

Grow in Grace Conference 2021
Jude 17-25
The End and the Means

If you will, take your Bibles now and turn with me to the book of Jude.

Anytime we talk about the relationship between God's sovereign will and our responsibility towards him in how we are to live and act, we're treading on some complicated and beautifully mysterious ground. Jude teaches us two important principles about God's will and our responsibility, principles that are repeatedly affirmed and taught in the rest of the Bible:

1) God is the one who calls, collects, and keeps men and women out of sin and unto salvation through faith in Christ. The 'x-factor' of saving faith, the thing that determines whether or not a person is born again, isn't a quality that is found in us, for we are natural born enemies of God, who are born dead in our trespasses and sins. The x-factor of faith is the sovereign work of God. The confidence of faith, the thing that anchors our hope that we will remain in Christ until the end when we are finally united to him in his direct presence, is a confidence in the role that God plays as he keeps us and guards us, so that he may present us to himself on that last day joyfully blameless.

2) Jude teaches that we play an active role in responding to the work God does in us. God's will for all men and women is that they would believe in his Son, who he has appointed as the savior of the world. Last night we saw that even as Jude celebrated the work of God to keep believers in Christ, he also called believers to actively and urgently contend for the faith that God delivered once and for all to the saints. Jude's letter to the church simultaneously declares the news of God's victory and calls the people of God into battle. The destination of God's people is as sure as God himself, and yet there's still an exhortation for God's people to persevere.

Jude seems to view the present condition of God's people through a lens where we already possess the riches of God's salvation and the inheritance of Christ's righteous glory, and yet there's a sense in which we've not yet arrived at that destination yet. Like an engagement ring that establishes a new relationship between a man and woman, eagerly waits for the day when it will be joined with the wedding band, so the people of God live in the covenant of Jesus' blood and his love, and yet we long for the day when we will see his glory and be united to him in the fullness of his presence. As we wait for that day, a day that is surely coming, we have a necessary calling from God to actively walk in the truth of faith in love.

The book of Jude is as much a declaration of the confidence of God's saints in the assurance we have that he will hold us fast until the day that we are joined to him, as it is an exhortation to keep ourselves in God, to run the race, to fight the fight, and to live and remain in the truth even as the truth lives and remains in us. I mentioned last night that there are two key

commands in the book of Jude: 1) contend for the faith, once for all received by the saints and 2) keep yourselves in the love of God.

We've seen why we must contend for this faith. There are enemies who will come into the church, who will seek to pervert and distort the gospel of Christ to serve the passions of sin. We must defend the truth of Christ from such people, and we must contend for the purity of our own faith, so that we do not fall into the same condemnation that has been appointed for the enemies of Christ.

This week, and related to that first command, I want to investigate what Jude says about the way that we're to contend for the faith we've received and how we are to keep ourselves in the love of God. Let's begin by reading our passage together: Jude 17-25.

God takes great pleasure in making dead sinners live. He loves to exalt the glory of his Son, Jesus Christ, by raising the dead with him. He has set on Jesus a name that is above every name with great glory and great joy. That joy is the destination of the Christian faith. The right response to that divine act of love is belief and obedience that flows from a heart of love. And so, the book of Jude is dedicated to the task of securing our faith in the power of God and to calling us into battle against a defeated, but dangerous foe. The main point I want to draw your attention to in this text is this:

MP: Christian, keep yourself in the love of God

In our time this morning I want to draw your attention to the way Jude calls us to do that with three points:

A) Know that it is God who Keeps You

B) Remember that the threat against you is still real

C) Therefore Earnestly Strive to Use the Means of Grace

Unless you enjoy reading the Puritans, you're probably not too familiar with the term, 'Means of Grace.' I'll explain more about that term a little later, but for now I want you to think about them simply as the ordinary ways that God has appointed for us to live in and to experience his grace for daily lives. These are avenues through which we actively live in the truth of God and keep ourselves in the love of God. Before we come to that; however, I want to focus for a few minutes on God, the great keeper of our salvation.

A) God the Great Keeper

Let's begin with doxology, (v. 24-25), "Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever, Amen."

I think you could preach 1000 sermons from these two verses and never wear them out. Before we can begin with the way Jude calls us to keep ourselves in the love of God, we must

see that we've done nothing to put ourselves in the love of God in the first place. "We love," John writes, "because he first loved us." "For while we were still weak," Paul wrote to the church in Rome, "at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom 5:6-8). Ephesians 2:1-3, "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature, children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."

A doxology is an expression, a recognition, an ascription of glory to God on the basis of something that is essential to him which has been manifested in something that he has done. Jude 24-25 is rightly called a doxology because it attracts our gaze to God and glories in him for three things:

1) It exalts him as the only God, who is our Savior. Jude's expression here is complex. He's using the word, "God" (theos) to refer I think specifically to God the Father. That's a common thing that you see throughout the writers of the NT. Jude is in no way implying that Jesus does not share in the divine nature with his Father. After all, he calls Jesus, Christ "Messiah" and "Lord," titles that Jesus can only maintain if he is one in nature with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

Jude exalts Jesus with the same glory with which he ascribes to God the Father—it's a glory that comes with his timelessness and his preeminence, to them, "be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever." If Jesus isn't God, then this doxology would be blasphemy.

Jude does distinguish between the persons of God the Father and Jesus, God the Son, by what he says about their role in our salvation. Jude calls God the Father, our Savior, and he does that because Jude recognized that while the Father was not crucified for our sin on the cross as Jesus was, it was the Father who sent the Son to do that. So, God is our Savior, through Jesus Christ, who has been exalted as Lord of Heaven and Earth, and who rules and reigns as he sits at the Father's right-hand, the place of power.

2) This doxology exalts the majesty of God for his preserving power. In v. 24a, Jude says, "Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling." Catch that: the power that keeps God's people from stumbling into sin and its destruction is a power that is God's alone.

We know that God does not prevent his people from being tempted. He allows his people to go through times of trial and temptation because it has a purifying and perfecting effect on us. James exhorts us, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you

know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

The difference between the seed of faith that springs up and is quickly choked out by the cares of the world or shrivels up under the strain of persecution and the seed of faith that grows and matures so that it bears great fruit isn't that one undergoes testing while the other doesn't but that the seed that bears great fruit has been planted and is kept by the preserving power of God, who keeps them from stumbling.

Life is like the weather. Some days are bright and sunny, others bring terrible storms. The endurance of the saints, the power that keeps God's people from stumbling is nothing less than the great power of God as he keeps his people. Look at how Jude reflects this in the way he first addresses his readers in v. 1b, “To those who are called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ.” Though this letter is meant to call the saints of God to act, as we will soon see, the confidence that Jude has for God's people has little to do with us and everything to do with the ability of God, who he announces is able to keep us from stumbling headlong into sin.

3) This doxology exalts the majesty and the power of God because of the way God's preserving power will effectively deliver God's people into the presence of his glory with great joy.

God is not begrudging in his work of salvation. He does not keep his saints and deliver them to himself with a frown upon his face. He adopts us in the fullness of divine joy, which in turn becomes the fullness of our joy. Heaven will be a place of unimaginable joy, not just because sin and death are banished from that place, not just because we will be gathered there with those who have gone before us on this path of faith, but because God is there, and we will stand in the fullness of his presence and so we will be filled with a joy that surpasses the greatest ecstasy that this world has to offer.

In Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, when the son who had wasted away his inheritance in a foreign land returned to his father, he came seeking only to be a servant in the house of his father, but when he returned, his father ran to him and received him with joy, the kind of joy that Jude exalts God for in this doxology. It would be a merciful and gracious thing for God to forgive us of sin and to admit us into his house as lowly servants, but that's not the way he receives those who trust in Christ and persevere in the truth of this faith. He receives us as his children, and as we enter his house and stand in his presence, God will present us to himself in the fullness of his glory with great joy.

God is the great keeper of his people, and this is good news, because though Jesus has secured victory for his people, the threat is still real (our second point).

B) Remember that the threat is still real

Because God is the keeper of his people, because He has accomplished his great work of salvation through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, a sacrifice that stands once and for all,

God's people can know for sure that the victory is ours. In every war, there is a decisive turning point. In God's war on sin and death, his salvation victory was established on the cross, and that victory was declared when Jesus was raised from the dead. We know that God is able to keep us from stumbling. We know that he will present his people to himself blameless with great joy. It's a done deal, but just as a mortally wounded bear poses a serious threat as long as it draws breath, so the defeated kingdom of darkness still poses a clear and present danger to the followers of Christ. One pastor puts it this way, "Just because the brilliant Commander-in-Chief promises victory on the beaches does not mean that his troops can throw their weapons overboard. The promise of victory assumes valor in battle." (Piper)

It's been said, I think rightly, that Christians fight from victory, not for victory. Just because victory is kept for us by God and ensured by the power of God doesn't mean that we can take off our helmet and take a rest by the side of the way of truth. The threat is too real and too present to do that.

Jude told us in v. 3, that though he had desired to write about our common salvation, he was instead compelled to write appealing to God's people to contend for the faith, because the church had come under assault from within. He saw the danger. He wants us to see the danger too, and so he reminds us in v. 17 of the warnings that were first given by the apostles as they delivered to us the warning they received from Jesus, "remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, following their ungodly passions." It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit."

Now, we went pretty in-depth last night into the character of these enemies of the faith that Jude had in mind. Though these imposters were in and among the churches, they did not belong to the Church because they did not belong to Christ. They professed allegiance to Christ, but they were clearly twisting the freedom of Christ to serve perverse desires. Here in v. 18, Jude calls these people scoffers, men who were possessed by their natural condition, mastered not by Jesus but by their own ungodly passions and tastes.

Jesus warned his disciples in Matthew 7:15-20 about people like this, false prophets who would come in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. He says, "You will recognize them by their fruits."

The fruits of these people Jude describes, these people who had infiltrated the church were fruits of sin and death. He offers a series of descriptions of them here in v. 18. I will highlight three for you:

- 1) He calls them scoffers, people who laughed at key doctrines of the Christian faith. We get better idea of the kind of scoffing that Jude has in mind here from 2 Peter, which was written as Jude wrote this. Peter warned about scoffers who would come, following their own sinful

desires, who would try to cause people to doubt the second coming of Jesus. “Where is the promise of his coming?” they will ask. To which Peter responds, “they deliberately overlook this fact...that by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.” He then says, “But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that the with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any would perish.” So while these scoffers laugh at the majesty of King Jesus who will come to judge them and take advantage of this time of God’s forbearance, the church must count this time as God’s mercy, and must strive on to share the gospel, with the same desire that none should perish.

2) Jude also says that these people are devoid of the Spirit. This is the fundamental explanation of why these scoffers and perverters of the truth do what they do. The Spirit of God who convicts of men of their unrighteousness, guides the people of God in the way of faith, is at work in us to keep us, and who intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words, is not in them. The Spirit of God is not a feeling you get in your bones when you hear your favorite song come on the radio. The Spirit of God is not a mystical force who comes to us when we reach a certain sort of enlightenment. The Spirit of God is the defender of truth, who applies the work of Christ to us, and raises dead hearts in saving faith. Like the wind, he moves how he wishes, according to the perfect plan of God the Father. The Spirit is the one who binds God’s people together in the love that flows from truth, and he works to guard the Church against error and disobedience. One of the critical evidences that these troublers of the church were enemies and not friends to the bride of Christ is that they had no love for the truth and that they tried to leverage God’s mercy to support their own rebellion against Him.

3) Jude says that these people cause division in the church. Their division from Christ led to an effort to lead others away from him, causing division in the church. The Spirit of God is the thread that holds us fast to Christ and to one another. But these enemies of the faith have no union with the Spirit and so they have no union with the people of God. The spirit of division is not the Spirit of God, and that’s something to remember as Satan does everything he can to divide us from one another.

The description Jude gives is similar to what Peter says in 2 Peter 2:1-3, “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.”

People such as Peter and Jude speak of carefully camouflage their true identity. Their motives are cloaked with bits of truth. They don't always wholesale deny the basic convictions of the gospel, they merely twist the freedom and the work of Christ into a tool to get what they really want, fame, money, recognition, etc. They turn Christ into profit, and so deny him. In their greed, they seek to exploit the faith of others, and many, Peter warns, will follow their sensuality.

The threat is real. Though we firmly stand in the conviction that God is the great keeper of his people, that final victory has already been made secure, that does not mean that we can afford to relax. The enemy may be defeated, but he's still dangerous, and so in Paul's warning to the Ephesians elders in Acts 20, he urges them to pay careful attention to themselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. In v. 29, he says, "I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert."

As we seek to be faithful to Christ, and to keep ourselves in the love of God by living out our faith, it's important for us to remember that though our hope rests on the irrevocable victory of Jesus, there are many forces at work in this world that still pose a dangerous threat to us. Jesus says that not all who see him on the last day and say to him, "Lord, lord," will enter the Kingdom of Heaven to be with him. We must take care and we must be discerning to make sure that we are not led astray. Just because a song is labeled Christian, or you find a 'Christian' book on the shelf, doesn't mean that it's to be trusted. Like the Bereans who searched and tested Paul's message by the word of scripture, so we must test everything we hear by the authority of God's word, realizing that if we are not careful, we can easily be led astray into error.

C) Making Use of the Means of Grace (don't read yet)

God has not left the church to contend for the faith in our own ingenuity or in our own power. He is able to keep us from stumbling and to present us blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy. Even as God ensures the perseverance of his people, he has also equipped us with the necessary tools for doing so, and we have a responsibility for putting those tools into action. Jude's letter is a call for God's people to come into action, to contend for their faith and to keep themselves in the love of God.

Before Jude signs off in his letter to the church, he throws open the armory of heaven and urges us to take hold of three specific weapons, three means of grace, by which we will most certainly endure as we are kept in the power and the grace of God: 1) Building ourselves up in the knowledge of the truth through God's word 2) Praying in the Holy Spirit 3) Taking an active role in the fellowship of God's people.

We don't use terms like 'Means of Grace' very often. I do not in any way want to make you think that these are ways that we earn God's favor. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith

alone, in Christ alone. The destination of God's people is secure because God has promised eternal life to all who are joined to Jesus by faith. Go back to that golden chain of salvation that Paul talks about in Romans 8:30, "And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified." That's God's work. That's what assures us of the absolute triumph of God's mercy, but the Bible never teaches us to assume that we are saved irrespective of what we do, as if we can just say, "I believe in Jesus," and then live however we want. We cannot claim to know God or to have his truth abiding in us if we are not responding to that knowledge of the truth by walking in it. We do not receive the love of God on the basis of what we do, but according to Jude, we have an active role as we live out the faith that is within us keeping ourselves in the love of God.

If you wanted to travel to Florida, you could get on I 43 and start South, but you will not make it there unless you drive on the road that's been paved and unless you observe the rules of the road. You cannot put cruise control on, go to sleep, and expect to make it there. You'll just end up in the ditch.

Jesus is the author and the perfecter of our faith. By his righteousness he has laid down a path for us, and by his sacrifice, he has secured his people in the inheritance of his glory. Still, we must run the race to which we've been called, striving as Paul puts it after the prize set before us. The confidence of our faith is in the objective work of Christ, but this does not excuse us from keeping a careful watch on ourselves to make sure that we do not have an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from him. We are exhorted by God's word to make our calling and election sure.

The means of grace that Jude speaks of here are like a vehicle that helps us to travel the road of the Christian life, guided by the Holy Spirit, persevering in the faith that we've received by the grace of God, and I want to take a close look at each of these, starting in v. 20, "But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith."

1) We keep ourselves in the love of God by building up our faith in the knowledge of the truth. When a person comes to faith in Christ, when they are born again, they begin a journey of growth in the knowledge and the grace of God. We are urged to mature in our faith, to press into Christ, to grow into him, to conform to him, and so to build on the foundation of the faith that we've received. In 2 Peter 1 we read this, "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and

brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ...be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

God’s word is fundamental to this building that Jude speak of. We know God as he has revealed himself in his word and as he applies his word to our hearts by the power of his Holy Spirit. The words that we read in the Bible are special because they were given to men by the Spirit of God and because they are used by the Spirit as he builds us up in the faith that we have in Christ. We must therefore put effort into knowing God through the means he has created for us to do that, through his word. “Blessed is the man,” David writes in Psalm 1, “who walks in not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.”

I would love to hear that you were all dedicated to reading your Bibles daily. I know that finding the time in a busy schedule can be difficult, but more than simply reading your Bibles, I would much rather know that the thing that drives you there is that you want to know God better. All too often, our Bibles remain closed, as do our hearts, and we cannot expect that our love and zeal for the glory of Christ will grow if we are not taking steps to pursue him in his divine revelation. God’s word is active, and it is essential for spiritual life. Just as wheels on a car direct it where to go, so the word of God directs us in our knowledge of the way in which are to walk. 2) We find the second means of grace that Jude directs us to take hold of in v. 20b, “praying in the Holy Spirit.” We keep ourselves in the love of God through fervent, Spirit directed prayer. Jude could have just told us to be prayerful, but he goes a little further here to emphasize how we are to be praying in the Holy Spirit. Just as the Holy Spirit activates and applies God’s word to us, so he is essential to our prayer lives.

Praying in the Spirit is the same idea that we get from Paul in Ephesians 6:18. It’s not a specific kind of praying, but the sort of prayer that believers are called to offer up to God at all times. We are not called to pray without ceasing because God is not already aware of what is going on in our lives or because he needs us to open some sort of portal through prayer before he can intervene. Rather, God calls us to pray because prayer is part of having an active relationship with him, communicating with him, delighting in him. Prayer is fellowship with God. Can you imagine a husband and a wife who after making their vows never said another word to each other again? They might be able to get along with the husk of a marriage, but there would be no life there.

God calls us to prayer because it's in prayer that we learn to treasure the truths of his word. It's in prayer that we realize our total dependence on him. It's in prayer that we learn to trust him and to rely on him. It's in prayer that we learn to savor his presence. I can think of no greater way than to bankrupt faith than to fail to pray. Prayer is as essential to the Christian life as breathing is to a living being.

You know, it feels kind of strange to me that Jude would say, "keep yourselves in the love of God," especially when we don't merit the love of God through anything that we do. This is where prayer comes into play. Prayer is in part a plea for God to do what he has said he will do. It's a confession of faith that he keeps his word, and it's an active participation in what he is doing in the world, through the means that he's appointed for us.

Jude qualifies this call to pray by saying that we are to pray in the Spirit. Praying in the Spirit means praying by the direction of the Spirit, with the priorities of the Spirit, in reliance on the Spirit. When we pray in the Spirit, we are being moved by the Spirit to pray according to the wisdom and the direction of the Spirit. Hopefully you're seeing how prayer and fellowship with God go hand-in-hand as they do. One of the key differences that Jude draws between those who are in the church but who are not subject to Christ is the presence of the Holy Spirit, and one of the functions of the Spirit is to guide us to prayer and to direct us in our prayer. Even in our weakness, the Spirit is there, helping us, pressing us into the love of God, as Romans 8:26 says, "For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."

Prayer plays an essential role in keeping us in the love of God, because it's so intimately woven into the relationship God's people have with God through Christ and by the Holy Spirit. I want to encourage you all to take hold of this, to make it apart of your daily life, because God calls us to come to him in this way, and he's appointed this as an action of response to the work of Christ. So keep yourselves in the love of God by praying.

3) The third means of grace that Jude calls our attention to is that of fellowship in the faith with others. There's some intense action going on here in v. 22. They are all 'other' driven, and they are all done while we wait patiently on the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, which leads to eternal life, "And have mercy," Jude says, "on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh."

There are three kinds of people here. They all require different kinds of responses. The first kind of person is the person who struggles with doubt. How do you respond to a brother or sister, who is struggling with doubt? Jude says, "have mercy on him." In this we are to have the spirit of Jesus, who though he rebuked his disciples for their unbelief after he had risen from the dead, restored them in love and fellowship to himself. Jude doesn't say what sort of doubt he has

in mind, whether this is someone struggling with a point of doctrine or with assurance of faith, but to a person who is suffering at the hands of doubt, Jude calls fellow believers to deal with them with the same tenderness and care of Christ.

Sometimes a situation calls for more severity. The second sort of person, Jude describes as, “being in the fire.” These people are in a desperate situation. It’s possible that these were people who had given into the false gospel that was being taught by the people who had infiltrated the church. “Snatch them out of the fire,” Jude says. Sometimes a situation calls for direct and pointed intervention. I hate having to confront people. I would much prefer to be able to nurture and encourage, but sometimes a situation calls for bold and quick action. Do not be content to see a brother or a sister going down a path to destruction. We must be more fearful for each-other’s souls than we are for our own reputation.

The third sort of person Jude describes, seems to have fallen like the second person into old, sinful ways. Jude says to show mercy to this person, but to do so in fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh. We have to do a little bit of reading into the text here. I think this person is different than the second, though it seems they’ve fallen into the same error. While the second sort of person was in the midst of the fire, this third sort of person isn’t, but they were it seems caught in the same sin. Jude tells the church to show mercy to people like this, but to do so fearfully. Church discipline is about the purity of the church and the faith of every individual Christian in it. While judgment is inherently necessary for church discipline to work, the goal of church discipline really is restoration. This third sort of person seems to have been caught in the trap of these people who were twisting the gospel into an opportunity for sensual pleasure. The word ‘garment’ refers to a long garment that was worn under your outer cloak, next to the skin. That tells you what kind of error these people had fallen into.

Jude says that the church should show mercy to these people, but to do so in fear. Mercy must not condone wickedness. God’s mercy does not shrug at sin. God’s mercy is shown in spite of the ugliness of our sin, not in tolerance of it. The church must therefore be wise in how it restores those who are truly repentant. They must be restored in such a way that shows no affection for the sin, but cares for the well-being of the person.

Ok, so what’s all this got to do with the ‘means of grace’ we’ve been talking about. Well, I think that when you put all of this together, what Jude is referring to is the way God has appointed for his people to live in fellowship with one-another, for the purpose of walking together in the truth and love of Christ. The fellowship of God’s people plays an important role in the effectiveness of the other means of grace. We’re called to build up our faith, and we called to be building up one another in the truth (1 Thess 5:11). We should all strive in our personal relationship with God, and we must commit to the building up of the body of Christ, equipped by the Spirit to serve the church.

The pattern of prayer that we see in the NT church was a pattern of individual prayer and corporate prayer together. I do not think we can exercise the other means of grace rightly and normally without this most important means of fellowship. Jesus tells us that the law and the prophets are summed up in two great commands: to love God with all that we are and to love one another as he has loved us.

Fellowship is not a means of grace that commonly comes to people's minds when they think about the means God expects us to use as we live in faith, but it's clearly essential. Jude says that one of the key features of the enemies of the faith who had infiltrated the church is that they caused division within the body of Christ. In order for the body to thrive, all of its parts must work together, collectively, towards one goal.

Worship is a daily, individual relationship with God, but it's also a corporate one. The fellowship of the people of God is one of the ways that God builds up and edifies the church. It's there that we get a better perspective on God's word that we wouldn't have if we were on our own. It's there that we are able to intercede for one another, as we pray in the Spirit, and it's there that we guard each other from all sort of error.

As Jude calls believers into the conflict, to contend for the faith that is within us, he does so with three important truths: He shows us that God is the Great Keeper, who is able to deliver us and to sustain us as we wait on the fulfillment of his mercy and grace. He shows us that as we wait, we face a clear and present danger. The call to contend for the faith is a call of response to that danger. Finally, Jude calls us to take hold of the means of grace that God has provided for us as his people, through which we may keep ourselves in the love of God as we wait patiently on the return of our Lord.

So, as the author of Hebrews says, "Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience....let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in every time of need." Amen.