those who have become entrapped by a lifestyle of drugs, alcohol, gambling and sexual immorality. Far from despising them, Christians are called to regard them with pity and mercy, doing all we can to rescue and rehabilitate them. However, in getting alongside them we must be on our guard that we do not fall into the same temptations.

24-25. These are probably the most familiar words from the whole of Jude's letter and their very familiarity may cause us to miss the tremendous truths conveyed in them. He says that God is able to keep us from falling (aptaistos). This is the only use of the word in the New Testament. Elsewhere it means surefooted. It is difficult to live the Christian life; there are so many opportunities, let alone temptations, to sin. God will keep guard over us to prevent us from slipping – provided we hold onto him. In 1 John 3:9 there is the amazing assertion that a child of God cannot sin. Commentators interpret that in a number of ways but the truth is that if we are holding to Christ we cannot sin; every time that we do sin we will discover, if we are honest, that at that moment we had let go our hold of him. God will not overrule our free will, but if we use that free will to choose to hold onto him, he will keep us from falling.

More than that, he has worked (in Christ) and will continue to work to bring us into his glorious presence. Then we shall 'see' God – whatever that may mean in the structure of the eternal realm – and know him utterly as he is. That is remarkable; nothing in our material world can continue to exist in close proximity to the sun and nothing less than perfect in the spiritual realm can continue to exist in the presence of the holiness of God, yet he can bring us without spot or blemish (the language is that of the Old Testament

sacrificial system) into close relationship with him. The words here are particularly strong, avoiding any sense of fear or cowering; we shall stand before him boldly and confidently with great joy. What a day! What an experience!

In the New Testament it is usually Jesus Christ who is described as our Saviour, but the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is united. Jesus came to save us at the instigation of the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Authorised Version (and the New KJV) omits the words 'through Jesus Christ our Lord'. There is some difference of opinion whether the phrase relates to his act of salvation or to the ascription of glory etc. The NRSV allows for this by translating –
To the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. [Jude 1:25]

It is difficult to understand why glory, majesty, power and authority should be ascribed only through Jesus. Admittedly we humans can approach the Father only through the Son, but these are attributes belonging to the Trinity as part of who and what they are. Whereas it is a fact that God saved us through Jesus Christ. It seems safer therefore to relate '*through Jesus Christ*' to the word 'Saviour'.

Glory (doxa) springs from the honour given as a result of the expression of character and being. Think of the wonder of creation; the self-giving love involved in Christ's offering of himself on the cross; the wonder of the resurrection. All this is a shining example of just who God is.

Majesty (megalosune) "denotes greatness, majesty; it is used of God the Father, signifying His greatness and dignity." (Vine).

Power (kratos) denotes dominion and manifested power and perfect or complete strength.

Authority (exousia) "the power of rule or government, the power of one whose will and commands must be obeyed by others." (Vine)

Such God is, always has been and always will be. By adding 'Amen' (so be it; this is so), it is as though Jude is folding up his letter, and impressing his seal on the hot wax before sending it to those who will read it.

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