

BIG LESSONS

FROM
LITTLE BOOKS



Philemon II John
III John Jude

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THE ONE-CHAPTER EPISTLES

- Philemon —
- II John —
- III John —
- Jude —

**New Albany – Louisville Ecclesia
2014**

Preface:

Sometime, in the seemingly remote past, the New Albany-Louisville Ecclesia decided to have “special studies” that would not be lengthy. Included in these were studies on the one-chapter epistles. Contrary to our more recent studies in Revelation, Hebrews, and Romans, daily notes were not recorded and distributed among ecclesia participants. Consequently, the “memory” of the details of these studies resides only in the notes taken and preserved by the study leader. It is from those notes that this current opus derives. Since we have published our more lengthy studies both for our own and for others’ benefits, it seemed that publishing these shorter studies would, for the same reason, be appropriate. We hope blessings will ensue.

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BIG LESSONS
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The One-Chapter Epistles

Introduction to the Book

We quote from Philemon, II John, III John, and Jude, but it is usually just an isolated verse to help us defend, define, or enhance a subject we are discussing — which has its roots in larger epistles. There is no flaw in doing this, but we have missed some sizeable blessings if we have not considered the entire contexts of the verses we are isolating.

The Apostles Paul, John, and Jude wrote these small books (actually letters, not books!) knowing that the whole Church throughout the age could derive blessings from them. In their larger works, these same Apostles usually give us extensive treatments of small subjects as well as involved treatments of interconnected subjects. We would naturally find this more intriguing. But there is something to be said for a letter which pointedly and directly treats one important concept, distilling it down to its very core. When we thus have the epitome of something much larger, we can more likely retain the force of the Apostles' points. For this reason we commend to the reader, with all the enthusiasm we can, these four little gems of Biblical literature, each with a force of its own to help us in our sanctification efforts.

Philemon is written to show us the blessings of relationships which should and do change when those involved become brethren in Christ.

II John is written to show us that spiritual growth is our main defense against heresy, and that the great heresy of the age is trinitarian concepts.

III John is written to show that we can find strength to carry on faithfully despite cruel oppositions.

Jude is written to warn against a mind that can become dominated by the flesh, leading ultimately to Second Death.

These four epistles are almost more like post-cards. But their power lies in their brevity and pointedness. They should not suffer the neglect that they commonly seem to experience.

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Scriptures are from the New American Standard translation of the Bible. Any words added by the translators are entered in *italics*, consistent with the text.

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— PHILEMON —

Introduction

Philemon apparently was a convert to the Gospel by the Apostle Paul's own efforts (verse 19). He was a resident of Colossae, and this letter to him was delivered by Tychicus who was bringing Philemon's slave, Onesimus, back home, as well as delivering the epistle to Colossae. (Colossians 4:7, 9) Thus the two epistles are contemporaneous and date somewhere around late A.D. 57 to early A.D. 58.

Philemon was a man of some means as is evidenced by his ownership of at least one slave (Onesimus), and in that he apparently hosted the Colossae Ecclesia in his home (verse 2). Paul also expected to be a guest in Philemon's home when he reached Colossae (verse 22).

The purpose of this Epistle is a unique one in the history of the early Church. Some thought that its inclusion in the New Testament was inappropriate because it is not only a personal letter to one individual, but basically it is not concerned with doctrine or prophecy. It is concerned with behavior, attitude, and the relationships among saints — regardless of their stations in life. Thus it becomes, in all of its brevity, an important lesson for the Church throughout the age. The fact that Paul addresses it (verse 2) “to the Church in your house” carries it far beyond its immediate purpose as a personal letter.

Since “the Church in your (Philemon's) house” was the Colossian Ecclesia, we are forced to the conclusion that this “personal” letter was not very personal. The entire ecclesia was privy to its contents and, therefore, a witness of how Philemon handled the information, as well as how

Onesimus reacted to it. We might conclude that openness rather than privacy was standard in the early Church!

This letter's immediate purpose, of course, is plain. Philemon's slave, Onesimus, ran away from his master. In his flight, he came upon the Apostle Paul who converted him to Christianity. Paul, then, is in a position of needing to teach Onesimus of his duty to return to the slavery he had escaped, while teaching Philemon that his servant had now become Philemon's brother in Christ and deserved an entirely new relationship with his master once he had returned.

The lessons for us are many. Among other things, Paul is consistent with his teachings that when called we remain in the condition where God found us unless just circumstances allow us a favorable change. Paul was no crusader against slavery. For us, the lesson is so valuable: Our earthly condition is immaterial when it comes to our service to the Lord. Social change was to be left until the Kingdom. This is a difficult concept for many to accept.

The "in between the lines" messages of this letter are many. This is one of the powers which this epistle can have. Reading Scripture solely for its surface and basic meaning is helpful, but it is nowhere near what we are meant to have. The Holy Spirit helped the Apostle write these words, and the Holy Spirit never is shallow; it is multifaceted and has multi-levels. We will see this as we read Paul's letter to Philemon not as recipients of somebody's letter, but as saints digging deeply into the inner-workings of God's spirit on our behalf. It will, in few verses, teach us to look for the same depths elsewhere.

Verse 1

**“Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,
to Philemon our beloved *brother* and fellow-worker.”**

Paul is in jail, but he doesn't call himself a “prisoner of Rome.” He calls himself a “prisoner of Jesus Christ.” It is his faithfulness to the Gospel which has imprisoned him. All of us will be able to rejoice under the most unfavorable circumstances if we, like Paul, can trace those circumstances to our love of and service to our Master. **This is lesson number one.**

Timothy is with Paul. He is the ever-willing supporter for the Apostle for whom he must have the most deeply-held respect. Paul could just have said, “Paul...and Timothy...to Philemon.” But it is evident that Paul takes great delight in being able to claim that relationship in which we all should delight: “Timothy, our brother...”

One thing that keeps us going individually as well as among each other is that awesome and constant realization that we are a special new creation — actually the embryo children of God, and, therefore, “brethren” in a sense which defies sufficient expression. **This is lesson number two.**

Elsewhere, (II Timothy 1:2), Paul calls Timothy his “son.” This also is a word-defying relationship. To have had the rare opportunity of being used of God as an agent in the bringing of someone to the point of God's spirit begetting can only be felt and appreciated by those who have been so used.

But this inspires the question, “Which is the greater honor, to call someone a son in the faith, or a brother in Christ?” It may be a useless question, but thinking about it can yield some good thoughts. Our relationship to our “Abba, Father” is our greatest treasure. Those who share that treasure are our brethren in the greatest calling of eternity. Thus it would seem that the “brother” relationship is the dearest. If God so blesses us as to be the instrumentality in enlarging that brotherhood, we are doubly blessed, and the one we can call “son in the faith” will, of course, constitute both a remarkable relationship for us as well as a notable “Ebenezer” in our relationship with God. But a person becomes “our son in the faith” so that he can become our “brother in Christ” — the higher honor.

This musing has a point. The objective of Paul in writing this letter is to impress upon Philemon that Onesimus now is his brother! What a complexity Paul is forcing on Philemon! (He will give a subtle reminder of this complexity in verse 16.)

The NAS adds “brother” after “Philemon our beloved.” Obviously, even though the word itself is spurious, the idea is not. Philemon was beloved because he was a brother. But the Greek is, more accurately, “*to Philemon the beloved.*” It is likely that Paul had a special affection for Philemon — and a closeness that, as we shall see, allows him to address Philemon with great candor. Philemon also was Paul’s son in the faith.

Name etymology is fascinating. Since Philemon means *AFFECTIONATE*, it is possible that Paul is playing with his name. We will see that Paul does exactly that with the name of Onesimus.

The verse concludes by telling us that Philemon was a “fellow worker.” Philemon in some manner was being helpful in the work of the Gospel. The Greek is, “*the beloved and a fellow-worker of ours.*” This information, of course, is not for our benefit. It is for Philemon’s benefit. He surely knew he was a fellow-worker; but as he would read Paul’s letter, he would thus know that the Apostle valued what he was doing. And as he continued reading, he would learn what more he could do in order to remain a fellow-worker and not a hindrance to the development of the Church. **This is lesson number three.**

Verse 2

“...and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow-soldier, and to the church in your house: ...”

The greeting continues beyond Philemon. This is appropriate. Even if the letter principally is to Philemon, it would seem inappropriate to ignore the major members of his household. The commentators usually (and reasonably) thus suggest that Apphia is Philemon’s wife, and because she is called “sister,” also a saint. While Archippus is not called “brother,” the assumption that he is a saint is bolstered by his being addressed as “our fellow soldier.” The commentators presume him to be Philemon’s brother in the flesh. The greeting concludes with the inclusion of “the Church in your house.” The Greek is not “in” but “at.” If it were “in,” we might suppose that others living in the house also were “brethren.” But “the Church at your house” sounds much more as if it is the Church which meets there.

We would not want to pass too quickly by the phrase “our fellow soldier.” Early Christian terminology was packed with meaning. Some of it has, over time, merely become cliché and platitude. But Paul was in prison. The Church was (and has ever since been) at war. The war is complex. It is within self and against outside enemies of the Gospel. Paul, in using such a term for Archippus, is reminding the household and us of the seriousness of our assignment. We miss blessings if we read over such words without contemplation.

Again, we might or might not profit from knowing that Apphia is a Phrygian name which is expressive of *ENDEARMENT*. Etymology becomes important in Paul’s later pun-making, so translating names seems appropriate.

Archippus seems a name with a little more than coincidence. It means “Master of the Horse” or possibly “Chief Horseman.” Perhaps this is an additional reason why Paul would think of calling him his “fellow soldier.” Paul refers to him in Colossians 4:17 showing that Archippus was involved in some special sort of ministry. He may have been an elder in Colossae.

Verse 3

**“Grace to you and peace from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ.”**

The words of this verse are, word for word, those which Paul uses in his greetings in Romans 1:7; I Corinthians 1:2; II Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; Colossians 1:2; and II Thessalonians 1:2.

This exact repetition would, for most of us, simply be a habit we use every time we write a letter. It could be that with Paul. But we suspect the combination of Holy Spirit inspiration along with the intellect of this great Apostle suggests otherwise. Instead of being REPETITIVE, Paul probably is being SELECTIVE of words he wants every Church to hear.

“Grace to you...” In what might well be called the great “Grace Chapter” (Romans 5), we find the Apostle immersed in gratitude for this quality of grace. The great Apostle John, who represents us all in the Revelation saga, and seemingly also in John 21:20-23, has a name meaning “*the GRACE of Jehovah.*” We are miracles of grace, as this name suggests. Paul no doubt wants us to keep this foremost in our minds. Our life depends on it! “Grace” comes from a Hebrew word meaning “*to bend or stoop in kindness to an inferior.*” Does this not fully picture God’s mercies toward us?!

“And peace.” Peace will grow out of our appreciation of that grace. Thus Paul has both cause and effect (grace and peace) in his greetings to all of these ecclesias and to Philemon and his house. It is the perfect combination.

“From God our Father.” This is the first and all-important source of grace and peace for us. And, Paul insists, it is not just “from God,” but “from God OUR FATHER.” Thus Paul again stresses the blessedness of the brotherhood. God is not the world’s father. The Jews would not utter such “blasphemy.” They crucified Jesus for the claim! Paul wants us both to claim and to cherish the unspeakable relationship. It is, in the end, the ONE thing that will hold us securely as we travel the narrow way.

“And the Lord Jesus Christ.” Jesus, of course, is the one whose sacrifice and advocacy make possible both the begetting from and the continuity with God. But, lest we again read over words too quickly, let us note these words which Paul consistently repeats. “The Lord” is a title full of meaning for us. Unless he is our head, our master, our everything, we will lose the grace and the peace.

The Apostles knew him as Jesus (Savior), and so do we. Translating his name is helpful because we never should lose sight of the fact that we needed to be saved, and it is only by his sacrifice that salvation is possible. Paul would, no doubt, emphasize that it is FAITH in this that makes it all possible. We ARE saved!

Finally, Paul adds “Christ.” It means The Anointed — the one God has placed in this position. Who, then, will challenge the arrangement?! Our flesh might (as Jude will warn us later); but if our new creature AWE continues to be struck with the power, authority, and commission of Jesus, we will be well-served. **All of this is lesson number four.**

Again, we can only repeat the need for our reading “between the lines” of Apostolic words so that our new creatures can be edified by the unimaginable spectrum of meaning the Holy Spirit provides.

Verse 4

**“I thank my God always,
making mention of you in my prayers, ...”**

The first three verses constitute the opening salutation of this letter. Verses 4-7 are, in a sense, yet a part of the salutation, but they are set apart as a sort of note of appreciation.

Verse 4 is reminiscent of places like Philippians 1:3. We might again read lightly over these words, but to our loss. The concept of prayer for those under our charge and part of our fellowship is at least as old as I Samuel 12:23. There it is said to be a sin against God if we do not engage in this kind of prayer. This, combined with THANKFULNESS, forms the basis of this verse. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians (I Thessalonians 5:18) that giving of thanks “is the will of God.” Only twice in the New Testament is “the will of God” so explicitly defined. The other place also is by Paul (I Thessalonians 4:3): “This is the will of God, even your sanctification.” So, in verse 4, Paul combines prayer and thanksgiving for Philemon and his house.

If we, too, practice prayer and thanksgiving for our brethren, it can only have the good effect of tightening the bonds of the body and keeping before our hearts and minds that unity of our calling without which we never will be successful. **This is lesson number five.**

Verse 5

**“...because I hear of your love,
and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus,
and toward all the saints: ...”**

This verse “turns the tables” in a sense. Paul fulfills his prayer and thanksgiving “because” Philemon keeps giving him reason to do so. We want to be kept in the prayers of the saints; we want them to be thankful to be our brethren. We must, therefore, help give them reason to do so. Paul is telling Philemon why Paul keeps him in prayer. It is because Philemon exhibits two qualities toward two recipients. He shows LOVE and FAITH toward Jesus and toward ALL SAINTS.

Paul could have said, “toward the saints,” but he is about to call on Philemon to extend his love to his runaway slave who has become a saint. We could say that Paul is being subtle, but it is more likely that he is being instructive. Philemon has shown love and faith toward all saints. If Philemon thinks about that for a while, he will have no problem extending those graces to Onesimus who was a renegade, but now is a saint.

Philemon’s primary love and faith is shown toward “the Lord Jesus.” That is the imperative. How could we not pray for and be thankful for all who have that love and faith? But out of that love and faith there is a corollary love and faith toward those who belong to Jesus. We cannot really have the first without the second. The love for saints is a large topic; but perhaps in this context, “the faith which you have toward...all the saints” is worthy of special note.

Philemon, no doubt, had lost any faith he might have had in Onesimus. But that was now past. He will not be able to look upon Onesimus as he had previously looked. Onesimus was now a saint. And Paul's clear teaching is that WE HAVE FAITH IN ALL THE SAINTS. It is a concept which we may too infrequently articulate. We often speak of our need to love the brethren; but we infrequently state, and perhaps infrequently exercise, our faith in them. **This is lesson number six.**

Verse 6

“...and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake.”

Paul now tells Philemon the OBJECTIVE of Paul's prayers. The first phrase is unusual: “the fellowship of your faith.” If we contemplate what we have learned in the previous verse, this peculiar expression begins to have significant meaning. Paul is trying to teach us a great lesson. While there is (and must be) personal faith, there also is a collective faith — a “fellowship of faith.” Our faith in each other, the FAITH OF THE BODY OF CHRIST IN ITSELF, is such a powerful concept as to be a doctrine! It is the basis of all we say and know under the words “the UNITY of Christ.” **This is lesson number seven.**

Paul's prayer is that this “fellowship of faith” may BECOME EFFECTIVE. Apparently having it is good and imperative. But it becomes “effective” only with the presence of something else.

This verse can be obscure in its meaning. The wording is clear — especially when we note that “knowledge” is not information, but *EPIGNOSIS*, that knowledge which has taken hold of us and changed our characters. It is closer to our word *ACKNOWLEDGE*, than to our word *KNOWLEDGE*. (The KJV makes this distinction.) In other words, the truths we have received have not just changed our thinking, but they have changed our hearts so that we inwardly *ACKNOWLEDGE* Christ in everything we practice.

So, what is the objective of Paul’s prayer that the effectiveness of our interactive-faith-fellowship come about

“BY THE ACKNOWLEDGING OF
EVERY GOOD THING WHICH IS
IN YOU IN CHRIST JESUS” (KJV)?

Marshall translates it: “May become operative in a full-knowledge of every good thing in us for Christ.”

Carefully considered, Marshall’s version may give us the best idea of what Paul meant. A paraphrased version of this verse would be thus:

Verse 5: You have a love for the saints and a faith in them.

Verse 6: I pray that this unity will result for all of you in the metamorphosis of your characters to the point where everything good in us will work for the benefit of Christ.

As we approach verse 7, this paraphrase works. Verse 7 will begin with “For...,” and its content will flow nicely out of the above.

Verse 7

**“For I have come to have much joy and comfort
in your love, because the hearts of the saints
have been refreshed through you, brother.”**

Philemon’s demonstration of love — which Paul states was demonstrated by Philemon’s faith in the brethren — gave Paul both comfort and joy. He received comfort because Paul knew that the unity of the body had to be maintained. It gave Paul joy because it is what he wanted to see.

Then Paul shows the effect (as suggested in verse 6) of Philemon’s Christian practices:

“The bowels of the saints have been
refreshed through thee, brother.” (Marshall)

That is the point. We could call it **lesson number eight**. The very INMOST PARTS of our new natures are REFRESHED — cleansed, made new and vibrant, by this combination of love and faith toward each other.

Verse 8

**“Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ
to order you *to do* that which is proper, ...”**

With all of that preamble, Paul now is ready to apply the lessons to the reason he is writing — the acceptance of an errant slave as a brother in Christ. The appeal begins in verse 8 and continues through verse 21.

“Therefore” is the first word of this verse. What really follows this word is in verse 9: “Therefore...I appeal to you.” In other words, ‘Since (verse 7) you have a habit of refreshing the saints by your love and faith in them...I want you to extend this quality toward an opportunity which will soon come your way.’ It isn’t until verse 10 (when Paul repeats “I appeal to you” from verse 9) that we learn the object of this appeal: Onesimus. Thus, to understand “therefore,” we must actually read three verses.

Back to verse 8: It is rare to see such a clear example of Apostolic authority. Paul says he won’t use it, but he makes it clear that he could. Why did he do this? Why didn’t he just skip the words of verse 8 entirely? It is impossible that he wanted to boast that he had the power. Yet, for us, it is good to see such a plain statement regarding how much power was actually delegated to the Apostles.

But why did he say it to Philemon? It may have been in order to impress upon him just how important the coming request actually is — important enough that Paul would order it if he had to. But it may also have been to reflect what Paul had noticed in Philemon earlier — something Paul also had in himself. It may be that by this verse Paul is saying that he, also, had love for and faith in Philemon, just as Philemon had for all the saints. It is important to know that our brethren have faith in us.

Verse 9

“...yet for love’s sake I rather appeal to you —
since I am such a person as Paul, the aged,
and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus — ...”

Paul makes it clear that he appeals to Philemon rather than (Greek =) “to charge” him BECAUSE LOVE prefers it that way. This is a wonderful lesson for us all. The spirit of the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:6, 16) grew early in the Church. It was the spirit of domination. Paul demonstrates that even when that power was legitimate (as it was in the Apostles), it was not the preferred course. And he had faith in Philemon that an appeal was all that was necessary. In the end, heart obedience always is better than formal obedience. **All of this in verses 8 and 9 is lesson number nine.**

Most translations of verses 8 and 9 present information in an order that we are not used to as English readers. For instance, the NAS version of verse 9 reads,
“Yet for love’s sake I rather appeal to
you — since I am such a person as
Paul, the aged, and now also a
prisoner of Christ Jesus — ”

The verse, thus presented, makes little sense to most of us.

The Message translation, however, — a work we rarely would consult for textual accuracy or scholarly care — gives us a version of verses 8 and 9 which is so satisfying as to answer all of our questions about the Apostle’s words and intent:

“In line with all this, I have a favor to ask of you. As Christ’s ambassador (literally = “old man”), and now a prisoner for him, I wouldn’t hesitate to command this if I thought it necessary, but I’d rather make it a personal request.”

Verse 10

“I appeal to you for my child, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, Onesimus, ...”

We finally have arrived at the kernel of Paul’s letter. He explains that Philemon’s slave, Onesimus, became Paul’s son in the faith during Paul’s imprisonment. In Colossians 4:7-9, Paul mentions that Onesimus, “our faithful and beloved brother,” was returning home to Colossae with Tychicus who will deliver Paul’s letters as well as their report on Paul’s situation.

Verse 10 is “the appeal.” How could Paul have approached the matter with more heart? “I appeal to you for my child.” How could Philemon at this point in the letter keep from melting? He, too, was a faith-son of the Apostle.

We can only wonder if this is, at this point, the first that Philemon hears that his runaway slave, formerly not in the faith, is now a faith-son of Paul. It may not be. When Philemon received this letter, Tychicus and Onesimus already would have arrived in Colossae, and the letter to Colossae probably had been read — revealing Onesimus’ new status as “our faithful and beloved brother.”

Nevertheless, Paul's words in verse 10 had to be emotionally powerful in Philemon's shaking hand!

For those of us whose humor tends toward punning, there is a certain relief, a certain justification for our puns, as Paul makes a pun on Onesimus' name. This punning is not unique to this Book of Philemon. God and Jesus both resort to playing on words. It is, it seems, the preferred Divine humor!

Onesimus means "*useful*."

Verse 11

**"...who formerly was useless to you,
but now is useful both to you and to me."**

Paul immediately plays with Onesimus' name. It is an interesting juxtaposition of sober seriousness in verse 10 to light-heartedness in verse 11. Perhaps it was Paul's intention to lighten the shocking news. One cannot help but draw an interesting parallel. When the sleeping saints were raised, Stephen saw Paul there! If he were not enlightened before that moment, his natural response might be, 'What are you doing here?' But surprise surely turned to joy quickly! Onesimus before Philemon was certainly similar.

Paul's summary is concise: Onesimus (who had the attitude and practice of a runaway) was "formerly useless to you." But then comes the immediate reversal, "but now is useful both to you and to me." There are no explanations or reasonings supplied. Paul knew the reversal of value should be obvious to Philemon. Since

Onesimus was now in Christ, his service to Philemon would be willing, faithful, and generous. He would, indeed, live up to his name, “Useful.” It also is clear that Paul wouldn’t mind it if Philemon shared his slave with Paul. As he hinted, he is “now useful...to...me.”

Verse 12

**“And I have sent him back to you in person,
that is, *sending* my very heart, ...”**

Paul respected property rights, so he sent Onesimus back to Philemon — no doubt after careful tutelage on the responsibility Onesimus had toward Philemon, even though they would now have a special “in Christ” relationship.

Verse 13

“...whom I wished to keep with me, that in your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel...”

Paul was honest with Philemon. Paul wanted to keep Onesimus. Interestingly, also because of property rights, Paul acknowledges that if Onesimus had remained with Paul, the credit for his service would go to Philemon. We can’t suppose that Onesimus wouldn’t also get credit, but legally, Onesimus’ service would, as Paul states it, be credited to Philemon. This is Paul’s meaning when Paul writes, “in your behalf he might minister.”

Verse 14

**“...but without your consent I did not want to do anything,
that your goodness should not be as it were by compulsion,
but of your own free will.”**

Again, Paul refers to propriety: “Without your consent I did not want to do anything.” There is a lesson here. We know the early Church experimented with communal ownership. It didn’t work. And, even now, while we are a “family,” we should not suppose that we can impose ourselves regarding the use of each other’s time or possessions. We can ask. Paul was “asking” by way of suggestion. But we cannot assume. **This is lesson number ten.** We might even think that the Apostle here is suggesting to us that suggestion (hinting) might be better than direct request. A hint is easier to turn down, and we always should want our brethren to be able to say “no” with the greatest of ease. We do not know their circumstances, and they do not owe us explanations. Grace in such matters is quite lovely.

This is the thought as Paul closes this verse. He is, in essence, saying,

I didn’t want to presume.
I want all that is good from you
to come from the heart,
not from a feeling of duty.

Verse 15

“For perhaps he was for this reason parted *from you* for a while, that you should have him back forever, ...”

This verse contains one of those very rare words in Scripture: “perhaps.” It seems that Paul, while not informed of God’s purpose in this matter, was speculating as to why Onesimus ran away — what the benefit was to Philemon. In this verse and the next, we virtually see Paul’s adopting what he had written in Romans 8:28 — that God was working all things together for a good outcome for all involved.

Paul’s speculation is this: If Onesimus had not run away, he may not have become a brother. So, if Philemon has lost him “*for an hour*” (Greek), he now gets “him back forever.”

Verse 16

**“...no longer as a slave, but more than a slave,
a beloved brother, especially to me,
but how much more to you,
both in the flesh and in the Lord.”**

But, Philemon was getting Onesimus back no longer as just a slave, but more than that — ever so much more than that! He was getting him back as a beloved brother. Paul had come to know Onesimus as Philemon never had. By adding “beloved” before brother, Paul was telling Philemon what a wonderful character was hiding behind what had previously looked like only a rebellious slave.

Paul's own affection for Onesimus is repeated here when he says "a beloved brother especially to me." Again, Paul is probably gently suggesting to Philemon that Onesimus' character was well worth probing. If Onesimus was so special to Paul, he must, indeed, be very special.

Then Paul tells Philemon that Onesimus' value to Philemon is increased greatly. Onesimus "in the flesh" (i.e., as a slave) will be "how much more" than ever before! **This may be lesson number eleven.** When we are inducted into The Christ, even the world should see how much more valuable, cooperative, and reliable we are than we ever were before.

Then Paul adds that, beyond "the flesh," Onesimus will be of value to Philemon "in the Lord." There will be one more consecrated member of the body adding his talents, his willingness, and his love to the ecclesia experience.

Verse 17

**"If then you regard me a partner,
accept him as *you would me.*"**

Paul knew that old habits die hard. **This is lesson number twelve.** In the eyes of Philemon, Onesimus had looked the same for years. It would be difficult to see him differently despite his consecration. Even with acceptance of him as a brother, there were bound to be residual memories, reactions, impressions, and assumptions. Paul wanted Philemon, as much as lieth in him, to change all of that. Thus we have this verse. "If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me." This is a tall order. Any of us who may have had

friends, family, workers, or even enemies convert, we'll know both the difficulty and the necessity of forgetting the past. The fact is, God does this with us; we can do no less with others.

Verse 18

**“But if he has wronged you in any way,
or owes you anything, charge that to my account: ...”**

Now Paul approaches the subject of rectification of wrongs. Jesus treats the subject by teaching that before we bring God an offering, we should correct what we have done in wronging others. Most of us, of course, could not literally undo all that we have done. It usually, in practicality, becomes merely an attitude of and expression of apologies.

Paul in this spirit asks Philemon to ‘let Onesimus off the hook’ by sending Paul a bill for any financial loss Philemon might have experienced due to the errancy of Onesimus.

Clearly, if Paul had written this verse to any of us, our reactions would almost certainly be ‘Forget it!’ Matthew 7:1, 2 should lead us in that direction. It is quite likely that that was Paul’s intent in making the offer. No one would think that Philemon would ever consider taking Paul up on his offer. But Paul wants that thinking extended. He wanted Philemon to treat Onesimus’ debts exactly the same as he would treat Paul’s offer: ‘Forget it!’

There is one more lovely concept in this verse. While we would always want to settle our debts if possible, we should also, like Paul, want to help others settle theirs. **This verse is lesson number thirteen.**

Verse 19

**“I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand,
I will repay it (lest I should mention to you
that you owe to me even your own self as well), ...”**

Paul’s reference to writing with his own hand might have more than one suggestion for us. He might be saying that he has ‘cosigned’ the debt of Onesimus. He might be saying that this entire matter was of such great personal importance to him that, unlike most other writings which involved amanuenses, Paul felt the need, though difficult, to write with no intermediary. In any case, he doesn’t seem to feel the least shame in making Philemon feel guilty if he doesn’t jump on the opportunity of pardoning Onesimus of all responsibility for past infractions.

Poor Philemon! Paul leaves no gate open for Philemon’s reasonings to make an escape. It is no subtle reminder that, since Philemon’s own conversion was at Paul’s hand, he owed Paul his very existence! Talk about debt!

Verse 20

**“Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord;
refresh my heart in Christ.”**

Almost as if to say: ‘Philemon, you can repay what you owe me by pardoning Onesimus,’ Paul offers a way out for Philemon if his attitude toward Onesimus has been less than Christian. Paul is referring back to verse 7 where he had previously recognized Philemon’s work of “refreshing” the saints. Paul now says, ‘You can continue your good refreshing work for me by granting my request.’

Verse 21

**“Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you,
since I know that you will do even more than what I say.”**

This verse concludes the primary body of the letter. After exhausting all available arguments, Paul says, ‘I do trust you; I do have faith in you that you will listen to my request — even exceed my expectations.’

It is a nice conclusion. This verse does have what might appear to be a difficulty. Most translators use “obedience.” Obedience is, of course, to an order, not a request. Yet Paul had insisted that he wouldn’t order, but only “appeal.” The word for “obedience” can mean obedience. But it also can mean “*attentive hearkening*” or “*compliance*.” The Greek quite literally means “to *hear under*.” The “under” part means that the matter has come down from someone with authority. This is the

case. But Paul did not order. Though he, as an Apostle, was over the disciples in authority, he, in this case, abandoned his right to order in favor of a reasoning and emotional appeal.

So, this verse, instead of opening “Having confidence in your obedience,” should say something like ‘I have faith that you will hear the higher way.’

Verse 22

**“And at the same time also prepare me a lodging;
for I hope that through your prayers
I shall be given to you.”**

With this verse we begin a three-verse miscellaneous “mop up” of details.

A paraphrase:

While you are attending to what I have suggested, please pray for and prepare for my release from prison so that I may visit.

Verse 23

“Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you.”

Paul wants it known that others also suffer imprisonment for the Gospel. Epaphras was one of those incarcerated with Paul and wanted his greetings sent to Philemon. Since Onesimus had been with both Paul and Epaphras, Epaphras would have been fully apprised of Philemon’s house and its significance in Colossae.

Verse 24

**“...as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke,
my fellow-workers.”**

Greetings also are sent by Paul’s “fellow workers” — not prisoners, but willing attendants to the Apostle for the furtherance of his mission.

Verse 25

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”

It is short, but the closing benediction reflects the power of the opening greeting (verse 3). “Grace — that power-giving, life-enhancing, experience-enabling help from God through our Savior, our Lord and Head, and God’s appointed priest and king — may that Grace work with your mind!”

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THE MAJOR LESSON OF PHILEMON

We have noted many little lessons in this letter. There probably are more than we have noted. But if there is one overriding principal lesson, it probably is expressed in the words of Paul:

“Henceforth know we no man
after the flesh.”
(II Corinthians 5:16)

* * * * *

— II JOHN —

Introduction

For those who have read the four Gospels, it should be obvious immediately how differently the Apostle John writes as compared to Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The same distinction exists in the Epistles. Yes, Peter, James, and Jude are different from each other and from the Apostle Paul, but the distinctions are not so great nor so immediately noticeable as they are with John. It is not easy to isolate in a few words, but John seems less focused on reasoning with us than are the others. His seems more an approach to the heart and emotions.

When John wrote Revelation, of course, he was, as he affirms, merely an observer and a reporter of what he saw. Thus his “style” there is not comparable to his Gospel or epistles. In his epistles he “hugs” us! And he seems always more paternal than fraternal. Since John outlived the other Apostles, he perhaps just felt as if all of the disciples were his “children.” This is not a fault. It makes us quite comfortable with him — almost like spending time with a favorite grandfather.

This difference, however, poses for us the problem of interpretation. We have to read John differently than we read the other Apostles. We don’t want to say that we can’t read him with logic in mind, but doing so will give us less-satisfying results than that approach gives with the other writers. Just as with the favorite grandfather, we come away more with a feeling of how loved we are than with a checklist of what we learned from him. But also, as with the grandfather, we realize that he has a

faith in us as the future of the Church, and that his arms around our shoulders will give us that feeling that we must not let him down in his expectations. There is, after all, some reason why we know him as “that disciple which Jesus loved” — a reference which John, himself, clearly delighted in.

Verses 1 and 2

**“The elder to the chosen lady and her children,
but also all who know the truth,
for the sake of the truth which abides in us
and will be with us forever: ...”**

The first two words of this epistle (in the Greek, and in most translations) are “*The elder.*” This may refer to John’s being an elder (a minister) in the Church. It is a reasonable interpretation. But, knowing John as we do, it seems it may just be John’s joy in being the old man of his generation of the Church.

John, as we understand it, is the “angel of the Church in Smyrna” (Revelation 2:8) — the messenger and trumpet-blower to the second chronological period of the Church. Though he was around from the beginning with Jesus, though he lived through the entire “Ephesus” period of the Church, he is the one who still is there when the Church period changes. He is “the old man” of Christianity being used by the Lord to strengthen the faith of those entering a rather horrid period for the brethren — a period which may need more love than doctrine.

Among other things, the Gnostic heresy began to rear its ugly apostasies as Ephesus was closing. John was well aware of this challenge to faith, and his writings in his epistles clearly are aimed at the primary errors of Gnosticism — one of which questioned Jesus’ earthly and spiritual identities. That, of course, would undermine the very principal doctrine, the ransom. Thus the epistles of I and II John take obvious pains to defend Jesus’ identity. III John will criticize those who don’t.

“The chosen lady” to whom this Epistle is written has been a matter of much speculation. Apparently we need not to know who she is. The Message translation goes so far as to ignore her entirely, addressing the letter to “My dear congregation.” The point from which we might most profit is that John calls her “chosen.” His is a gospel of inclusion. He simply never misses an opportunity to make us a part of things. The word “chosen” does that. The way he treats us makes us think of him as “that disciple whom we love.”

After calling her “the chosen lady,” John includes “her children.” It is immaterial if they be actual descendants or spiritual descendants — or both. The fact is, John is “family-minded.” We should be also. The “family” of saints is one of the safeguards of the whole age. A loss of the sincere camaraderie of saints always results in spiritual disaster.

The 13th verse might well suggest that the “chosen lady and her children” might just be John’s affectionate name for each ecclesia. By sending greetings from one chosen sister and children to another chosen lady and her children, we begin to suspect that this might be the case.

It is important to look at verses 1 and 2 together, as John's thought seems to cross over the verse line. Many translations seem not to connect the parts of John's sentence very well. We suggest this wording and punctuation:

“...whom I love in truth; and, not only do I love you, but so do all who know the truth for its own sake — that truth which lives in us and will continue with us throughout the age.”

The implications of John's words are several. When he says that he loves them in truth, we could surmise that he means, “I truly love you.” But one would never suppose that he falsely loves us! So that construction seems not the best. As he continues, truth seems to be heavily on his mind. Thus its first use in the verse must also be a reference to truth as a body of sacred knowledge. It would have been helpful if John, as we do, used the modifier THE truth. But he doesn't. He does do that in the next two uses of the word. That suggests to us that he means a sacred body of knowledge in all three uses.

Here we see John not as a logician, but as a philosopher. Other Apostles probably would define truth for us. But John uses it five times in four verses and assumes we know what he means! The fact is, we do know what he means. Simply by inference we “feel” what John is saying:

We love everything we have been taught. It is part of us. It is what we love in each other as we see its effects. I am writing you to encourage you to hold on to this mysterious, indefinable, unifying spirit we call truth because you will find it is being challenged.

So, “whom I love in truth” comes to mean a very intricate thing! It means, “I love you because you and I are inseparable parts of some much larger unifying combination of doctrinal and character traits which are difficult to define except as implied in the word ‘truth.’ You know what I mean!”

Then he says that, for the same reason, this ecclesia is beloved by all who are of the same mind and spirit. His expression that these “know the truth for the sake of the truth” reminds us strongly of Paul’s words to the Thessalonians in rebuke of those who do not receive the truth for its sake. II Thessalonians 2:10 (KJV) says they “perish because they received not the love of the truth..., and for this cause God shall send them strong delusions that they should believe a lie.” This will be John’s point as he continues this epistle.

John concludes verse 2 with the assurance that that truth which abides in us (a part of our characters rather than of our minds) will continue to do so until the age ends. Here John is our hopeful and reassuring spiritual grandfather, showing us his confidence and faith that we will “carry on” once he is gone.

It will be helpful to repeat now what seems a good translation of the tissue which connects the first two verses:

‘...whom I love in truth; and, not only do I love you, but so do all who know the truth for its own sake — that truth which lives in us and will continue with us throughout the age.’

Verse 3

**“Grace, mercy and peace will be with us,
from God the Father and from Jesus Christ,
the Son of the Father, in truth and love.”**

How much this verse looks like similar verses in the epistles of Paul! Yet, with a careful eye, we can discern a great difference. Paul would say, “Grace, mercy, and peace be with you.” But John says, “Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us.” Paul is offering a prayer of hope. John is offering a statement of confidence. It is the grandfather speaking again! John knows (not that Paul didn’t!) that the Church would abide, would succeed, would carry on the commission from the Apostles. When he says “with us,” as opposed to Paul’s “with you,” John is offering a CONTINUITY of something already begun in him and being infused into the Church. It is only the slightest of subtle meanings, but it is charming and heart-warming. It is John’s being different from the other Apostles in a “warm, fuzzy” way.

John does not differ from the other Apostles as to the source and channel of this grace, mercy, and peace. It is “from God the Father and from Jesus Christ.” As Paul had done in the greeting to Philemon, the “Father” word is dear. It again stresses our family. And Jesus is not just Jesus, but Jesus THE ANOINTED — the one whom God placed to be our “Alpha and Omega” — the first and final word for us in all matters. But here the similarity ends. And it ends because John’s preoccupation with Gnostic errors forces him to stress Jesus’ identity: “the son of the Father.” John wants to be certain that the doctrine of Jesus’ true identity never is compromised.

The verse might for us who read English be rearranged to read, “Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us in truth and love from God...” etc. John wants us to know that grace, mercy, and peace will come about because of and by that body of truth in us and that this manifestation of gifts through truth is the true manifestation of love. So from John (verse 1) we get “love in truth.” From God and Jesus (verse 3), we get “truth in love.”

Truth is vitally important to John. So is love. He talks about both of them constantly — but not so much as to define them as to keep them before our minds and hearts.

Verse 4

“I was very glad to find *some* of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment *to do* from the Father.”

John has concluded his greeting. Verses 4-11 constitute the body of his letter.

Some translations give the impression that John has looked at this congregation and has rejected some of them since he only found some of them “walking in the truth.” The problem is not in the Greek text; nor is it in the translating. It is in the emphasis. A paraphrase might be helpful:

I had an exceeding amount of rejoicing in noticing how some of you are walking in truth — progressing beyond the learning point — just as our Father’s received commandment requires.

John's point was not to divide the ecclesia, but to recognize specific improvements in some. He was pleased to see growth! In commending it, he hoped to encourage it in others, not to discourage others.

Verses 5 and 6

**“And now I ask you, lady, not as writing to you
a new commandment, but the one which we
have had from the beginning,
that we love one another.**

**And this is love, that we walk according to His
commandments. This is the commandment,
just as you have heard from the beginning,
that you should walk in it.”**

As with verses 1 and 2, it is necessary that verses 5 and 6 be considered as a unit. In verses 4-6 we cannot help but notice John's continual use of the word “commandment.” Basically he defines the commandment as growth in love BY growth in character.

In verse 4 John said that PROGRESS (walking) was a commandment. In verse 5 he will LINK that concept to LOVE. In essence he will say that LOVE for God and for each other is shown by GROWTH. He clarifies this point in verse 6 when he teaches that GROWTH is LOVE: ‘This is love: pursuit, growth, progress, or walking according to His command.’

Verses 4-6 constitute a mini-lecture on faithfulness, BECAUSE verse 7 will show that deception lies at the door if this growth in faithfulness is neglected.

Verse 5 probably needs simplification in order to understand it better. First of all, it is an earnest plea for attention to a pressing and vital matter:

“I beseech thee, lady” (KJV);

“And now I ask you, lady” (NAS);

“And now I request thee, lady” (Marshall).

The bulk of this “request” is that the ecclesia REMEMBER something. That is why John says, “I’m not writing something new. I’m writing something you’ve known from the beginning of your Christian walk.” That “something” is our mutual love.

To paraphrase verses 5 and 6:

To love one another is something we have been commanded from the beginning.

And the manifestation of that love (is what I mentioned in verse 4). It is growth in the truth, WALKING in His commandments.

All of the above is related to John’s opening greeting. The “in truth” part of his introduction is shorthand for verses 4-6. Manifesting love by growth constitutes that “truth” which is so elusive to define, but which is THE BINDING AGENT of the entire Church. We can see that CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT is John’s answer for faithfulness, his armor against deception, his desire for all of his “children.” Even if we conceive of truth as doctrine, doctrine is not an END, it is a means. Good doctrine promotes good character.

Verse 7

**“For many deceivers have gone out into the world,
those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ
as coming in the flesh.
This is the deceiver and the antichrist.”**

Having explained in verses 4-6 what would protect the saints, John now explains something he knows from which they will need protection: DECEIVERS. Because Gnosticism was so rampant, John focuses on that particular deception which was then making the rounds. Even though that was a then-current problem, we now know from history that John’s concerns would come from sources other than Gnosticism. The problem would pervade the whole Gospel Age. The deception:

They “who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.” (KJV — a good translation of *ERCHOMAI* as “is come,” — something that has happened.)

John now provides a universal standard that is so helpful. He lets us know that this deception will be common to antichrist. Whether it be for an antichrist or the antichrist is immaterial. Any teaching against Jesus’ being human at the first advent constitutes an error so grave, so gross, so serious as to say that “the Christ” will not have this teaching; only antichrist will. The doctrine of the ransom hangs in the balance.

Verse 8

**“Watch yourselves,
that you might not lose what we have accomplished,
but that you may receive a full reward.”**

John wants us to be very sober about this. He implies that absorbing the error of this particular deception will cause us loss! What loss? John’s words are not easy to misconstrue. Faithfulness will bring us “a full reward.” The whole context is pointedly teaching that losing the distinction of Father and Son, losing the truth of Jesus’ having become a human, will result in LESS THAN a “full reward.” Only those who understand the doctrine of the “Great Multitude” (Revelation 7) can understand this threat. It is EXCLUSION from the “body of Christ” (the 144,000), even though it is not loss of a spiritual resurrection.

So, John begins this verse, “Watch yourselves.” (“Look to yourselves” — KJV.) The admonition is important. WATCHING can help! Jesus said, “WATCH and pray.” As much as John loves us, he must be forceful in asking us not to be casual Christians, thinking we are doing just fine because we are gliding along and “being good.” John, though he appeals to our emotional side, never slights the importance of doctrine.

Verse 9

“Any one who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.”

In this verse John tries to “pinpoint” the problem with those whose understanding strays. The NAS says, “Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching...” The margin reads, “goes on ahead.” Marshall says, “Everyone going forward and not remaining in the teaching...” The Message rather colorfully puts it, “Anyone who gets so progressive in his thinking that he walks out on the teaching...” Some people would justify the process which John condemns by calling it “forward thinking,” or, perhaps, “free thinking.” Paul calls it “not holding the head.” (Colossians 2:19) John has no patience with such straying.

But, as we finish the sentence, we see what John calls “going too far.” He says they don’t “abide” — feel at home with, remain — in the teaching OF CHRIST. John is not making reference to all that Christ taught. He is referring to the teaching REGARDING CHRIST — who he is and was. John says that they “do not have God.” He may mean that they don’t have God on their side in the matter. He may mean something more serious like the loss of the Holy Spirit (although that is not likely the meaning if we consider verse 8). He may mean that they don’t have a concept of God — who He is and what He is.

This verse is yet about those mentioned in verse 7 and their denial of Jesus as having been human. A paraphrase of the first half of verse 9 would be something like this:

“Those who have strayed from understanding that Jesus was human have lost contact with God’s truths and with who He really is.”

The second half of this verse restates the truth which the deceivers have lost. Again, to paraphrase:

Those who have maintained what Jesus has taught us will always possess a clear distinction between Father and Son. (They won’t be trinitarians!)

Verse 10

**“If any one comes to you and does not bring this teaching,
do not receive him into *your* house,
and do not give him a greeting;”**

John remains focused on this one error. It is the doctrinal focus of this entire epistle. He now answers the logical question, “What if someone appears who wants to teach us incorrectly in this matter?” The Apostle is explicit. “Tell him he is not welcome with these errors! And, furthermore, do not even give him a hint that you could rejoice with him in Christ.”

Translators struggle with intent here, more than with translating. The KJV says, don’t “give him Godspeed.” Thus, the KJV solution is that you cannot wish those persons the Lord’s presence with them in their Christian pursuits.

The Greek is, *“Don’t tell him to rejoice.”* It would seem easier to explain it through the back door: “Tell him to be sad.” That seems to be John’s intent: Tell him that he has lost much and has more to worry about than to be happy about.

The error is so common among Christians in our day that we usually just ignore the problem. That may be appropriate UNLESS the erring one brings up the error. John seems to want us to take that situation with dire seriousness.

Verse 11

**“...for the one who gives him a greeting
participates in his evil deeds.”**

John says that if we suggest to the erring one that his Christianity has anything to rejoice about, we are considered to be participants in the evil of spreading such poison. It is a matter for serious contemplation.

The NAS seems inappropriately harsh. We “greet” all kinds of heretics in this world. We aren’t supposed to be rude! But we are to be decisive when faced with this major heresy.

Verse 12

**“Having many things to write to you,
I do not want to *do so* with paper and ink;
but I hope to come to you and speak face to face,
that your joy may be made full.”**

John has finished his letter. He left us in verse 11 with a hard ending! We must think that he meant to.

Why John didn't want to write more, we will have to ask him! It is our loss. We weren't there if and when he visited.

He does, however, leave us with a good thought in this verse: “Face to face” fellowship is certainly more full of joy than messages of paper and ink. Maybe this verse is there to tell all of us during the whole Gospel Age to spend time together.

Verse 13

“The children of your chosen sister greet you.”

See verse 1 for a comment on this verse.

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THE MAJOR LESSON OF II JOHN

Perhaps two items dominate this letter. The first six verses teach us that GROWTH (the imbibing of the very essence of truth) is our main defense against error.

The remainder of the Epistle informs us that the great doctrinal error of the age is the misunderstanding of the nature of Jesus and his relationship to the Father.

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— III JOHN —

Introduction

This is the last of John's three epistles. It might be noted that John never mentions himself by name in any of them. But no one questions their authorship. Tradition assigns them to John, and the writing-style similarity to John's Gospel confirms their origin.

The three names which occur in this letter (Gaius, Diotrephes, and Demetrius) are not identified elsewhere and are lost to us.

The similarities of III John to II John are many. II John, however, was written to a group — either an ecclesia or a household. III John is exclusively to one individual. II John dealt primarily with one major doctrinal heresy. III John seems a warning against a single person, probably an elder, who has the audacity to contradict an Apostle and to try to ruin spiritual lives.

Thus II John warns of deceivers who “go too far” in straying from accepted doctrine; III John deals with an individual who contradicts authority — primarily in the area of behavior.

Verse 1

**“The elder to the beloved Gaius,
whom I love in truth.”**

Once again John begins with the words “The Elder.” Once again it seems most comfortable to assume that John is referring to himself as “the old man” of the Christian faith. It is interesting to note that, when he addresses what clearly is a “General Epistle” (I John), John’s opening is far less personal — even though it refers to his personal and wondrous experiences with Jesus. But in these two final epistles, both short, and both addressed to a more restrictive audience, he begins with something that establishes a one-on-one relationship — again, a grandfather image.

We don’t know about Gaius. There are a few others by that name in the New Testament, but there is no reason to identify this Gaius with any of the others. There seems to be no revealed etymology for his name.

The personalized greeting is as it was in II John, “whom I love in truth.” See the remarks on the phrase in the notes on II John 1. In short, to John, the basis of all Christian relationships is truth. Yes, of course, doctrine. But to John it is the bigger body of truth, the complicated but unifying combination of information, application, camaraderie, and sanctification. The letter is not to Gaius; it is to “the beloved Gaius.” John’s emotionality is ever-present.

Verse 2

**“Beloved, I pray that in all respects
you may prosper and be in good health,
just as your soul prospers.”**

John immediately repeats “beloved.” And because Gaius is beloved of John, John is solicitous of his well-being in circumstances, health, and spirit. And John says that he prays for all three! From the testimony of the whole New Testament we know that John is not praying for temporal wealth and health without the proviso that it be so only if it be God’s will in the matter. But we have much we can extract from these words as they relate to our own prayers.

With the above proviso, we can ask our Father on behalf of our brethren that their circumstances “in all respects” prosper. Obviously, there will be times that God knows that true prospering will be the ordering of circumstances so that the spirit prospers. Actually, if we look carefully, this is what John says. He says that he prays for circumstances and health to prosper AS Gaius’ soul prospers. We could read this to mean that Gaius has a healthy spiritual life and that John wants Gaius’ physical and experiential lives to be just as healthy. John, no doubt, would be happy for that if it kept the spiritual life strong. But John’s intent is, no doubt, along these lines: When we see that a brother is being used effectively of the Lord for the benefit of the body, we would like to see that benefit prospering and expanding. Consequently, we would like to see the “all things” work together to make that service continue and be meaningful in the lives of others. When John says “in all respects,” this seems to be his meaning.

Verse 3

**“For I was very glad
when brethren came and bore witness to your truth,
that is, how you are walking in truth.”**

When John begins this verse with the word “For,” he substantiates for us the meaning of the previous verse. Paraphrased:

May all things in your life work toward
the continuance of the spiritual good you
are doing for (BECAUSE) everybody is
reporting to me how much you help them.

What a wonderful testimonial to Brother Gaius. Brethren travel from his environs and tell John how the truth is in Gaius, not how Gaius is in the truth! John is careful in explaining his meaning. He says they “witness to your truth, **THAT IS, how you are walking in truth.**” The “that is” is supplied in the NAS, but that is the intent in the Greek. It is the same expression John used in II John. “Walking in truth” (growth) is what John is looking for. John sees this application-progress as the secret to our success in the Narrow Way.

Verse 4

**“I have no greater joy than this,
to hear of my children walking in the truth.”**

Just in case we miss the point, John repeats: “This is my great joy, to be told that my children are walking in the truth.”

Paul, when he speaks of his children in the faith, seems always to mean those whom the Lord received through Paul's personal witnessing efforts. John, on the other hand, continuing his grandfather image, seems to call all of the young Church his children. The perspective is so different! Both Apostles cared dearly for and gave their lives for the Church. But John is possessive of the brethren! As before mentioned, he considers himself paternal over fraternal. We have to love him for that!

Verse 5

**“Beloved, you are acting faithfully
in whatever you accomplish for the brethren,
and especially *when they are strangers*; ...”**

John now will focus on one of Gaius' strengths — a strength which someone else apparently was denigrating. Verses 5-8 will give praise to Gaius' life of hospitality.

For the third time, John calls Gaius “beloved.” John knows that Gaius is being criticized; therefore, the first thing he does is assure him that he is “beloved.” Next he assures him that he is “acting faithfully.”

Like John, we, when we have opportunity, can greatly strengthen our criticized brethren with as many assurances as we can give. Some of us can handle just criticism; it is a trait we all need to develop. But fewer of us can stand up to the pressures of unjust criticism. It is this kind which Gaius was experiencing. Reassurance can make the difference between discouragement and growth.

John first generalizes: “You are acting faithfully IN WHATEVER YOU ACCOMPLISH FOR THE BRETHREN.” Without centering in on Gaius’ particular accomplishments, John wants him and us to know that when we do things for the saints — whatever we do — we are “acting faithfully.” In other words, we need not account to any man the reasons nor the methods we choose to serve others.

Then John immediately turns to Gaius’ specific service: “...especially when they are strangers.” Probably many of us have experienced hospitality like Gaius supplied. We turn up in a strange city, contact the brethren, and they host us with lavish welcome! We could just imagine a Presbyterian showing up in Los Angeles, calling another Presbyterian, saying, “I’m in town.” The result almost certainly would be, “So what? Who are you? Don’t bother me! If you want to come to a service, our church is on Oak and 7th.”

Verse 6

“...and they bear witness to your love before the church; and you will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God.”

But, brethren unknown to Gaius show up in his town, and he treats them “in a manner worthy of God”! We can see how John would find Gaius “beloved” and “walking in truth.”

Those who have benefited from Gaius’ love apparently have told John and the Church of their experiences.

Verse 7

**“For they went out for the sake of the Name,
accepting nothing from the Gentiles.”**

John continues to show the appropriateness of Gaius' efforts. The strangers he had entertained were on the road to spread the good news — which John here reduces to “The Name.” Obviously, unbelievers (“Gentiles”) did not support these pilgrims. But Gaius did.

We might profitably wonder why John uses the rather unique reference to the Gospel as “The Name.” He might be drawing on a reference to Jesus' words in John 15:21. Acts 5:41 and Philippians 2:9 offer similar concepts. But, as far as we know, this particular usage by John is unique in all of the New Testament.

Name, of course, in its fullest symbolic sense, means the totality of character. Thus, to take the Name of the Lord in vain does not really refer to profane exclamations, but to assume to represent God and His character while living a life contrary to that character.

John is very interested in character — character as the desired result of good doctrine. John is a character man rather than a legal, a doctrinal, or a reasoning man. Perhaps he was attempting to start a trend stressing character by representing our witnessing message as “The Name.” Nobody seems to have taken him up on his idea!

Verse 8

**“Therefore we ought to support such men,
that we may be fellow-workers with the truth.”**

John adds one more thought in regard to the good work of Gaius. The thought regards credit. His point is this: If we support those who do the Lord’s work, we are considered as doing their work with them. Once again, John likes to characterize the work as with, for, or in the truth.

“Truth” to John is, correctly, more than many of us make of it in our day-to-day usage of the term. It is not just teachings, nor just character, nor just fellowship, nor just sanctification, nor just supportive efforts. It is all of these combined. “Truth” for John is as much of the Divine wrapped up in us as is possible.

At this point John has commended Gaius for his one most notable strength. Now he will turn to the critic of it.

Verse 9

**“I wrote something to the church;
but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them,
does not accept what we say.”**

Verses 9 and 10 are aimed at (and we mean it in a projectile sense!) someone named Diotrephes. The etymology of his name cannot help but make us wonder! It means “Jove-nourished.” Jove, of course, in

mythology, was the supreme god. It must have gone to Diotrephes' head! John has nothing good to say of him.

It should be noted here that the Apostles had the right to openly charge others for their sins. We cannot do this. We can draw things to the attention of those who err, but we cannot openly condemn an individual as John does here and Paul does elsewhere.

The evidence suggests that Diotrephes was an elder. The arraignment is severe:

- (1) Diotrephes either interdicted or contradicted a letter John had written to the Church. (That may be why we don't have it!)
- (2) Diotrephes has a love of being in charge — to be “first” or head or dictator.
- (3) Diotrephes has the gall to call the words of an Apostle wrong!

Verse 10

**“For this reason, if I come,
I will call attention to his deeds which he does,
unjustly accusing us with wicked words;
and not satisfied with this,
neither does he himself receive the brethren,
and he forbids those who desire *to do so*,
and puts *them* out of the church.”**

John threatens. Virtually he says, “This is unacceptable! Watch out if I get there in person!”

Then John continues the list of offenses:

- (4) Diotrephes unjustly speaks evil of my character, and he does so with particularly virulent words.

That would be bad enough; but then Diotrephes adds to his sins:

- (5) He refuses to receive brethren!
- (6) Those who do receive brethren, Diotrephes censures!
- (7) And, the ultimate dastardly deed, he throws those out of the Church who refuse to do things his way!

Hopefully none of us knows such an elder — or even such a brother. Clearly he never should have been allowed to maintain any authority in the Church. However, thinking of each of John’s indictments against Diotrephes, we can arm ourselves to root out any hint of these things in ourselves and to resist any hint of these things among our brethren. It is no wonder that Paul could write that “the mystery of iniquity doth already work...” (II Thessalonians 2:7) And, John, in his first epistle can add, “Even now many antichrists have arisen.” (I John 2:18)

We can see why these verses are here. Gaius did receive the brethren — even strangers. It brought out the wrath of Diotrephes. John wants Gaius to know in no uncertain terms that Gaius is right, and Diotrephes is malignant.

Verse 11

**“Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good.
The one who does good is of God;
the one who does evil has not seen God.”**

Once more Gaius gets his “pat on the back.” John again calls him “beloved.” In the vernacular, John says, “Don’t let Diotrephes rub off on you. He is wrong. His deeds are evil! You have been doing good. Keep it up! Your good comes from God. Diotrephes, on the other hand, demonstrates by his evil that he has never even figured out who God is.”

That’s it. John has summarized and judged the whole situation in Gaius’ ecclesia. What more could be said?

Verse 12

**“Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone,
and from the truth itself; and we also bear witness,
and you know that our witness is true.”**

We again are in the dark regarding identity. We don’t know who Demetrius is except that he is worthy of praise. It is almost as if John is saying to Gaius, ‘You do have fellowship there with those who have characters like yours. Lean on them. Support each other.’

Demetrius is a male form of the name of the mythological goddess Cybele. She was the mother of the gods — with emphasis on mothering, nurturing, supporting. She was the goddess of nature, and she was seen as being placed

over the general welfare of the people. Thus, even in his name, Demetrius is a “warm and fuzzy” brother who can hold Gaius in a warm and comforting and supporting embrace.

There is no way of telling how much “coincidence” there is in the etymologies of these names. But, even if they are purely coincidental, the Lord has allowed us to be enriched by the coincidences. Is there anything He can’t use for our instruction and benefit?!

Demetrius, just like Gaius, has brethren testifying about his qualities. Don’t we all long to reach that kind of character! Then John adds a peculiar statement, a statement very much in harmony with his use of “truth” in both of his final epistles. He says that Demetrius has received a good testimony “from the truth itself.”

Well, the truth has no personality. So, what does John mean? He means, as witnessed by his previous usage of the word, that Demetrius EMBODIES the growth, the evidence of “walking” up the Narrow Way, the character development that John wants to see in all of his “children”! So, even though he is a man, it is clear (in keeping with his name) that he can be a “mother” over the ecclesia. “The Truth” testifies of his worthiness and abilities.

John has not just “heard” about Demetrius. Apparently he knows him so that he can say, “And we also bear witness (about him), and you know that our witness is true.” Gaius, you know that I’m not exaggerating!

Thus John concludes his supportive letter to Gaius. He leaves him in the warm support of Demetrius with all of the assurance possible that Gaius is following the right

course and has all the needed assistance to continue and to overcome.

Thus this letter is almost just a note that says, “I’ve heard of your experiences, and I want you to know that everything is working on your behalf.”

It’s almost as if it were written on a pretty card instead of on paper intended for letter-writing. We, too, can look around and deliver such quick and encouraging note-cards to our brethren. It can mean much. John’s little note comes down to us after two Millennia, still encouraging and comforting!

Verses 13 and 14

**“I had many things to write to you,
but I am not willing to write *them* to you
with pen and ink;**

**but I hope to see you shortly,
and we shall speak face to face.**

Peace *be* to you.

The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.”

As with II John, we are told that John doesn’t want to write a letter — just a note on a pretty card! He would rather visit — a hint to us today!

Then he adds his benediction: “Peace be to you.” How short! But how complete. Considering the reason for the note, peace was what Gaius needed. As we consider this note, we receive peace. No doubt, Gaius did, also.

One must smile. Unless the card didn't have enough space on it, John seems to contradict his own advice. He says, "The friends (no specifics) greet you." Then he says to Gaius, "Greet the friends by name." John wanted his greetings delivered individually, but he failed to do this in the other direction! We love you, John!

* * * * *

THE MAJOR LESSON OF III JOHN

It is sometimes difficult to distill ideas. But the one thing in the end that rides above all in this letter is:

**CARRY ON FAITHFULLY
DESPITE CRUEL OPPOSITION.**

* * * * *

JUDE

A LENGTHY INTRODUCTION: JUDE, THE AUTHOR

[Note: For those wanting to escape the complexities of this Introduction, please proceed to p. 78, The Purpose of the Letter]

Who is Jude? He introduces himself as the “brother of James” in verse 1. But since some have had questions regarding his identity, it seems mandatory at the outset that his apostleship be confirmed. This is the Jude who elsewhere is called an Apostle. He is the brother of the Apostle James who wrote the epistle. This James is also known as the “son of Alphaeus.”

Only Apostles had the right to establish and confirm doctrine. The words of Jesus and the Apostles as recorded by Mark and Luke (not Apostles) are acceptable because Mark and Luke (historians) are very conscientious in not teaching, but, rather, in quoting those who had authority to teach.

In considering Jude’s identity, we will find that the evidences regarding Jude and James are so thoroughly intertwined that our search will require consideration of both of them together rather than singly.

— THE EVIDENCE —

SUMMARY STATEMENT

Before looking at textual proofs, a brief summary of the findings will be helpful.

Joseph's brother, Alphaeus (or Cleopas, its Hebrew equivalent), died without an heir. Both men were married to women named Mary. Joseph (under the Levirate Marriage Law) raised children by his sister-in-law. The first-born was James ("the Lord's brother" — Galatians 1:19). Under the Levirate Law, the first-born took as surname the name of his dead father. Other children of this Levirate arrangement and under the same roof, but who took the surname of their biological father, were Joses and Salome. These all are considered the Lord's siblings. James "of Alphaeus" was an Apostle; so was his brother Judas (Jude). There are only two men named James in the New Testament. The other was John's brother, also an Apostle.

THE SCRIPTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

(Textual references are to the NAS.)

(1) James (the "son") of Alphaeus and Jude (Thaddaeus) are two of the twelve Apostles. Matthew 10:3 and Mark 3:18 call Jude "Thaddaeus." Luke 6:15, 16 and Acts 1:13 call him Jude. Unfortunately in these last two citations, the words "the son" are added before the name James, thus calling Jude "the son of James." These words are supplied. To be correct, they should say "the brother" of James — a correction established by Jude

himself in the first verse of his Epistle. In the KJV (Matthew 10:3), the words “Labbaeus whose surname was” Thaddaeus are spurious, thus adding to the confusion.

The above texts (except for Jude 1) in the MSS do not officially establish Jude as the brother of James. However, the KJV does add the correct words in Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13.

(2) The brothers of Jesus are listed as James, Joses (Joseph), Simon, Judas (Jude) and sisters (Matthew 13:55, 56; Mark 6:3). That this James, who is “the Lord’s brother,” was also the Apostle James (and thus also “the son of Alphaeus”) is clear by Galatians 1:19. If James of Alphaeus is the Lord’s brother, clearly Jude is also the Lord’s brother — but is never called the “son of Alphaeus” (even if his mother were found to be James’ mother) because the Levirate Law gave such a title only to the first-born of the arrangement.

(3) James apparently was the recognized spokesman of the Jerusalem Church — the one first consulted, the one acting as chairman. (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Galatians 1:18, 19; 2:9, 12) In I Corinthians 15:7, it is most likely that this is the same James, although the possibility exists that this is James of Zebedee.

(4) The mother of James was named Mary. She, with Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Jesus, are present at the crucifixion. (See Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40; 16:1; Luke 24:10.) James’ mother is specifically stated to have other children named Joses or Joseph (appropriately!) and Salome. Interestingly, Jude is never specified as her child, although Matthew 13:55, 56 and Mark 6:3 might suggest it. In the above listing (Mark

15:40), James is shown to have as his nickname, “The Less,” (or “The Little”), probably for either his physical stature or for his age-comparison with the son of Zebedee (whose mother was also at the crucifixion — Matthew 27:56).

The above references do not mention Jude as the son of Mary, the mother of James. Matthew 13:55 does include Jude with James, Joseph (Joses), and Simon as Jesus’ siblings. This leaves open the distinct possibility that Jude and Simeon were the sons of Mary, the mother of Jesus. This seems the most likely conclusion.

(5) Who, then, is Mary, mother of James?

In John 19:25, three Marys are mentioned near the cross: Jesus’ mother, Magdalene, and Mary (the wife) of Cleophas. (Cleophas is Alphaeus — one being the Greek equivalent of the other.) This Mary is stated to be “the sister” of Jesus’ mother. It is more likely that “sister-in-law” is intended — although the possibility exists that they were sisters who married brothers. It seems unlikely, however, (though not totally impossible) that sisters would have the same name.

(6) This situation has all the evidence of being a Levirate marriage. (See Deuteronomy 25:5, ff.) In this arrangement one stipulation was that brothers dwelt together. It seems that Joseph’s brother was Alphaeus. (It seems also convenient that Alphaeus means “exchange” or “instead of” — as if the Lord is helping us understand by a play on words that this was truly a Levirate marriage.) Alphaeus apparently died without heir. Joseph was, then, the father of James by Alphaeus’ wife. Under the Levirate arrangement, only the first-born (James) of such an arrangement was to take the name of the dead brother. Hence James is known as the son of

Alphaeus, but any and all others, though they be the brother (or sister) of James, would not be known as the children of Alphaeus. Thus John and James are called the sons of Zebedee. But both James and Joses (though they had the same mother and father) are not called the sons of Alphaeus. But Jude is the brother of James regardless of whether or not they shared the same mother. Thus Joseph lived in one house with two Marys (frequently mentioned and seen together) and a family of brothers and sisters, all biological children of Joseph except for Jesus. Thus also, all were the brothers and sisters of Jesus (ignoring, of course, that God was Jesus' actual father)!

SEEMING DIFFICULTIES

(1) “His Brethren believed not in him.”
(John 7:3, 5, 10)

It is very clear from Galatians 1:19 that this statement cannot be all-inclusive. James was the Lord's brother and an Apostle. He obviously was one of the brothers who did believe in him. Clearly, so is Jude. It may be that only Simon and Joses were the skeptics, and that it is they who are mentioned in John 7. Acts 1:14 proves that John 7:5 was not true by the time of Pentecost! The best solution to John 7 is that his brethren did not believe in him earlier in his career.

If John 7:5 were all-inclusive:

(a) Why, then, in Matthew 28:10 and John 20:17 does Jesus say first, “Tell my brethren”? The news would not go to unbelievers. There is no record that Jesus called his disciples his “brethren” up to this time except in the lesson of Mark 3:33 — “Who is my mother, or my brethren? Behold my mother and my brethren.” The lesson’s meaning is certain, but it does not yet have him habitually calling anyone his brethren who were not earthly family any more than he called everyone his mother. Until Pentecost, the disciples officially were not brethren because there had been no spirit begettal. In Matthew 28:10, Jesus may have meant, “Tell James and Jude.”

(b) Why, then, in Mark 3:31 are his brethren “seeking him”? He (and they) were grown men. They were not calling him home to dinner. They almost certainly wanted to learn from him — not a condition of brethren who don’t believe in him. But again, the text may be referring to James and Jude.

(2) Acts 1:14 lists as being present at Pentecost the Apostles PLUS his brethren. This seems no problem. All of his brethren (whether same household or cousins) were not Apostles. Only two were: James and Jude. This text strengthens the argument, however, that some of his brethren — even other than those who were Apostles — DID, by Pentecost, believe in him, or they would not have been there. But, previously they may not have believed, thus fulfilling John 7. His brethren here almost certainly are Simon and Joses.

(3) Some have claimed that neither James nor Jude mention their apostleships in their epistles. This is true. Peter and Paul, on the contrary, mention theirs regularly

(although Paul does not do so in Hebrews). But John does not. Shall we, therefore, assume that John was not an Apostle?

The strongest (but not valid) argument along this line is in Jude 17 and 18 where the sentence structure seems to place Jude outside the number of apostles. But Jude's point seems simply that we must hear all Apostolic writings. The strength of Jude 17 and 18 is not sufficient in the light of all the evidence to exclude Jude's apostleship.

(4) Why does Jude call himself James' brother and not the brother of Jesus, while James is called "the Lord's brother"?

The answer to this question seems entirely a matter of reference and timing. In Galatians 1:19 it is Paul who refers to James as "the Lord's brother" — the only such reference in Scripture. The context shows that Paul simply wanted to distinguish WHICH James he meant. Calling him "the Lord's brother" made his point.

Jude, however, wrote his letter after Jesus' and the older James' deaths. Thus he identifies himself as the brother of the only James, the most prominent apostle in the Jerusalem Church. Calling himself the Lord's brother might have been construed as an "I have connections" sort of bragging statement. (Even James didn't personally use this identification of himself.) Calling himself the brother of James simply identifies himself over the many other Judases in the vicinity, and it connects him to the references which list Jude the Apostle as the brother of James of Alphaeus, the Apostle.

It also is worthy of note that the Apostles knew that Jesus was not the son of Joseph, but of God. Jude may identify himself as the brother of James as an indication that they had the same father. That God was Jesus' father was something the Apostles would want to emphasize. To call themselves Jesus' brother might obscure this fact.

(5) BRINGING ORDER OUT CHAOS.

Following the aforementioned evidences, it seems fairly safe to arrive at the following conclusions:

When we consider the children of Alphaeus' wife, Mary, we can securely rely on her offspring being James, Joses, and Salome. Reading Matthew 27:56, Mark 15:40 and 16:1, and Luke 24:10 we see CONSISTENTLY that Jude's name never is present — probably a strong enough PROOF that he and Jesus had the same mother. Comparing the two Mark texts, however, makes it plain that omissions of names are not uncommon!

The household of Jesus included his “father” Joseph; his mother, Mary; his Aunt Mary; his aunt's children, James, Joses, and Salome; and two other brothers, Jude and Simon — both likely the sons of his mother, Mary. It also is clear that there were other “sisters” (Matthew 13:56; Mark 6:3). No other brothers are mentioned. Since other sisters are mentioned, it is probably safe to conclude that no other brothers existed. This strongly suggests that Joses and Simon are the two brothers who did not believe in him early in his career (John 7), but did believe in him eventually (Acts 1:14).

The question exists, Why is Salome the only named female sibling? She may have distinguished herself and thereby had some recognition. Or, she may have been “of

age,” while the other sisters were too young to be catalogued by name. The one thing certain is that Joseph had at least three children by Alphaeus’ wife.

Of particular import for the Church is that Jesus, James, and Jude are the three inspired teachers from this family. What a heritage from this one household!

(6) ONE ADDITIONAL NOTE.

James, the son of Zebedee, dies in Acts 12:2. He never writes an epistle. All references to James thereafter are to James “the Less.”

A careful scrutiny of Acts 12:16, 17 and 15:13, 14 and of Galatians 2:9 and 2:11, 12 seems to imply that Peter and James the Less were close to each other, perhaps because James was so prominent, or perhaps (as tradition has it) because James looked so much like Jesus that Peter was greatly attracted to him. (Of course, there would be no biological reason for any similarity.) In any event, Jude in his first verse also allies himself to James and perhaps, therefore, has much contact with and respect for Peter. It is not unlikely that this is the reason Jude’s epistle is so greatly influenced by Peter’s second epistle. They very well may have discussed the problems of the Church together at length and decided on a joint effort in warning the brethren.

* * * * *

THE PURPOSE OF THE LETTER

This Epistle from Jude might easily and well be called THE SECOND-DEATH LETTER. While this sounds morbid, it is clear that Jude and Peter (II Peter 2) were jointly very concerned with warning the brethren of death-threatening tendencies they saw in the ecclesias. In verse 3, Jude virtually tells us that he changed his mind when he was sitting down to write. The matters of this epistle are such as forced Jude to warn. It is a sobering thought, and one well worthy of our undivided attention, meditation, prayer, and absorption.

* * * * *

JUDE

(Textual references are to the NAS.)

Verse 1

**“Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James,
to those who are the called, beloved in God the Father,
and kept for Jesus Christ:”**

We immediately are taught by and gratified by Jude’s reference to himself as “a bondservant of Jesus Christ.” In the flesh, Jude was Jesus’ brother, sons of the same mother. But fleshly relationships are not the basis of our relationship to Jesus. Jude now knew his brother as his Lord and would not conceive of any other condition than

being in bondage to him — an inseparable and perpetual servant. This speaks volumes to us. Clearly Jude knows Jesus as a New Creature by the Holy Spirit which inspired Jude and informs us. But Jude also formerly knew Jesus as a human being, living under the same roof. Nothing, however, in the many years of that earthly-brother relationship could give Jude pause about unrestricted devotion to his brother. Even without the Holy Spirit, this would have to constitute a powerful witness to the character of Jesus.

Then Jude makes the family connection to his brother, the Apostle James. His reason for doing so is obscure. Perhaps this is just his way of claiming the Apostleship by reference to the listing in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Bro. Jude may well have been a very humble man who, along with John and James, though they were Apostles, seemed reticent to fling titles around lest that action be misunderstood. Besides, as mentioned, keeping Jesus' lineage clear and separate from their own was of vital importance. They didn't call themselves Jesus' brothers.

It is interesting to note that fully one-half of the Apostles came from families which supplied two sons each as Apostles. There were Peter and Andrew who were sons of Jonah. There were James (the elder) and John, the sons of Zebedee. And there were James (the Less) and Jude, the biological sons of Joseph. Joseph's household, of course, also supplied "the Apostle and High Priest of our profession," Jesus.

Jude addresses his letter "to those who are the called." It is thus specifically to all saints, and the KJV's titling of this letter as a "General Epistle" is eminently correct. Thus it immediately takes on importance beyond events of Jude's day, beyond emphasis to certain groups (as in

James' "to the twelve tribes who are dispersed"), and, rather, has its address to all of us during the entire Gospel Age.

This is not to say that the more "aimed" epistles (like James or Philemon) are not for us. Quite to the contrary. Jesus advises us that a message for a specific period of the Church is, indeed, a message for us all. Thus, each of the Revelation period-specific messages is followed by the necessity that we "hear what the Spirit says to the Churches" (plural).

Additional wordings in Jude's first verse inspire meditation and the benefits therefrom. When Jude uses "called," he invites us to ponder the purpose of the calling — the highest and most awe-inspiring purpose being that God (from before recorded time) intended a personal family on His own plane of being. It is to that which we are "called." He will, of course, use the called class to establish an everlasting covenant with mankind and to restore men to the perfection needed for that covenant relationship. But being "called" is first and foremost to be God's personal family. Hence the next word is "beloved" in God the Father! Who could God love more than His divine (to be) offspring? There is no way that Jude wants us to forget our status. What he is about to write is his attempt to keep us "beloved" — and to maintain that sonship, that New Creature fathered (begotten) of God. With the implications of this first verse, who wouldn't want to learn and practice every holy thing Jude is about to say?! And finally, he concludes the verse with "kept for Jesus Christ." We all are "called" to be a part of the Bride of God's dear Son. Now Jude wants us "kept" secure for that honor. It is the purpose of his letter.

Verse 2

**“May mercy and peace and love
be multiplied to you.”**

“Multiplied” is the verb in this verse. It would seemingly be sufficient for anyone just to have “mercy and peace and love (agape),” but not so! Jude wants them multiplied — increased and increasing. It is not merely a casual or pleasant opening phrase! Those who are privileged to walk a while with their Savior know well that these graces come to us early. But if we and as we grow as New Creatures, we can barely contain the goodness from our Father as we experience the perpetual increases due to expanding sanctification. This is Jude’s prayer for us. Thus he says “May” it happen to you as God has intended it. This multiplication in our Christian lives is MANDATORY for success. It amounts to fruit-bearing. Jude doesn’t want any lack of multiplication to expose us to the dangers he is about to expose.

Verse 3

**“Beloved, while I was making every effort
to write you about our common salvation,
I felt the necessity to write to you
appealing that you contend earnestly
for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”**

We now have Jude’s thesis statement for this short but important letter.

The interpretation of this verse differs according to which Greek manuscript is correct. The Vatican Manuscript and

Nestle’s careful recension have decided on “OUR common salvation.” Other manuscript evidence suggests “THE common salvation.” The NAS (accurately) uses the former recension.

If “the common salvation” were correct, Jude probably meant Millennial restitution — the salvation which will be common to all men. Thus, paraphrasing, Jude would be saying:

I was about to write to you about the Kingdom,
but circumstances necessitated a change: that I
write to you about contention for the faith.

But, the better Greek manuscripts, “our...salvation,” (our High Calling — similar to Titus 1:4) suggest a paraphrase more like this:

When I diligently sat down to write you of
the salvation we share, I felt the necessity of
writing you especially about one part of it:
the intensive inner contest for the faith
that was once delivered to us.

(This sounds a bit like Paul in I Corinthians 9:24, 27.)

The Greek for “contend earnestly” is one word. It is “*epi*” plus “*agon*.” “*Epi*” is a prefix of INTENSIFICATION — hence the English modifier “earnestly.” “*Agon*” basically means a contest — but an internal contest, not a match of wits! We derive our English word AGONize from this Greek word. We all know that agony is internal; it is not between two parties. This is important! Jude is not admonishing us to struggle with each other. He is teaching that we must wage a successful war-within-self to be faithful. He is saying, “Earnestly AGONIZE deeply within yourself constantly to maintain your faithfulness.”

Absolutely no spirit of contention with others is neither admonished nor implied.

To win the race, great self-discipline must be wrought. This is the opposite of the crime of “licentiousness” (lack of self-strictness) mentioned in the next verse.

“Contending earnestly” in this verse is the “Keep yourselves” of verse 21, and everything in the intervening verses is parenthetical, showing how others are losing the race — not “keeping themselves.”

If this, indeed, be Jude’s intent, then “the faith which was once delivered to the saints” is not a listing of doctrine, but rather the “common faith” and discernment of the unity of the body of Christ and its salvation. (Ephesians 4:5, 13) This seems to be the contextual thrust of the following verses. This, of course, does not exclude doctrine, but it does not make doctrine the end or aim. It makes unifying character-likeness to Christ the objective. And it is this departure from Christ’s character that Jude vehemently condemns in this epistle. Thus, in essence, “the faith once delivered unto the saints” is the faith of sanctification, i.e., that which edifies the consecration vows of the body as a body.

The word “common” suggests this unity of the body as the essence of the once-delivered faith. “Common” certainly does not mean ordinary! It means held as the one, agreed-upon, unifying element. If Jude were speaking of doctrine, he would have better said that he was writing about our doctrine. But by saying “common salvation,” he clearly means that which unites us.

Note carefully that all of the examples which Jude utilizes are examples of bad character, not of bad doctrine. It is

so very necessary that we learn to keep our hearts with all diligence. The Lord can straighten a crooked head (if it is honest) with a few simple facts. A crooked heart He cannot and will not adjust. He will aid us to adjust our own hearts if we are sincere; but He simply refuses to interfere with our free moral agency.

Note that Jude does not (as he could) say, “Defend the faith.” He says, “Earnestly agonize over it.” He says he is “appealing to” us to do it — so that (verse 1) we will be “kept.”

Verse 4

**“For certain persons have crept in unnoticed,
those who were long beforehand marked out
for this condemnation, ungodly persons
who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness
and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.”**

So, what is this CONTEST within us? What CONTENTIONS are going on that make us agonize? Perhaps no better-detailed answer to these questions exists than Paul’s words in Romans 7:14-25. It is the contest between the reasonings of the flesh versus the control by the new mind.

Beginning with verse 4, Jude will show this battle from a special perspective. He will show, example by example, how brethren who have given in to the rule of their human thinking will be a vital threat to those who are trying to maintain the ascendancy of their New Creatures. He will be showing how this threat will require

agonizingly difficult experiences for those who wish to be “bond-servants of Jesus Christ.” He will be honestly assessing that giving in is for us the possible road to Second Death.

This verse begins with “For.” It is a connective word. To get Jude’s meaning, we must know what the word connects. The connection seems clear. He had said in verse 3 that he urgently “felt the necessity” to address an agonizing subject. So, it is this phrase which connects —

“I felt the necessity to write...
for (because) certain persons
are a threat to your well-being.”

What a sobering and shocking beginning to a letter!
What urgency there is in Jude’s pen!

The word “unawares” or “unnoticed” is not in the manuscript. However, it is certainly implied in “crept in” — a phrase which implies **stealthfulness**. Jude is telling us that he is writing because he has noticed, but we might be so innocent as not to notice, that sinister forces may actually be present in an ecclesia. While we do not want to be paranoid, to be prone to false accusations, or to lose our innocence, we must keep Jude’s words in the backs of our consciences just in case such a stealthy invasion should occur in our midst.

The fate of these who creep in will be varied. The context of Jude’s remarks shows clearly that some are doomed to the death from which there is no return. But verses 22 and 23 show us that there are other options. The judgment of these matters is the Lord’s, not ours. But the handling of them, the “agonizing” within ourselves, is our duty, our responsibility, our need, and our assignment as watchmen.

Jude says that these threatening persons were “long beforehand marked out.” In other words, they are an important-enough part of Gospel Age history that PROPHECY deals with them. The margin says they were “written about.” The Greek is “*fore-written*.” Nadab and Abihu (Numbers 3:4) might be one typical example.

Jude adds that they were fore-written “for this condemnation.” He drops this phrase into our laps as if we were expected to know what “this condemnation” is! The Greek is “*krima*” — *judgment*. The remainder of the verse defines what “this condemnation” consists of. Thus, Jude, paraphrased, seems to say:

These persons were indicated in prophecy for this condemnation: They are guilty of ungodliness, lack of self-control, and denial of the headship of Jesus.

These three “guilts” would, indeed, make these persons a terrible threat to the spiritual welfare of the congregations they attend.

(1) Ungodly is a word which could have numerous meanings. The Greek is “*impious*.” The implication is lack of respect where respect is due. The beginnings of this flaw could simply be an attitude of dealing lightly with God — mixing the sacred with the profane and failing to fear His majesty as is appropriate.

(2) Jude says, in harmony with the above definition of ungodliness, that these “turn the grace of our God into licentiousness.” Licentiousness is lack of self-control. In other words, it is possible to corrupt the purpose of Grace in our minds. As Paul says in Romans 6:1, “Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never

be!” Jude says, while it should never be, it is in these persons! Thinking that God is there to give us “special dispensation” because of grace, these persons add to God’s grace and honestly believe that they need not exercise and grow in self-control. It is a sad, but apparently not rare, deception.

(3) Jude’s third indictment is that these “deny our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ.” Perhaps the word “only” makes Jude’s point very clear. We cannot have two masters, according to Jesus. Thus, Jude’s point is that these faith-apostates do try to have two masters, consequently DENYING the real and only Master and Lord, Jesus. Jesus is no longer their head because they also allow their old creature minds to do part of their thinking. They have two masters; or, as James puts it, they are “double-minded.” (James 1:8)

The combination of these three parts of this one condemnation powerfully lets us know the agonizing we must do in ourselves lest any of these corrupting tendencies lead us toward the abyss. While Jude says these persons CREEP IN, he does not say HOW they creep in. It is not reasonable to think that these are just wayfaring strangers suddenly appearing in our midst. Since Jude wants us to AGONIZE, the implication is strong that if we don’t agonize, we become these malignant brethren. The influence “creeps in” because it grows within us. This is why Jude gives us the precautionary blessing of verse 2.

Verse 5

**“Now I desire to remind you,
though you know all things once for all,
that the Lord, after saving a people out
of the land of Egypt, subsequently
destroyed those who did not believe.”**

It is very important that we perceive the reason for verses 5-7. Jude is not singling out three groups for condemnation. He is choosing three groups because they demonstrate the point he just made in verse 4. That point was the MIXING of two kinds of thinking. In the case of the Church (which is his concern and care), Jude wants us to never consider MIXING spiritual thinking with fleshly thinking. He doesn't want fleshly thinking even to “creep in.”

All three examples in verses 5-7 exemplify bad compromise. The groups vary widely:

- (1) There was Israel with whom God was dealing on a very exclusive basis.
- (2) There were the fallen angels — beings from God's own realm.
- (3) And there were Sodom and Gomorrah, Gentile cities with which God had no dealings.

But it will be their SIMILARITIES which will make Jude's point.

Verse 5 opens with what seems at best like an awkward expression, and at worst seems unintelligible!

“Now I desire to remind you, though
you know all things once for all...”

What does this mean? When he uses the word “remind,” he is saying, paraphrased,

I'm going to give you three examples with which you are very familiar, but the lessons from which you may not be keeping sufficiently before your minds.

In other words, Let me stress what you know but may not carefully be heeding, and about which you need to be reminded. The awkwardness of the opening of this verse thus disappears.

Example #1

It is slightly more difficult with the example of Israel than with the other two examples to catch Jude's point about compromise or about MIXING two kinds of thinking.

Israel left Egypt sincerely believing that God was saving them and that Moses was God's delivering agent. But during the ensuing wanderings, and beginning very shortly after their deliverance, they lost belief. They murmured and complained. They actually wanted to go back! This is Jude's argument. Loss of our initial justifying faith and return to fleshly reasoning will be disastrous! All except a few who left Egypt never made it to the promised land. And why? Because they failed to continue in belief. It is Jude's contention that this kind of thinking can occur and grow (creep in and prosper) in the Church.

The message to the "certain persons" of verse 4 is this: Just because you have been saved by God, don't consider yourself safe. Laxity will mean destruction of your hope — if not of your being.

Verse 6

**“And angels who did not keep their own domain,
but abandoned their proper abode,
He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness
for the judgment of the great day.”**

Example #2

Here is another compromise in the thinking process. The angels initially were in perfect harmony with and obedience to their God. But individual thinking — reasoning beyond and in contradiction to Divine permission — led them to abandon their assignments and spheres of abode. They did their own planning. This is licentiousness, lack of self-strictness or self-control.

Their punishment was to be doomed to darkness. The lesson for saints is that licentious thinking will not lead to light or freedom, but to lack of understanding and bondage to our fallen natures (darkness).

Obviously, this verse supplies additional secondary information for us in our understanding of Scripture. But let not these helpful facts obscure Jude’s reason for citing this example. Jude’s sole point is that we must agonize so that ungodliness, free-thinking, and denial of the headship of Jesus is not our lot.

The secondary facts of this verse are:

- Earth was not the assigned domain of angels except when God stated otherwise.

- The fallen angels were guilty of ABANDONMENT of their post.
- Their punishment was to be relegated to imprisonment in the atmosphere that they chose.
- They also are not permitted to function in the light, but only in the obscurity of secrecy and non-materialization (since materialization was part of their crime).
- Their punishment is temporary. It all will come to resolution during the second presence.
- (See II Peter 2:4; Genesis 6.)

Verse 7

**“Just as Sodom and Gomorrah
and the cities around them,
since they in the same way as these
indulged in gross immorality
and went after strange flesh,
are exhibited as an example,
in undergoing the
punishment of eternal fire.”**

Example # 3

Note the opening words: “Just as...” Jude does not want us to miss his point. Something in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah is “just as” (just like) the story of the fallen angels.

It is entirely too easy to pass this verse off as just an example of immoral or disobedient practices. That is not Jude's point. Jude's point is that JUST AS fallen angels cohabited with beings lower on the creation spectrum, SO DID Sodom and Gomorrah: men with animals.

(Just as an aside: It is curious how many brethren will cite this verse as proof of Sodom's guilt because of homosexuality. The fact is that this verse never mentions that fault. And Sodom's guilt, as clearly stated by God Himself, never mentions that sin either. See Ezekiel 16:49. [It might be argued, but not provable, that 16:50 refers to homosexuality.])

But, back to Jude's intent. Unfortunately, the NAS says in verse 7 — the one here being commented upon — that Sodom (and others) “indulged in gross immorality.” That text has been corrupted in the NAS! The KJV and the Greek manuscript are correct:

“committing *fornication* and going
away after *different flesh*.”

How interesting that Jude should choose THESE TWO of Sodom's crimes! He does so BECAUSE THESE TWO DEMONSTRATE HIS POINT.

Fornication in prophecy is the universal symbol for MIXING spiritual profession with fleshly action. It is so clear that this has been Jude's message of warning since verse 4.

Strange (different) flesh makes Jude's point again. Our fleshly natures are BELOW our spiritual natures on the creation spectrum. Allowing our fleshly minds to influence our New Creature minds is the same as

Sodom's sin of going after strange flesh. These must not be MIXED!

As Jude concludes this verse, he explains that Sodom is an example for us. In other words, this verse is not to condemn Sodom. It is, rather, instructional for us. So is their punishment, "eternal fire" (= age-long destruction). If we, as members of Christ's body MIX or COMPROMISE our spiritual calling with our fleshly thinking, our faith will be BURNED UP. Jude is suggesting Second Death, "the lake of fire" — or, perhaps only the loss of our anointing, though our life could be saved. (I Corinthians 5:5) At this point it is imperative to note that the three examples of verses 5-7 are there for us. While Israelites are said to have been "destroyed," while the fallen angels are in "eternal bonds," and while Sodom suffers "eternal fire," ALL HAVE SUFFERED ONLY TEMPORARILY! Israel will be restored (Romans 11), the angels are in bondage until the Judgment Day (Jude 6), and Sodom will return to find its fate more tolerable than that of the Jewish city of Capernaum. (Matthew 10:15) But Jude's "examples" are there for us with the more terrible prospect of Second Death if we destroy our embryo spirit natures.

Verse 8

**“Yet in the same manner
these men, also by dreaming,
defile the flesh, and reject authority,
and revile angelic majesties.”**

“Yet in the same manner...” The opening phrase of this verse has two points to make. The word “Yet” implies that “these men” (those of verse 4) know these same Scriptures but are heedless of them. “In the same manner” seems to imply that, even though they know these texts, they still, in the same way as the Israelites, angels, and Sodomites, continue to pursue their wrong courses. Obviously, Jude is telling us that knowing the Scriptures, and even knowing what they are about is not sufficient protection for the New Creature.

“By dreaming.” Jude does not explain his intent for this expression. It must be important since the construction seems to indicate that the three perversions following are all caused “by dreaming.”

One thing seems certain in Jude’s terminology. These men are not dealing with REALITY. Their fleshly thinking has disconnected them from the Narrow Way and they INVENT or JUSTIFY reasons for their courses of action. We all can have dreams! But mercy to us if we count them valuable!

A reasonable construction for Jude’s thought here is something like this:

These men, instead of studying, absorbing, and heeding the lessons of Scripture, concoct their own rationalizations (dream-reasons)

for their sensualities, their ‘independence,’
and their ungodliness.

A careful examination of the three items which require their dreaming (their rationalizations) shows them to be the three items of verse 4 – only here they are expressed with different words in different order.

- (1) They defile the flesh.
- (2) They reject authority. (= “despise Lordship” – Marshall)
- (3) They revile angelic majesties. (= literally, “they rail at glories” – Marshall)

In verse 4, #1 above is the equivalent of lack of self-control. #2 above is the denial of Jesus’ headship. #3 above is ungodliness; i.e., they are impious – lacking respect where respect is due. Thus Jude has come full circle. He stated the three condemnations in verse 4. He illustrated the problem with examples in verses 5-7. He recapitulated the character weaknesses in verse 8.

A comparison of verse 8 with II Peter 2:10 is helpful. Peter lists the same three problems with these reprobates, but with some differing terminology. He expresses point #1 as walking “after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness.” There is no particular need to interpret this as open immorality. Rather, it likely refers to a course in life of over-indulgence and greed – the lust of the eye and the uncleanness of catering to the flesh. What has been cleansed in us are our thoughts and aims. Fleshly thinking is unclean because it defies those two things. We actually can come to lusting after our own reasonings!

Peter expresses point #2 as (in the Greek) “*despising Lordship.*” This is important to us all. The lack of cheerful acquiescence to the ecclesia arrangement — the arrangement dictated from the mind of Jesus, our head — is an ever-growing symptom of the final hours of the Church. There is a proper “Lordship,” but there also is the doctrine of the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:6, 15) — a lordship which impedes proper Christian liberty. It is likely that Jude’s and Peter’s thought is that these blighted ones cannot take direction or restraint, but they likely can give it.

Peter’s third point is that they are “*self-satisfied darers, not afraid to blaspheme glories*” (Greek text). Most English versions read “evil speaking” — which, of course, is a terrible sin. But the Greek is “*blasphemy*” — a vindictive and deeply accusatory railing against those above us. Peter makes that very point when he uses the word “darers.” He points out that their self-will or self-satisfaction virtually has no need of anyone over them. They functionally can say to Jesus, “I dare you to do something about it!” That brings Jude to his next point:

Verse 9

**“But Michael the archangel,
when he disputed with the devil
and argued about the body of Moses,
did not dare pronounce against him
a railing judgment,
but said, “THE LORD REBUKE YOU.”**

This verse begins with “But” because Jude is drawing a stunning CONTRAST. In verse 8, Jude says that “these

men...rail at glories” (Marshall) — beings ABOVE them. Jude now says, “EVEN MICHAEL, the chief angel (Jesus, himself) would not hurl a railing judgment against someone less than he: the devil.” The comparison should sting! (Compare II Peter 2:11.) Jude apparently is quoting from Zechariah 3:2. (See Rotherham’s footnote in Zechariah.)

Some have asked, “What is the difference between a railing accusation and saying, ‘The Lord rebuke thee?’” — which in itself seems a sufficiently solid accusation! There is a chasm of difference in ATTITUDE between the two. One is a vindictive proclamation of judgment. The other is a noting of a clear wrong, but without a determination of eternal consequences. “Railing accusation” in the Greek is “*blasphemous judgment.*” Rebuke merely is that: a statement of having noticed an incorrect course. So Jesus was saying, “Yahweh will point out your error.” In verse 23, Jude seems to inculcate this attitude for our behavior.

Among other things, this statement by Jesus shows such complete confidence that God works all things for good! Isn’t that, in some sense, Jude’s whole point from the beginning? The spiritual mind will REST in God (Hebrews 4:1). The mind of the flesh — a reprobate mind for a New Creature — will “dream up” reasons that it has to be God’s executioner for all of the wrongs it sees! This, as Jude has expressed, leads even to accusing those above!

This verse, like verse 6, gives us additional or secondary information beyond Jude’s point in his argument. We learn from it that there was, indeed, a dispute between the Logos and Satan about the disposition of Moses’ corpse. Satan didn’t win the argument, but we can see

that he must have had the same motive that has corrupted man's thinking from the beginning. Man (and the devil) tend to worship that which IS MADE rather than He Who MADE IT. It is to the devil's advantage to have us do so. In essence, Jude's reprobates are doing this very thing; they are worshipping their own thinking processes over the mind of the Lord. Perhaps this Moses reference is not so secondary after all! (See Revelation 14:7.)

Verse 10

**“But these men revile the things
which they do not understand;
and the things which they know by instinct,
like unreasoning animals,
by these things they are destroyed.”**

Again Jude begins with “But.” Again there is a CONTRAST. Verse 9 showed us Jesus' attitude (and Satan's). In contrast, now, to Jesus, we will view the totally corrupt and deficient “reasoning” processes of the fleshly mind.

The contrast: Though Michael KNEW WELL the error of Satan, yet he did not vilify him. But these (of verses 4 and 8) vilify things even of which they are uninformed. (Such is the danger of a little learning. We have the “truth;” therefore, we often tend to think we know everything!) Jude's point is that it is the very truths they claim that they don't understand and therefore MISREPRESENT!

The second contrast: While these speak evil of spiritual things about which they actually are uninformed, their NATURAL (fleshly) tendencies (which THEY KNOW WELL!) corrupt them. (The NAS “destroyed” is incorrect – except in the sense that corruption of our New Creatures will, indeed, destroy them.)

Verse 11

“Woe to them!

**For they have gone the way of Cain,
and for pay they have rushed headlong
into the error of Balaam,
and perished in the rebellion of Korah.”**

Verses 11-13 will list the characteristics of this class, both by comparing them to Scriptural characters (Cain, Balaam, and Korah), and by comparing them to the forces of nature (reefs, clouds, winds, trees, waves, and wandering stars).

“Woe to them.” Jude begins with the result. “Woe” is not a friendly word! The “woes” of Revelation undermine the very foundations of existing society. Jude’s exclamation does the same. Indulging in the corruptions he is about to list will undermine the very foundations of New Creature development.

“The Way of Cain.” (See Genesis 4:5-7 and I John 3:12.) These misdirected saints slay their brethren (through accusation, discouragement, ridicule, and compromise with the flesh) because, deep down, they have a jealousy about the sacrificing spirit of true saints. Cain was warned, but to no avail.

“The error of Balaam...for pay.” (Compare II Peter 2:15, 16 and Numbers 22.) Balaam was a compromiser of righteousness because he could have gain from it. Note that Balaam first obeyed the Lord, but he kept asking (seeking “loopholes”) because he so desperately wanted gifts and honor. To the end he claimed to be a servant of God; yet he seemingly types the Second Death.

“Perished in the rebellion of Korah.” (See Numbers 16:1-3, 31-35.) This was a clear case of despising authority based on the “dream” that “all the congregation are holy, every one of them...Why do you exalt yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?”

At this point it should be noted that these three examples very closely approximate in their sins the three problems which Jude originally detailed in verses 4 and 8.

Cain was impious. He could not be bothered by any higher reason why Abel’s sacrifice might be better than his. Godly reasoning was far from his mind.

Balaam had licentious thinking — no self-control. Fleshly thinking, the exact opposite of listening to God, was uppermost in his character.

Korah clearly is a superior example of denial of headship. God had established the position Moses held. But, as far as Korah and his hosts were concerned, their thinking was just as good. As he boasted, paraphrasing: Everyone in the congregation can think as well or better than you, Moses!

Verse 12

**“These men are those who are hidden reefs in your
love-feasts when they feast with you without fear,
caring for themselves;
clouds without water, carried along by winds;
autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted;”**

Having used human examples from Scriptural records, Jude now turns to the book of nature in order to describe the faults of “these men.”

The first item poses a minor problem. Some translations use “spots” (KJV) or “stains.” The Marshall recension has “rocks” in the interlinear. The NAS uses “hidden reefs.” Some form of “rock” seems correct from the best Greek recension. It also would seem best since everything else in Jude’s list is a force of nature. Therefore spots or stains seem oddly out of place. “Rocks” for any sea-faring people would immediately caution the danger of hidden reefs which sink ships. Therefore, the NAS translators seem to have captured best the meaning of this term.

“Hidden reefs” is the first example from nature which Jude uses. Previously he had said that these influences had “crept in.” It seems Jude is attempting to let us know that we are not looking at overt apostasies of action. We are looking at brethren who “fit in” unless our “spiritual radar” is sufficiently tuned to Spiritual aberrations. These “rocks” or “reefs” are below the surface.

Jude continues in his description, “reefs in your love feasts when they (1) feast with you, (2) without fear, (3) caring for themselves.” Our love-feasts are our fellowship, our studies, our testimonies — everything a good (healthy) ecclesia should share. Perhaps a

distinction might help: They feast with us, but they don't feed us. Their whole purpose is to feed themselves — which (due to a total lack of spiritual understanding — verse 10) they do entirely without fear. Jude already had made reference to their not having the needed reverential fear (“revile glories” — verse 8). This will in part be manifested by their taking advantage of the love of the saints but then never reciprocating that love toward others. They are present, but useless! (Perhaps many of us have experienced brethren who eventually either depart or grudgingly attend because they “don't get any blessings” from the ecclesia. It seems to have escaped their attention that they are supposed to be there to give blessings!)

The words “caring for themselves” (Greek = “*feeding themselves*”) have a little additional significance. The word for “feeding” (caring) is “*poimainontes*.” It is a form of the Greek word “*poimen*” — one who tends flocks or herds. The irony in Jude's phraseology is that these “tend themselves” or “shepherd themselves”! What good are shepherds who tend themselves and not the flock? The phrase also may indicate a tendency to group together — to favor their own kind. That is, they shepherd themselves in the sense of cliqué tendencies. Since most people like to be “on the inside” of a cliqué, it is manifest how this tendency can lead to spiritual shipwreck on “hidden reefs.”

Jude's second example from nature is “clouds without water.” Some of us have experienced summer droughts when the sun keeps baking our gardens relentlessly, and the heat oppresses us to the point of exhaustion. Then a day arrives with plenteous clouds, and we get excited about the anticipated relief and blessing. But the rain never comes. Our disappointment returns, and we hope

for more beneficial clouds another day. Thus it is with these brethren. We expect blessings from saints! Sometimes they promise them in ways that keep us in expectation. But they never deliver.

Is there a spiritual example? Perhaps one manifestation would be great boldness in the faith in TEARING DOWN, but never having the spirituality to BUILD UP or replace what they have torn down. Their criticism of the sacrifice, witness efforts, study habits, etc., of others will be marked; but their own sacrifices, witness efforts, study habits, etc., will be fruitless, imagination-less, and void.

Next Jude turns to the movement of these “clouds.” He points out that they are “carried along by winds.” There obviously is an instability in these brethren — a vocal certainty, but an irritating lack of solid foundation. The appearance of this or that controversy will show that, despite their professions of spiritual stability, they will succumb to clever arguments which will never disturb those whose foundations are secure.

Jude’s fourth comparison to nature is “autumn trees without fruit.” The KJV has it, “trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit.” But the NAS closely adheres to the Greek. The weakness of the KJV is obvious: How could the fruit wither if they are without fruit”?

The word “autumn” could simply mean that after a growing season there should be fruitage. That likely is Jude’s spiritual intent. Thus “autumn” (in the spiritual application) suggests that these brethren have been around for a while, and, thus, they should show some spiritual maturity. This lends support to the concept that by “crept in,” Jude may well be speaking of those of us

who over time have allowed (almost unnoticed) worldly thinking to supplant the thinking of their new minds.

How tragic for any of us to have borne early fruitage and then to be found wanting at that very time when a ripe character fruitage will be the final test!

An additional evidence that these references are not to newcomers, but to those who have been long in the way, is that they are called “trees.” Trees are symbols of several things in Scripture, but in the context of a group of people, trees usually symbolize those who are stalwarts – rooted well in their surroundings. (Revelation 7:1, 3)

A dead tree stands out as a sad sight. Jude calls those trees “twice dead.” (Greek, KJV, and NAS margins) Trees don’t die twice. Jude’s reference clearly is meant to have a spiritual reference: Second Death.

Then Jude gives the reason: *“having been uprooted”* (Greek). In the natural world, the reference is clear. As a spiritual reference, Jude seems to be summarizing the reason behind this fatal condition. Their roots (their spiritual foundations in the will of God) have become detached. It is only one more way of saying that the fleshly mind must never take supremacy over Christ as the true head.

Verse 13

**“...wild waves of the sea,
casting up their own shame like foam;
wandering stars,
for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever.”**

Next, Jude likens these brethren to “wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam.” It is a complex analogy requiring some thoughtful analysis.

The reference to waves of the sea suggests anarchistic tendencies. This is in harmony with Jude’s point that these do not hold the head. The modifiers to waves are “**FIERCE**” in Marshall, “**RAGING**” in the KJV, and “**WILD**” in the NAS. Any one of these words might suggest the demanding nature of their agitations for personal “rights.” The picture seems to take us to the point where these brethren have lost enough control that their self-centeredness begins to show!

FOAM in water is caused by impurities. The Greek is “*foaming up their own shames.*” It shows that the impurity is shame. The forwardness of error is so interesting. While all humans have shames, it is the tendency of the humble to want to hide them. But error is bold. Apparently shame can be disguised as honorable! So these **DISPLAY** their “foam” by their raging claims that independence (anarchy) is a virtue!

Jude then turns to the stars for his last lesson from nature: “wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever.” Marshall translates part of it as “the gloom of darkness.”

Job 38:32 (KJV) makes reference to guiding “Arcturus with his sons.” The reference is to a runaway group of stars, plunging through the universe, but with enough guidance from God that they don’t crash into other stars and wreak havoc in the universe. When Jude says “wandering stars,” he still is describing the anarchistic (fleshly-minded) attitudes of these brethren. The fact that he calls them “stars” may also be a suggestion for us that “these men” might be teachers in the Church. (Revelation 1:20; 12:1) It is a sobering and, at the same time, frightening thought. Fortunately, God can guide Arcturus!

Stars should have light; but if these stars have light, it wanders; it is unstable and undependable.

The second part of this description may be to a phenomenon never known before our day — “Black Holes.” Black Holes are stars so heavy and absorbent that instead of emitting light, they absorb it; and they absorb everything within their gravitational influence, drawing it all into a crashing doom of darkness. The spiritual implications are gruesome. It would suggest that “these men” may be “heavyweights” in the Church — men of immense influence (or gravitational pull). Only the “gloom of darkness” rather than the purity of true Gospel light awaits them and those who will be swallowed up by their unspiritual influences. It is not a pretty picture.

The “blackness of darkness forever,” while it could apply to Black Hole stars, seems almost certainly another attempt by Jude to warn of Second Death.

We cannot help but notice the progressive degeneration of Jude’s nature references!

Verse 14

**“And about these also Enoch, *in the seventh generation from Adam,*
prophesied, saying,
“Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of
His holy ones, ...”**

With this verse Jude begins another section of description. In verses 5-9 Jude used historical events to make his point. In verse 11, he used Scriptural bad characters. In verses 12 and 13 he turned to nature. But now (verses 14-15), Jude will pronounce a judgment, followed by a final indictment (verse 16) which recapitulates in new words the sins he has already illustrated.

In verse 4, Jude had said that those men were written about in prophecy. Jude now cites one of those prophecies in verses 14 and 15. Unfortunately, we have no idea of the source of this prophecy! This happens in other places in Scripture and is quite disconcerting! The only thing we can deduce is that the Jews and early Christians had access to books which are no longer extant. We need not mourn this in the sense of feeling vital loss because the Lord has provided everything His Church needs. Nevertheless, if an Apostle quotes Enoch as a prophet, we know the quotation is inspired and worthy of acceptance. Perhaps the source will be found some day. Perhaps it was destroyed in the unfortunate burning of the library at Alexandria. Perhaps it yet resides in a dark and dusty old Vatican cellar!

Jude's words from Enoch sound much like Paul's words in II Thessalonians 2:10-12.

“Enoch.” He is specified by Jude as being “the seventh generation from Adam.” Since this seems to have little to do with Jude’s subject, we probably are missing Jude’s point! Enoch means “Disciplined.” Since Adam represents mankind, it is quite likely that Jude is telling us WHEN the prophecy of Enoch will come to pass. Mankind will be disciplined (taught) in the Kingdom’s thousand years, the seventh thousand years from man’s creation. It is even possible (though not likely) that Jude is not actually quoting a prophecy by Enoch, but rather telling us (via name meanings and generation placement) that Enoch’s life is an allegory that teaches the words which Jude will here report. We could then extend the allegorical lesson by including Paul’s words in Hebrews 11. Paul, then, would be telling us that Enoch’s “translation” (i.e., “carryover”) represents judged and disciplined mankind being taken into the eighth day that they should no longer “see death.”

But, let’s assume that which is more likely — that Jude is actually quoting. Enoch’s words begin in the middle of verse 14 and continue throughout verse 15:

“Behold.” Revelation’s prophecy uses this word at points where the Lord wants us to have a more in-depth consideration. What Enoch meant by it is speculative. But Jude is using the prophecy to say that all he has spoken about will have a day of reckoning — at the parousia.

“The Lord came with his holy ten thousands” (NAS margin). When the parousia opens, the Lord raises the sleeping saints. All 144,000 of them are not yet sealed, but the judgment (some of it) can begin before that completion — with only tens of thousands.

Verse 15

**“...to execute judgment upon all,
and to convict all the ungodly
of all their ungodly deeds
which they have done in an ungodly way,
and of all the harsh things
which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.”**

“...to execute judgment upon all.” The entire Millennial Age is included in this prophecy — even though a restricted part of judgment progresses before it expands to “all.” This thought is reflected in Psalm 149:5-9; Revelation 11:15-19, and 19:11, and following. Thus Jesus’ commission grows until it embraces all, including the individuals of the human race.

But Jude’s argument (since verse 4) has been particularly against IMPIETY (“ungodliness”). Ungodliness was one-third of his indictment. He uses Enoch’s prophecy to show the eventual end of all impiety — that found in the world, in the nominal church, and even among the spirit begotten. Thus Jude, quoting Enoch, says that all impiety will be exterminated, regardless of where it has been found. Enoch says the Lord will convict four kinds (or places) of impiety:

- impiety of character:
“convict THE UNGODLY;”
- impiety of works:
“all their UNGODLY DEEDS;”
- impiety of attitude:
their “UNGODLY WAY;” and
- impiety of speech concerning God:
“all the harsh (Greek = *hard*)

things which UNGODLY sinners
HAVE SPOKEN against Him.”

Neither Enoch nor Jude leaves an ungodly stone unturned!

Verse 16

“These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of *gaining an* advantage.”

Jude is upset! He uses this verse as his final barrage of warnings. This time Jude doesn't use historical examples, nor Scriptural personages, nor forces of nature, but Jude uses plain language.

It may not, at first glance, appear that there are three indictments as there were in verses 4, 8, and 11. But there are; and they appear to be the same three previously noted:

- (1) These are “querulous murmurers” (Marshall). “Querulous” is an adjective meaning “full of complaints.” This would seem to be a new way of saying “impious” (lack of respect where it is due). If we are pious, if we respect God's will for us, we cannot be discontents.
- (2) These are “followers of their own lusts.” This seems another expression of licentiousness (lack of self-control).
- (3) And, “they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of advantage.” This rewords the idea of “denying our only Master” (not holding

the head) in that gaining a following does not point to the Lamb.

A comparison of II Peter 2:18 and 19 with the third point above is helpful. Peter notes that these brethren are boasters — loud proclaimers of the liberties they enjoy. Their “targets,” according to Peter, are those “barely escaped” — i.e., those “new in the truth,” not yet securely free from their former bondages.

This verse ends Jude’s comments on “these men.” He has exhausted his disgust (and ours!), and he wants now to give us the proper course of action when faced by these deceptive practices.

Verse 17

**“But you, beloved,
ought to remember the words
that were spoken beforehand
by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ,...”**

“But you, beloved...” Jude returns to us for the first time since verse three where he also addressed us as “beloved.” While the Apostle Paul would send us to Old Testament texts because the New Testament was not yet written, Jude sends us to the already written, or, at least, the already-spoken and remembered words of the New Testament “stars” — the Apostles. This is important. While the prophets were inspired, so are the Apostles. Jude wants us to become readily accustomed to seeking our answers in their writings — which, of course, include his own. Peter combines all three (prophets, Lord, and Apostles) in II Peter 3:2. Thus we see, just from Peter

and Jude, how the Apostles recognized their own positions of authority and began to admonish us all to heed their words. Both Peter and Jude speak of the Apostles as if they were someone else. But we can both imagine and sympathize with the mixed humility, emotion, and responsibility heaped on this fisherman and this carpenter! They cannot and do not want to deny their charges. At the same time, they are humble men who do not want to lose their humility. They are wonderfully exemplary teachers for us.

Verse 18

**“...that they were saying to you,
‘In the last time there shall be mockers,
following after their own ungodly lusts.’ ”**

Which words of the Apostles are we to remember?

A few texts which Jude may be citing are II Peter 3:3; I Timothy 4; II Timothy 3:1-9; Matthew 24:24; Luke 21:34, 35.

“The last time” to which Jude refers is, in the large sense, the entire Gospel Age. After all, as Jude writes, he is describing things already happening. But, as we have seen, this is a “general epistle,” and its lessons are very much for the entire Church — and especially for those times in its history when Jude’s warnings would be most applicable. The “last times” of the “last times” (Laodicea) would have special reason to heed and apply Jude’s warnings. The II Peter 3:3 text (which is almost certainly on Jude’s mind) clearly has its application specifically in our day.

Jude again references what seems like his primary indictment: “ungodly lusts.” We should meditate much on a term which seems so important to Jude. Impiety (not placing God high enough) seems to be the root of all the problems which Jude elucidates. In our day, it is an easy fault into which one can fall. In this verse, Jude links impiety with the tendency to mock. If we hear this in the brotherhood, it is at once an alarm and a spiritually disturbing peace-taker. It is the Greek word we also see used by Peter (II Peter 3:3) — although the KJV translates it “scoffers.” Both Apostles link it with “lusts” — the mind of the flesh, devoid of spiritual reasoning oversight.

Verses 19-21

**“These are the ones who cause division,
worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit.**

**“But you, beloved,
building yourselves up on your most holy faith;
praying in the Holy Spirit;**

**“keep yourselves in the love of God,
waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ
to eternal life.”**

These verses have need of being considered together because they form a “THEY-WE” contrast. Note that verse 19 begins with “They...” But verse 20 begins with “But you...” In one sense, these verses are Jude’s solution to the problems. The contrast is clear:

THEY:

- (1) make separations (Marshall)
- (2) are fleshly (literally: natural, i.e., human), not spiritual

BUT YOU:

- (1) are most-holy-faith edifying
- (2) pray with your spirit-begotten minds
- (3) make the keeping of yourselves in God's love your objective
- (4) wait for the Lord's mercies to give you real life.

(These wordings are as close to the intent of the Greek text as we can come.)

Verse 19

**“These are the ones who cause division,
worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit.**

Looking more closely at the two points made about “them” is helpful. Jude says they “make separations.” As we live and grow over time under the Lord’s tutelage, one item grows in our beings as paramount. That item is THE UNITY OF THE BODY. The more we read New Testament Epistles, the more this concept dominates. Somehow “these men” seem to miss this. They don’t seem to mind schisms. If they don’t actually make them, they feel somehow comfortable with the concept that separations are only natural and to be expected. But separations aren’t “natural” (except in the sense that they are carnally-caused). They aren’t to be expected (except

in the sense that they are prophesied). They are to be fought against!

It is imperative that we realize the CORE IMPORT of Jude's condemnation. Jude is not concerned with HOW they make separations. He doesn't care if it's doctrine, practice, personality, prophecy, or whatever. He is concerned that these saints DON'T SEE THE SIN OF SEPARATION. They seem to consider separation as a goal, or as an accomplishment, or as a virtue — or, at least, as an inevitable. The fact is, separation is carnal, and that is Jude's indictment of these brethren. They have fallen into carnal-mindedness.

That is why Jude's second point is really an extension of his first point. He says (NAS) they are "worldly-minded, devoid of the spirit." These two points are effect and cause: They make separations BECAUSE they have fleshly minds.

How can we impress upon ourselves strongly enough Jude's warning? As Paul would say, "I keep my body under." No struggle is more important for the eternal life of the New Creature. If we succumb to the mind of our humanity — no matter how well we justify its intent — we will lose the mind of the spirit.

Verse 20

**“But you, beloved,
building yourselves up on your most holy faith;
praying in the Holy Spirit;”**

In verse 20, Jude wants us to know what is protecting us. His first point is our “building yourselves up.” Every meeting, every contact, every intent we have as part of the body must be EDIFICATION. There is nothing carnal about that! Of course, Jude adds “on your most holy faith.” The Greek does not seem to convince translators. Some say “*in*,” some “*on*,” and the Concordant Greek Text says “*to the holiest*.” This last seems the most stimulating. If we build “*in*” the faith, that is good. If we build “*on*” the faith, that also is good. But if we build “to” the faith, we have an expression which really stresses OBJECTIVE. It is curious that Jude supplies “holiest” or “most holy” to his adjective. It seems something should be holy or not holy! Why, then, “most holy”? When the preposition “*to*” is used, we see our CONSTANT growth in sanctification. We edify each other to the holiest point possible while yet in the flesh. We are going “*to*” — TOWARD — the holiest level of which we are capable. Thus, the best thought and translation seems to be

“...building yourselves up to the
holiest faith structure possible.”

How do we do this? It is entirely by communication — not just study of the Word, but by communion with the source: “praying in the Holy Spirit.” The phrase should elicit some curiosity. It seems that just “praying” should be sufficient. But Jude is saying more. The natural man can pray. But the prayer that will “edify to the holiest faith possible” is not just prayer, but prayer tempered by the work of the Holy Spirit in us, polished by the

instruction the Holy Spirit supplies us, and stimulated by the inner desire for the growth of what the Holy Spirit has begotten in us.

Verse 21

**“Keep yourselves in the love of God,
waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ
to eternal life.”**

This verse begins in the middle of a sentence. Verse 20 began the sentence. The connection is important: “But you, building and praying..., Keep yourselves.” Thus “keeping ourselves” is a function of what began in verse 20. IF we edify and pray spiritually, we will have done our part in keeping ourselves from the rampant deceptions. The rest of the verse is the rest of the imperative:

The NAS says “waiting anxiously for.”

Marshall says “waiting.”

The Diaglott says “looking for...”

The Greek (*prosdechomai*) means “*to receive to oneself.*” It seems the simplest and best. Jude’s imperative seems to be:

‘Receive the mercy of our Lord
Jesus Christ to eternal life.’

It is almost a one-sentence summary of Paul’s treatise in Romans about the mercies of faith justification. Jude seems to summarize it all:

‘Keep yourselves in the love of God
by receiving (constantly) your faith
justification — the mercy provided by
Jesus’ sacrifice — which will lead you
to eternal life.’

Verse 22

“And have mercy on some, who are doubting;”

Here we begin Jude’s recommendation for dealing with those going toward the dangers he has treated in his letter. As has been noticed, Second Death is the real warning; but lesser consequences are possible. As Jude details his recommendations, it will be clear that he recognizes and delineates varying depths of corruption. Obviously, no one can reverse Second Death once the boundary has been crossed. But Jude may just mention those who have irretrievably crossed the line. He will delineate three groups and three appropriate methods of dealing with them.

First, it is necessary to note that the actual Greek in the manuscripts differs. Sometimes this happens. This is why God has provided the tedious but rewarding work of men we call recensionists. Unfortunately, even they cannot always be certain of the form or intent of the Greek text.

If we read Jude 22 and 23 in some translations, there are only TWO groups mentioned. In others, THREE groups are mentioned. The recensionists favor the three-group solution, but mostly because Jude seems to prefer groups of three! The NAS also prefers this solution.

In the first group (verse 22), the Greek word *ELEATE* (“have mercy or pity on”) is mostly accepted by the recensionists. However, the most ancient manuscripts prefer *ELEGXETE* which is the word quoted by early Church writers. It means “convince or refute.”

Also in the first group (verse 22), the recensionists adopt a later reading (*diakrinomenous*) meaning “who are

wavering (= or *doubting*)." It also can imply *DISPUTING*. Compare verse 9. But the earlier manuscripts use a variant meaning "*who separate themselves*."

Thus we have in verse 22 two extremely different possibilities:

- (1) "Have mercy on some who are doubting"
(NAS)

versus

- (2) "Some who are separating themselves,
convince (or refute)."

The latter seems so much more definitive and consistent with Jude's tenor.

We will summarize this point at the end of the discussion of verse 23.

Verse 23

**"...save others, snatching them out of the fire;
and on some have mercy with fear,
hating even the garment polluted by the flesh."**

The two remaining groups are covered in this verse.

- (1) The first group of these seems so much like those mentioned in I Corinthians 3:15 — a group which has lost its anointing, but has its spiritual life

saved — the Great Multitude. “Save others, snatching them out of the fire.” Jude doesn’t elaborate. Perhaps he feels that Paul has covered the matter. Nevertheless, group #2 requires strong help: “Snatch them!”
(See I Corinthians 5:5-13.)

- (2) The final group is not easily defined. The KJV says to “save” them. But Jude doesn’t say that. He says “pity” them “with fear.” The NAS uses “have mercy with fear.” (It is a possible alternative to “pity.”) In either case, it is WITH FEAR — not likely “reverence” here, but just plain old apprehension. It also is clear that their “garments” (their justification) have been “polluted by the flesh.” (KJV = spotted.) This is typically a Great Multitude description. Thus, this third direction of action from Jude is difficult. Are there two levels of Great Multitude degradation? Yet, if this third group were to be Second Death material, we might be convinced to “pity,” but the question of “mercy” is a bigger one! The third group seems to be right at the edge of Second Death.

In any case, Jude defines three appropriate actions on our part:

- (1) Convince,
- (2) Snatch,
- (3) Fear.

They are progressively downhill.

The Weymouth translation (First Edition) summarizes the three points perhaps best:

“Some, when they argue with you, you must endeavor to convince. Others you must try to save, as brands plucked from the flame. And on others look with pity mingled with fear while you hate every trace of their sin.”

While the TWO GROUP translation of verses 22 and 23 is not likely correct, it is helpful to read translations which have adopted this approach. In a few respects, the TWO GROUP approach is much easier to interpret.

The New World (J.W. translation) says,

“Continue showing mercy to some that have doubts. Save them by snatching them out of the fire. But continue showing mercy to others, doing so with fear...”

The NEB says,

“There are some doubting souls who need your pity. Snatch them from the flames and save them. There are others for whom your pity must be mixed with fear; hate the very clothing that is contaminated with sensuality.”

If we were to reword Jude’s points down to our responsibilities, it would be something like this:

- (verse 21) While you are keeping yourselves,
(verse 22) you must deal with those who aren’t.
- With doubters, supply the proofs they

- need.
- (verse 23)
- With those whose spiritual lives seem in danger, take strong (even shocking) actions.
 - With those whose justification seems nearly abandoned,
 - reflect sincere pity (in hopes that it might catch their attention or the notice of others),
 - but don't even approach the hateful state of their affairs.

If we were to distill Jude's points down to one attitude for ourselves, it would be something like this:

Sincerely care for the welfare of all, knowing
all the time that you cannot give of your oil.

Verses 24, 25

**“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,
and to make you stand in the presence of His glory
blameless 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.”**

Jude closes his epistle with a benediction. The beginning and ending of it are: “To Him be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority.” Much as John does in Revelation (e.g., 1:4), Jude puts the Father's supremacy (1) “before all time,” (2) “and now,” (3) “and forever.”

In between these points, Jude assures us that it is God “Who is able to keep you from stumbling.” It is God Who can “make you stand” — and not just stand, but stand in the most awesome location existent: “in the presence of His glory.” The reference might be to the “other side;” but it is likely that Jude wants us to know that faithfulness now (despite all going on around us and among us, as he has warned) keeps us standing in His Holy Presence. Our justification gives us the “great joy” of being “blameless” in this position. This benediction gives the faithful the perfect offset for all of the darkness of Jude’s message.

The dedication of the benediction also contains subtle references which the faithful can cherish. It is “to the only God, our Savior.” James had written that two Masters are a snare. But there is no question of the ONLY God. There is no question of His singular gift to us: Salvation. “The only God, our Savior.” And God’s mechanism for our relationship is given due credit: “Through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Jesus was Jude’s brother in the flesh. He is Jude’s brother and Lord in the spirit. But he is ours, too!

* * * * *

THE MAJOR LESSON OF JUDE

Jude is concerned that we must not give in to fleshly reasoning, thus exposing us to the partial or complete loss of our calling. He identifies particularly three areas of danger:

- impiety or ungodliness:
mixing the sacred with the profane;
- lack of self-control:
the absence of spiritual growth
because of pandering to the flesh;
- denial of headship:
virtually a railing against Jesus'
rules for us.

* * * * *

