

Rev. Bob Canode

“Mercy, Peace, and Love” Jude 1-2

This short letter is one of several letters in the NT that are designated as “general epistles” or “catholic epistles”. As early as the 4th century this collection beginning with James, have been referred to as the “general epistles” because, unlike the letters of Paul, they are not addressed to any specific location or congregation.

They appear to be addressed to the church in general rather than, for example, to the church in Corinth or Philippi. Jude is not any different in this regard. He does not address a particular church; “*Jude...to those who are called...*” (Jude 1). But he does address a particular problem. That problem is the existence of false teachers in the church and the danger they pose to the true people of God.

In verse 4 he states the reason for this letter, “*for certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ*” (4).

These people parade around as leaders among the people of God which is why Jude uses similar OT examples of false teachers like Balaam and Korah to illustrate what kind of people they are. They disguise themselves as “shepherds” but Jude say in verse 12 they are really “*shepherds feeding themselves*”.

What is interesting in the letter though is that Jude, even though he uses very strong negative language to describe the character of the false teachers and takes up a good amount of space in the letter to do so, he nevertheless does not call upon the church to take direct action against them.

Action may have been needed in some cases. In fact in 3 John, the letter right before this one in the NT, John expressly states that he would take action against a certain Diotrephes because he was doing what the false teachers in Jude’s letter were doing and that was, at least, opposing authority.

Jude says in verse 8, “*Yet in like manner these people also relying on their dreams, defile the flesh, reject authority...*” In 3 John, the apostle says this of this man, “*I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us...*” (3 Jn 9-10).

And so sometimes disciplinary action is needed to eradicate false teachers but Jude does not use this letter as an occasion to encourage the church to do this. Rather he tells the church in verse 21 “*keep yourselves in the love of God*” He even calls the church to show mercy (22) to doubters and to save others out of the fire (23).

And so it is a call to perseverance in the midst of this trial and a warning about the sinful and ungodly character of these so called leaders. Based upon the content of the letter we can identify Jude’s intentions. He focuses on the ungodly character of the false teachers and not on the content of their teaching. He also reminds the church of the sure and certain judgment that is coming in Christ and that these wicked people will be swiftly destroyed then.

He says in verse 4 that they are “*designated for this condemnation*” and in verses 14-15 that the Lord will come with “*then thousands of his holy ones to execute judgment on all the ungodly*”. And so from this we can infer that Jude did not want the members of the true church to be tempted into falling into the same sinful behavior nor did he want them to be overcome with lust for vengeance.

Rather they were to keep themselves in the love of God and wait for the return of Christ. This letter has much in common with 2 Peter. Some scholars believe Peter borrowed from Jude when he wrote that letter. In that letter the church was dealing with false teachers of the same sort and so Peter, as in Jude, tells the church, “*...confirm your calling and election*” (2 Pet. 1:10).

Jude ends with one of the most beautiful passages in all of Scripture and that is the wonderful doxology written in verses 24-25.

This evening we will consider the opening of the letter in verses 1-2. The main point of these verses is this: Jude writes to those who are called in Christ and prays that God would increase grace in them”

As was typical for letter writing in the first century of Greco-Roman life, Jude uses the opening of this letter to identify the author and sender, identify his recipients, and to give greetings. As we saw last week with the greetings Paul gave at the end of his letter to the Philippians, even though the *form* of Jude’s introduction is very similar to secular letters of his day, the *essence* and the *power* of the words Jude writes are very different.

In verse 1 Jude identifies himself as the sender and he takes the opportunity here to establish exactly who it was that was using the pen and ink. He says it is Jude and that he is a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James. This James that Jude refers to here is most likely James the Lord’s brother. Both are mentioned in Mark 6 and Matthew 13; “*And when Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there, and coming to his hometown he taught them in their synagogue so that they were astonished, and said, ‘Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?’*” (Matt. 13:53)

James would later become a prominent leader in the church. We see this in the book of Acts and in Galatians where Paul identifies him as the Lord’s brother and then says that James, along with Peter and John, seemed to be “pillars” in the church (Gal. 1:19; 2:9). It is also very likely that this James was the author of the NT letter James that the church has received.

And so Jude identifies himself as the brother of this James. James was a prominent figure in the early church. We see him in Acts 15 at the Jerusalem council giving a speech alongside Peter to help the church determine what to do about ministering to recent Gentile converts. Notice how Jude does not add any descriptions to James. He is just James because he was well known and had authority in the church.

And so perhaps that the church might not get this Jude confused with another Jude or Judas, Jude singles himself out as the brother of a true leader, one of the pillars in the church, James. But he first identifies himself as a servant/slave of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jude’s identity is first and foremost understood and defined by his relationship to Jesus Christ.

This is how his recipients were to understand themselves as well. They are those who have been called by God, loved by the Father and kept for (or by) Jesus Christ. This is important for all believers to understand that in whatever situation we are in, that our fundamental identity is defined by our relationship to Jesus Christ.

Because of this there are certain obligations imposed upon us because we are identified with Christ and belong to Him. For Jude this is significant. If this James is the Lord's brother, than Jude could have simply said that he was the brother of Jesus. This he is. But Jude's most basic identity is not found in his blood relation to Christ, nor in his blood relation to James, but in his *spiritual* relationship to Jesus Christ by faith.

Because of the Spirit forged bond that Jude has with Christ, along with James and all other believers in the church, Jesus has become, as he says in verse 4, "*our Master and Lord*". In other words we are possessions of Jesus Christ. He purchased us by His blood, and therefore our most basic understanding of our identity is found in relation to Him.

This means that whatever the Lord Jesus Christ chooses to do with you, with the gifts He gives you, this is what you are to do, for His glory. The false teachers rebelled against Christ and denied Him. For us He is our Master.

This relationship to Christ helps us understand how we are to love our blood relatives properly but the Spirit-bond we have also transcends those relationships. Jesus said as much when He said that His mother and brothers and sisters were those "who do the will of God".

If any of these false teachers were blood relatives with a member of the true church then they were truly no longer part of the family. For Jude, this relationship meant that during his time on earth he would be a servant of Jesus Christ for the sake of the church.

Now in a very real sense we are all servants of Christ, Jude even says Christ is our Master. But this designation for Jude in this context meant that he was a formal leader in the church. Paul identifies himself and Timothy as servants of Christ in Philippians. He calls himself a "servant of Jesus Christ called to be an apostle" at the beginning of his letter to the Romans. In the OT, Moses is referred to again and again as "the servant of the LORD" (Deut.34:5; Josh 1:1-2). Jesus said whoever would be first in the Kingdom of God must become "a servant" (Mark 10:43-45).

Jude, by this designation, shows that he had been set apart by Christ to have authority in the church, to lead it, and that Christ had given him the spiritual graces to do so. He does not identify himself as an apostle. But it is clear that the Holy Spirit inspired his writing so that what we have from Jude has the full weight of the authority of God Himself.

It's also clear that that same Spirit of Christ furnished Jude with the gifts necessary to speak with authority to the church and to *serve* her. This was the major dividing line between true leaders and the false leaders. The false teachers served themselves. Jude was a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ and therefore served the church as Christ did, by giving His life as a ransom for her.

Part of this service for Jude included being a watchman that warned the church of the wickedness and lascivious behavior of these people.

In the next part of the letter Jude identifies the group to whom he is writing and to whom this warning comes, "*Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James to those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ*" (1).

Jude refers to the members of the church as the called ones. This language of being called is used elsewhere in the Bible to refer to the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts and minds of the elect, to bring them to Christ by the gospel. When we as parents call out to our children, even with a very loud voice that the whole neighborhood can hear, that "calling" is not always "effective" is it?

For whatever reason they don't always come as a response to that calling. But when the Holy Spirit "calls" us, His "voice" and power are *always* effective. What does He do in this calling? He convinces us of our sin and misery, causing us to mourn for our sins. He enlightens our minds and hearts to know Christ. He renews our wills. In a word He takes out our hearts of stone and gives us a new heart. He thus persuades us and enables us to embrace Jesus Christ who is freely offered to us in the gospel.

Working within us and by the gospel, the Holy Spirit effectively calls us out of darkness and unites us to the light of the world, Jesus Christ. This effectual calling is most vividly displayed in Scripture in the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus had been dead and buried in the tomb for four days. Jesus approaches the tomb and *calls* out to him, "Lazarus come out" and Lazarus walked out of the grave, resurrected to new life.

This is what Jesus does internally in His people. We were dead in our sins when the Spirit called us. By the power of God we are now alive in Christ. This would have been important for Jude's listeners to remember because Jude goes on to emphasize the ungodliness of the false teachers.

This is what they were before God called them, they were ungodly. But the Father called them to a different life and allegiance and to a different destiny. In Christ they now had a heavenly calling.

And so this letter comes to those who are *called*. They are also loved by God the Father; "*to those who are called, beloved in God the Father*"(1). To be called means that we are loved by God. Jude was writing to those who are called and thus beloved "*in*" God the Father. That is to say when God works faith in us, He causes us to abide in Him.

When Jesus promised the Holy Spirit, He said, "in that day you will know that I am in my Father and you in me and I in you" (Jn. 14). When the Father calls us He puts His Name on us. Through faith in Christ He is now *our Father*. He loves us and cares for us like a good loving father would care for his own children.

In the same way that He sustained His Son Jesus through His suffering all the way to the cross and then raised Him from the dead, so too will our Father sustain us in our suffering and raise us from the dead on the last day. To be called by God means also that we are kept for Jesus Christ; "*beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ*"

It is not clear from the original Greek Jude used whether he meant kept *for* Christ or kept *by* Christ. Later in the letter he displays a powerful image of the judgment day when he says the Lord will come with ten thousands of angels to execute judgment on the ungodly so Christ coming on the last day is definitely in view there.

In the doxology at the end Jude speaks of God as the One who is able to present us blameless before the presence of his glory through Christ. Peter says in his first letter that by God's power we are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time, that is when Christ returns.

Once God calls us, from Heaven, He guards our faith, from Heaven, so that we might be presented to Christ on the last day as His holy bride. This may be what Jude had in mind, that we are kept *for* Christ. In contrast to these false teachers who follow their own sinful passions God ensures that we will remain faithful to Christ.

But Scripture also teaches that we are kept *by* Christ. In His high priestly prayer Christ said of His disciples that He had *guarded* them and in John 10 He says that we are His sheep; He calls us and we

follow Him, He gives us eternal life and He said, “...they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand”

So Biblically speaking both are true, we are kept for Christ and we are kept by Christ. But what Jude intended here we can't be certain. If I had to choose one though I would prefer the reading that we are kept *for* Jesus Christ. It fits the context of the letter and it makes God the Father the One who calls us, loves us, and guards us.

With the very serious threat that the false teachers posed to the faith of Jude's hearers, they would need to know their faith was being guarded by the power of God. This was part of their identity in Jesus Christ. In the OT Israel is described as being loved and called by God; “*When Israel was a child I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son*” (Hos. 11:1). Therefore in Christ the church is the true Israel of God.

Jude identifies the sender and the recipients and then as a greeting he gives a prayer; “*may mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you*” Jude uses some impressive rhetorical devices in this letter to embellish his message and one of them is his use of triads. This is the use of joining together three words or references, similar in their spheres of meaning, to emphasize a point.

Mercy, peace, and love are connected here in this short prayer as blessings from God. This contrasts with another group of three that Jude uses to describe the false teachers in verse 8 who “*defile the flesh, reject authority and blaspheme the glorious ones*” As we consider this prayer we need to understand how Jude showed in his identification of the sender and the recipients that our state of being in Christ was not of our own doing.

God called us. By calling us Jude shows us that He loved us and that He guards us. Here and elsewhere in Scripture it is God or Christ who is the author of these actions. When we were dead in sin and in darkness He called us, when we were ungodly He loved us, when we are tempted to turn away He guards our faith.

The emphasis upon the sovereign activity of God in our being called and loved by Him, this might be taken an implied call upon the members of the church to engage in inactivity. If God by supernatural power does these things in us then what is left for the Christian to do?

But this is not at all what Jude has in mind. In fact it is precisely because God called these group of believers and loved them and guards them that Jude implores them to keep themselves in the love of God (v.21). They were to build themselves up and pray in the Holy Spirit (v.20). Even though we were spiritually dead in our sins when God called us, He nevertheless calls *us*.

That is to say the Holy Spirit gives us a new heart, renewed wills and enlightened minds so that is we, the members of the church, and not some other group of people who embrace Christ by faith. When God sovereignly calls you, you and not someone else, respond with your whole being. With *your* heart, mind, and soul, by faith, *you* begin to love Jesus Christ. This is a gift from God.

The same principle is at work as God sovereignly guards us throughout the Christian life. Our perseverance to the end is ultimately a work of God. Apart from Him we can do nothing. The strong temptations that continually call out to us, the consistent prospect of death that surrounds us and the merciless harassment of Satan, this would all do us in.

But they don't because God guards us for Christ. But at the same time, we are implored by God to engage our whole being in this fight. Jude called his hearers to “contend” for the faith (v.3). By God's grace they were to pray in the Holy Spirit and build themselves up. In this activity, on the part of the church,

Jude knew they would need Divine aid so he prays for them. He prays for mercy. The impact of these wicked people would have put them in a weakened position. They might have felt helpless from this attack from Satan. Jude prays that God would show them mercy.

These people who crept in, because of their sinfulness cause divisions. They threaten the peace of the church. Satan divided the peace that existed between Adam and Eve. This is what loud mouthed boasters could possibly do, divide the church.

Their rebellious and sinful lifestyle proved they were at war with God and with His church. The church would need grace from God to continue to do those things that make for peace. And finally Jude prays for love. The apostle Paul used a triad of his own in one of his letters to emphasize the importance of love; *“these three remain; faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love”* (1 Cor.13:13).

Love is self-giving, self-communication to another for the glory of God. When God calls us He loves us and gives Himself to us. This love is supremely manifested in the giving of His Son for our sakes; *“For God so loved the world that he gave His only Son”* (Jn. 3:16). The false teachers in their midst were like Cain, who killed his brother. They did not have love.

He says they were devoid of the Spirit (v.19). They were loveless. These Christians to whom Jude writes would need to be shown love by God while being harassed by people who hated them. Jude prays that these graces, these spiritual gifts from God would be “multiplied”.

“May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you” Jude prays as if these three things can be quantified in the lives of believers. This word is used in Acts to refer to the way in which the number of believers increased. After seven men were set apart to do diaconal work in the church Luke tells us in chapter 6:7, *“and the word of God continued to increase and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem...”*

Mercy, peace, and love don't have units by which we can measure them but Scripture does present the grace of God in Christ as something that should continually increase in the life of the believer, even in the midst of ungodliness. With the multiplication of believers you can see and measure the evidence. Two believers becomes four and four becomes eight and so on.

But where is the evidence in mercy, peace, and love? In a word Jude prayed that God by His Spirit would multiply mercy, peace, and love to His church and thereby make them more and more like Christ. Jude expected that as God answered this short prayer that his listeners would not only keep themselves in the love of God but that they would also *be merciful and make peace and show love*. This is where he ends up in verses 22 and 23, *“have mercy on those who doubt, save others, snatching them out of the fire, to others show mercy”*

The church was infiltrated by people pretending to be fellow servants of Christ but they were devoid of the Spirit and without Christ, indeed they must then hate Christ. Jude prayed through their suffering God would show grace and make them more *like Christ*, not turn away from Him.

Our Master and Lord Jesus Christ when surrounded by ungodly people, on His way to being crucified for ungodly people, He continued to show mercy and continued to love us even to the point of death, even death on a cross. Beloved called by God, as you are harassed by Satan, tempted by the world, sickened by those who claim to serve Christ but only serve their sinful passions, may mercy, peace and love be multiplied to you for the sake of Christ.

