

On the Most Holy Faith

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Jude 1:20-23

by Pastor Che Choyong

20 But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit,
21 keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.
22 Be merciful to those who doubt;
23 save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

<Introduction>

The Epistle of Jude is short, consisting of 25 verses. The author is Jude, who introduces himself as a brother of James and a servant of Christ. He is also physically a brother of Jesus. Like the second letter to Peter in the New Testament, Jude's letter is about false prophets and false teachers.

Jude says this in verse 3. "I had hoped with all my heart to write to you concerning the salvation with which we are partakers." This letter was written to those who believe in and accept Jesus Christ. Jude wanted to write about the salvation they had received, but he said he felt the need to encourage them to fight the battle of faith. Jude seemed to feel quite threatened by the series of events in the church.

He then recommended that they "fight the fight for the faith." He also explains that there will be judgment. I think he expresses how urgent and dangerous this fact is, and how it is a fact that will shake the whole Church.

In this letter he explains the need to "fight for the faith" and also talks about "how" we should fight. The verses I have chosen today are about how we should fight. First, let us look together at what Jude wrote about the necessity of the fight for faith.

<1. Three examples from the Old Testament>

In explaining this necessity, Jude cites examples from the Old Testament. He reminds us of the past, that there was divine judgment for these people and for these actions. These Old Testament examples were probably the main difficulties that existed in the church to which Jude was writing at that time and the elements that were confusing their faith.

Let us look at the examples given in verses 5-7. Three Old Testament events are mentioned here: first, those who did not believe in God even though He had delivered them by the Exodus; second, the angels who abandoned their proper place; and third, the example of the pursuit of unnatural carnal desires in Sodom, Gomorrah, and the surrounding towns.

These are events all too well known to the Jews. Despite the evidence of God's many works, those who did not believe in them, those who strayed from the realm of God's permission. And as for Sodom and Gomorrah, we are told that those who disregarded the order of creation with their desires will meet the final judgment.

These three examples show that there will surely be judgment for those who live in disbelief and disregard of God's authority and the order of creation. It seems that the church is using "judgment" to remind us that the church must first be a group based on God's authority and God's order of creation. He is saying that this principle, which existed long ago, in Old Testament times, or even before the beginning of creation, is the basis of this "saved flock," the Church, and is a fact to be acknowledged.

Then in verse 11, Jude gives one more Old Testament example. The first three examples he gives are of the people of Israel, the angels, Sodom and Gomorrah, etc., as groups. The next is an example of the actions of a single individual.

[Jude 1:11]

11. Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion.

These are examples of Cain, Balaam, and Korah. These are also very well known figures to the Jewish people. Let us look at these three figures in a little more detail.

<3. Cain's path, Balaam's wanderings>

First, we have Cain. Do you remember what kind of person Cain is? He is a character in the Book of Genesis. He and his brother offered sacrifices before God, but God did not accept Cain's sacrifice. Then Cain got angry and killed his own brother, which is a horrible incident. The letter of Jude says "the way of Cain," but what exactly does the way of Cain refer to?

[Genesis 4:6,7]

6. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?"

7. If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."

God did not accept Cain's offering. Personally, I think this was not so much a difference in what was offered, but something in the "heart of the man" who was offering it. In verse 7, God points out to Cain his error, saying, "If you are doing good, it is acceptable". God also presents the action he should take from now on. God says, "Sin pines for you, but you must reign over it." Very clearly, God informs him of his error and tells him what he must do, that is, he must reign over sin. But Cain does not accept these things and sins.

I believe that "the way of Cain" is to clearly know the standards that God expects of us, but not to accept them. I think it is to have standards but to do what I think is right.

It is to deny that God judges this world of ours by absolute standards. To say that I am right no matter what I think and pretend that I don't know. In other words, to confront it head on and ignore the standard. I think that is the way of Cain.

Then Judah writes saying that following the way of Cain, they fall into the waywardness of Balaam. Let us recall for a moment what this wandering is. Balaam is the character in Numbers 22-24. The book of Numbers covers this event of Balaam at great length.

As to when this event took place, it was when the Israelites finally arrived in the land of Moab, beyond the land of Canaan to the east, after 40 years in the wilderness. Across the Jordan River is the long-awaited

land of Canaan. The Israelites had won a victory in their struggle against the Amorites and other Gentiles and had come as far as the land of Moab. The king of Moab decided that he could not defeat Israel by force of arms and thought that he could win if he cursed Israel with the prayer of Balaam. So he promises to give Balaam a large sum of money.

[Numbers 22:18]

“But Balaam answered them, “Even if Balak gave me all the silver and gold in his palace, I could not do anything great or small to go beyond the command of the Lord my God.”

And he says that he will never bow down before silver. God puts words in his mouth, and God even removes the covering from his eyes so that he can see the Lord’s messenger. God, through various events, clearly shows him again and again that “this is not what God wants him to do”. But during these several times, he changes his words. He says, “Yes, I understand, I will do it that way,” but then he moves from place to place, waiting for God to say something else, such as, “No, I might say something else if I go to that mountain.”

What this shows is that he is torn between “I have to obey God’s word because God said it,” and “I want silver, too.” He can clearly understand God’s word and His will. But he also wants the large sum of money that the king has offered him, so he is wondering if he might forgive me if I go to that mountain, or if he might show me another will if I go there and prophesy, or if he might allow me to receive this large sum of money.

What happened to the end of this story? According to the Book of Numbers, he schemes to get the Israelites to commit adultery with the women of Moab, and the Israelites sin. Balaam’s “greed” overcame his “faith.”

This wanderings of Balaam went further than what Cain did, not only willfully rebelling against God, but also causing the people to sin. Though his mouth cries out “Lord, Lord” and seems to obey, his greed wins over his faith, and because of it, Israel, with the promised land of Canaan before them, falls into sin because of him.

Through this story of Balaam, Jude is saying that there were people and leaders in the church at that time who, like Balaam, were blinded by profit and were torn between faith and greed. He is referring to those who cried out “Lord, Lord” with their mouths, but were overcome by greed.

<4. Disobedience of Korah>

Next is Korah's disobedience. Korah is the event of Numbers 16 that took place in the wilderness. The order of history should be Cain, Korah, and Balaam, but Judah put Korah last. In other words, he seems to be warning that the last of these three is the most serious.

Korah is a son of the tribe of Levi. He is the one who has been frustrated and confronted by Moses and Aaron.

[Numbers 16:3]

3 They came as a group to oppose Moses and Aaron and said to them, "You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly?"

Korah's disobedience is not alone. It says that they rallied.

[Numbers 16:2]

2 and rose up against Moses. With them were 250 Israelite men, well-known community leaders who had been appointed members of the council.

This is what it says in Numbers. This is a gathering of leaders. They say "the whole congregation, all of them holy". This is a mistake in the concept of "holy". The leaders are so steeped in this error of thought and understanding that they are standing against Moses as one, based on this idea. No, they are confronting God, and verse 19 says, "When Korah had gathered all his followers in opposition to them at the entrance to the tent of meeting." And then it is the scene where they are waiting for God's judgment. To gather everyone and wait for God's judgment is a sign of confidence. They were confident. "We are right, we are absolutely right in God's eyes."

I think that Korah was very persuasive. He was a man who could offer reasonable ideas that people felt were good enough to move people's hearts, and he also had leadership qualities. In a sense, in our time, Kola could have been [a charismatic] person who could move people's hearts. But he had the wrong idea about "holy" things, and his actions were quite infectious. As a result, all who belong to them and their possessions are swallowed up and destroyed by the land.

I think Jude was trying to say, with these examples, that there were leaders in the church at that time who taught these wrong ideas. They are those who say they believe in Jesus Christ and know the law and will of God, but do not obey like Cain for various excuses and reasons. Or maybe they were people who reconsidered, “Maybe God’s will is not so,” and were lost between greed and faith, like Balaam. Or maybe they were those who, in the name of ethics and morality, made additional demands about God’s order and “gratuitous salvation” and said the wrong teachings. They were also those who did not know their error. Because in verse 12 of Jude, it is saying that they are participating in the Congregational Supper together. They didn’t even realize they made a mistake.

Clearly, they were not the ones who were telling people not to believe in Jesus in a big way. They have fellowship in the church, attend meetings, and telling people to believe in Jesus. But Jude reveals that they are in fact disobedient to God, profit takers and complainers of God’s word.

<5. Holy Faith>

These are subtle erosions that are, in a sense, invisible. These are subtle erosions on a subtle faith that no one but the person himself can see. So what should the church do, Jude begins to say.

First of all, where must our faith stand? That is, we should stand on the most holy faith. What is the most holy faith?

It is the gospel, “the gospel that is not according to the will of man”. It is not something that comes from the collective imagination of men, nor is it derived from human theories, nor from morality, nor is it a new theological idea. Nor are they words of Scripture forcibly combined to justify man’s ideas. They come from God, who existed before the creation of the heavens and the earth. So, while it is difficult to fully understand, it is “most holy” and it has the power to sanctify the saints.

In the Old Testament, anything that belongs to a holy God is holy, and God’s judgment on those who plunder it or misdirect it is shown in various places. We need to build ourselves on the gospel that comes from God, the Bible in general, with reverence, strong conviction, and a loving heart. Growing as Christians means that throughout our lives, our

intellect, actions, conscience, motives, and imagination should all be aligned with God on the basis of that gospel. This is a lifelong activity. This lifelong activity requires the help of the Triune God. As it is written: “(1:20) But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, (21) keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

It is very likely that the path of Cain, the Balaamite wanderings, and the disobedience of Korah, which I spoke of a little earlier, will permeate our lives of faith without our knowing it. We may be unknowingly lost and in rebellion. Therefore, we wait for Christ’s mercy. For no one is good enough to earn God’s grace, and the only way to be with God forever is to wait for His mercy.

<6, Mercy>

Continuing, Jude calls on the Church to let ourselves stand on God’s holy faith and then, if we encounter any of these dangerous influences, to help and teach them. He does not ask us to condemn, hate, or exclude them, but to have pity on them.

We tell them that they are to be pitied as we are to be pitied.

23 save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

This is how it is written. Some are condemned to fire, but we are told that we need to educate, teach, and pray for these people.

Also, according to the words, “Abhor even the underwear defiled by the flesh, and have mercy on them in the fear of God,” we must recognize that what is wrong is wrong. We must not lower God’s standard or change the standard of sin by saying that we should have mercy.

By “hate them down to their underwear,” I believe he means that we must recognize and fear the possibility that we, without even knowing it, may be steeped in “wrong thinking, man-made ideas, and new theologies”. The criterion is always first the law, then mercy.

If the conditions of salvation were lower, wouldn’t people repent? If we say there is no judgment, wouldn’t more people come to church? Isn’t Jude saying that we cannot lower God’s standards in the hope that more people will repent?

Doesn't this apply equally to us? We, too, are living in these "end times." And it is time to remember that story in verse 18, where the apostles said that "in the last days there will be mockers, who will behave according to their ungodly lusts." There will be people who will twist God's word according to their own greed, no, I think there will be people in this day and age, as there already were in the days of Jude, who wrote the letter.

But there is no need to fear it. Jude ends his letter with a prayer. "To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen."

This means that there is One who is able to keep you from stumbling, One who is able to make you stand before Him in glory with great joy, as one who is without blemish. That is the one and only God, Jesus Christ.

<Conclusion.>

The path of Cain is a path that I myself may walk, the wanderings of Balaam may be my own wanderings, and the disobedience of Korah may be the rebellion against God that lurks within me.

Let us make ourselves stand on the gospel that comes from God. Let us build ourselves up and be built up by God "on that most holy faith," which is not from men, not from new theological ideas, but from God, who is from before the creation of heaven and earth. This "fight for the faith" of the Christian is shared by Jesus, who defends and makes us stand. Through our life-long activities, let us learn firsthand our unity with God and true "holiness".

Let's pray.