
Praying for Persevering Grace

Jude 24-25

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Introduction Several weeks ago we began a series of messages during Sunday evenings, examining the prayers recorded in the New Testament. This particular prayer that we are going to examine was scheduled for this evening because it is Biblical Counseling Sunday. This morning Russ reminded us about the way that we are to look at ourselves and our situations. Tonight I would like to look at the place that prayer has in the change process.

We have some guests this evening. And you are here because someone you love is being recognized for their hard work during the last 12 weeks. Let me give a general introduction to this area of counseling. All counseling has as its goal the bringing about of change. It doesn't matter what philosophy of counseling is employed; the goal is change. At last count, there are over 180 different psychologies to choose from in our quest of bringing about change. From the psychodynamics of Sigmund Freud, to the cognitive perspectives of Piaget and Ellis, to the behavioral perspectives of Skinner and Watson, to the humanistic perspectives of Carl Rogers and Maslow, to the biological perspectives of many contemporary psychiatrists, all of these psychologies want to bring about change. The question that must be asked is, changed into what or into whom? What does the finished product look and act like? What is the standard by which we gauge success?

Biblical Counselors are no different as far as goals are concerned: we also want to bring about change. The difference is what we are helping people to change into. We are helping people to become more and more like Christ. And the standards and methods employed for that change are found in the Word of God. 2 Peter 1:3-4 tells us that God has given us everything that we need for life and godliness. And we find those resources in Christ and in the Scriptures which tell us of His promises.

The struggles of life that believers face can be traced back to the fact that we believe lies and we want what we want. Those issues of the heart make it difficult to persevere in our striving to become more and more like Christ. And this is what Jude's epistle is all about – persevering grace. So let's look to the Lord for help as we examine this text to see how we can persevere.

<Pray>

The Current Description

(v. 3-4)

I do not have the time this evening to do a full exposition of the book of Jude. What I am going to do is give the Cliff Notes version so that we can see what Jude is teaching us.

Jude was very eager to write about the wonderful salvation that we all rejoice in, but he found it discouraging that the church was being led into apostasy. He informs his readers that these unbelieving people have slipped into the church undetected and are an accepted part of the church family. They are people who are able to have a hearing with others, and are taking the teaching of the grace of God and turning it into something that actually denies Jesus as Lord and Master. They are skillful and convincing. They are turning people from THE faith. Jude changes his mind about what he is going to write about and urges us to contend vigorously for THE faith that has been once for all delivered to the saints.

The Continuous Defection

(v. 5-19)

He begins by describing this apostasy – its beginnings, its continual persistence, and its ultimate end. Jude generally uses a pattern of three in order to get his point across.

There was apostasy from the very beginning (v. 5-7). In three examples, Jude shows how it didn't take long to fall away from God. He shows how Israel was delivered from slavery, a picture of our deliverance from sin, and yet there were those who desired their former lives in Egypt who were guilty of unbelief. Even some of the angels did not want to stay within the bounds of their privileged position and fell away. And the final illustration of apostasy was Sodom and Gomorrah who practiced sexual sin and perversion. They serve as examples of apostasy from the beginning.

Then he describes the current situation during his day (v. 8-13). Apostasy was no different. In verse 8 he again uses threes to show that they were living immoral lives, defying authority, and scoffing at the power of evil angels.

He continued by describing them as walking in the way of Cain. They were practicing an immoral, natural religion that was acceptable to the unregenerate. They were guilty of the error of Balaam, who perverted the faith for the sake of his own gain. And they were like Korah, who despised authority and discipline.

And in verses 14-19, he describes how there will still be apostates in the church at the end. They will still be scoffers who follow their own ungodly desires. And they will cause divisions, be worldly people, and will be devoid of the Spirit.

Quite a disturbing description of people in the church who are leaders and the ones who will be led by them.

Our Common Duties

(v. 20-23)

It's very easy to read through what Jude has described thus far and think, "Man, are those people awful! That could never happen in our church and no one here would be led astray like that." But be very careful. The people that he has been describing are not believers. But isn't it true that there are times when we all act just like unbelievers. And that is the warning that he is sounding. When you are acting like an unbeliever, you had better check on your faith. Are you really in the faith?

So he gives us believers seven exhortations to help us in our contending for the faith that was once for all delivered.

Our Personal Duties

(v. 20-21)

Even though I have divided these seven exhortations into two categories, all of them pertain to us as individuals as well as a body of believers. These are exhortations to holiness and perseverance.

Build Yourselves Up

(v. 20)

First, we are to build ourselves up in our most holy faith. We are to act as moral and responsible agents in this. We are to work hard at doing this. It is proper for us to endeavor to do the work of building up our faith as if we had ample power of ourselves to do it. We should seek to establish ourselves firmly in the belief of the doctrines, and in the practice of the duties of the faith once delivered.

Growing in faith is one of the appointed means for persevering. We are to be concerned about our growth and exercise care over ourselves and our fellow believers. We build ourselves up by a deepened knowledge of our faith; meditating upon its substance and contents; believing and appropriating it, applying it to ourselves; and being governed by it. This most holy faith both requires and promotes personal holiness.

Building on the faith is equivalent to building on Christ, Who is the object of that faith.

Pray in the Holy Spirit

(v. 20)

The Holy Spirit teaches what we are to pray for, and how we are to pray. Without the Spirit, believers cannot call God their Father, nor can they pray with faith and fervency, or with freedom and liberty.

The Spirit can supply us with the strength of will and desire that are necessary in order to comply with these precepts. He takes His Word and, through His enabling grace, gives us all we need.

Keep Yourselves in the Love of God

(v. 21)

This can be understood in two ways: to keep up God's love to us; or to keep our love to Him. Since keeping up God's love to us is not a command that we can control, then it seems that we are to keep our love to Him vital and vivid. We can be commanded to love Him and keep ourselves in that love. We can't be commanded to keep up God's love to us.

So we are to see to it that our love for Him is preserved in a pure, healthy, and vigorous condition. We are to see to it that our love to Christ is in constant exercise by rendering obedience to Him. If your desire grows cold, your communion with Him will deteriorate and your witness for Him will be marred.

We cannot lose the love of God, yet we can lose the fervor of that love in our thinking, and we grow cold and indifferent in our expressions of it. It is important to make use of all proper means to maintain and increase this love in ourselves and in others.

Wait for our Lord and Eternal Life (v. 21)

There are several ways that this phrase can be interpreted. I favor the view that there is the future mercy of Christ which will be shown at death, in the grave, and at the resurrection. There will be this mercy at the day of judgment and in the merciful sentence that He will pronounce over us at that time.

We should be occupying our thinking with His grace and mercy that cannot be earned and is only given through the finished work of Christ. We are to yearn for His appearing and for the eternal life that we will enjoy in His presence for all eternity. We eagerly wait, by faith, and expect Him to fulfill His promise to us. We should love it, delight in it, and find our pleasure and cheerfulness in it. We wait with eager anticipation, yet with patience. Our faith grows as we contemplate His return and our eternal life.

Our Corporate Duties (v. 22-23)

As I mentioned before, these duties are both personal and for the body, but these duties involve us both individually and corporately. We are to help each other to contend for the faith and to build each other up in our faith. We do this by being involved in each other's lives. And what Jude is telling us is that there are different approaches to different situations and we must be sensitive to that as we help each other. This is good counsel to those who give counsel. We must be sensitive to those to whom we are helping. We need to minister God's Word in a way that will be most appropriate for those who hear.

Have Mercy on Those Who Doubt (v. 22)

There are those who are doubting. Perhaps they are not knowledgeable about the way they are being led or by whom they are being led. They are simple minded about the way they are heading. We should be approaching them with compassion, praying with them, praying for them, instructing them in a meek and gentle way, giving friendly and brotherly reproofs, and expressing a tender concern for their good.

Save Others by Snatching Them (v. 23)

Others are farther down the road in their leaving the faith. We cannot take the time to be gentle with them for long. They are in danger and need to have more severe reproofs and the urgency of the moment impressed upon them. Even making them aware of the judgment awaiting obstinate people who continue in sin. It will be like snatching them from the fire of hell to which they are heading.

Show Mercy with Fear (v. 23)

And then, the third group of people, those to whom we also show mercy, but their sin is such that we must be attentive to ourselves, so that we are not drawn into their sin. Our pity of their situation should not degenerate into a falling into their sin with them. We must maintain the hatred of their sin, and all sin, just as someone would hate to touch or wear a piece of clothing that was worn by someone having leprosy.

Our Capable Deliverer

(v. 24-25)

Now, I don't know about you, but those 7 exhortations are very tall orders. It is obvious from Scriptures, that we are not able to keep ourselves from falling. It started back in the Garden with the fall of Adam and Eve. They were sinless humans who could not keep themselves from sin. And we have the rest of the Scriptures for numerous other examples.

Also, since this is Biblical Counseling Sunday, and the graduation service at that, we, as counselors, need to take heed to this passage, as well.

Suppose that you are counseling a couple who are continuing to struggle for weeks. And they come in and say, "We just can't do this. We give up!" What should our response be as counselors to that couple?

Or, suppose you, as the counselor, are the one who says, "This couple is hopeless; I give up!" Is that response legitimate? Let's read verses 24 and 25. <Read verses>

He Enables Us to Persevere

(v. 24)

Can counselees or counselors say that they can't; that they give up? NO!! Why? Because we have One Who is able to keep us from stumbling! He is the Almighty God. All power has been given to Him. He is both willing and able to keep us. He has promised that not one of the ones that His Father has given Him will be lost. He enables us to persevere. He keeps us from being devoured by sin. He keeps us from being tempted beyond what we can bear. He keeps us from being dominated by sin. He keeps us through His enabling grace through self-denial, practicing His precepts, heeding His warnings, and following His example. And this enabling gives us great hope as we struggle in life.

But realize, that this is not a one-way street. Notice that in verse 20 we are commanded to keep ourselves in the faith. We are to work. But the other side of the coin is that God is at work in us, enabling us to persevere. It is pure presumption to think that God will keep us without us working first. The promise follows the command. We can't have His enabling without our working.

He is a Persevering God

(v. 1, 25)

But notice verse 25 and verse 1. Do you see how we have a God Who Himself perseveres. Our God put His plan together at least 5000 years ago. He has been persevering in His plan since then. He has not given up. He has not said that it is too hard. He is, in Himself, a persevering God.

He has been persevering since the beginning of time when there was the first apostate, He has been persevering throughout time, including Jude's time and ours, and He will persevere into the future until time is no more. He persevered before all time, and now, and forever. As a persevering God he is able to keep us.

He Will Joyously Present Us Blameless

(v. 24)

And He has promised to present us without sin (blameless) before Him with great joy. This has two parts. When we leave this earth through death, we will be ushered into His presence immediately. We will be presented without sin and with great joy. But there is the second part. That is when all the redeemed will be presented before Christ and God

the Father with great joy, when the bride of Christ will be presented without spot or wrinkle. The triumph over sin and death will be accomplished. And the joy that will be there will be incomprehensible to our sensibilities now. He will enable us to persevere so that we will be in His presence for all eternity where there will be great joy as God's glory is revealed to the entire universe and His persevering grace is shown. All saints will be presented as redeemed, sanctified, and worthy to live with the Triune God forever. No wonder that Jude could end this somber and important epistle with a doxology of praise. We have a persevering God Who enables us to persevere.

Let's sum up this epistle with some lessons about our praying for persevering grace:

Conclusion

We should pray that God would help us as we build ourselves up in the faith. Both praying for ourselves and for our brothers and sisters in the Lord

We should pray that God would help us to be faithful in studying His Word and making the necessary changes in order to obey His Word.

We should pray that the Holy Spirit will take His Word and supply us with the strength and desire to persevere.

We should pray that He would intercede for us when we don't know how to pray.

We should pray that our love for God would not grow faint, but that we would be enabled to keep that love burning brightly.

We should pray for a yearning to be in God's presence and for the patience until that happens.

We should pray thanking God for his mercy in bringing us eternal life.

We should pray for each other that we would persevere even in the most difficult circumstances.

We should pray for wisdom in approaching those who are straying from the faith.

We should pray for all of the leaders of our churches, that God would keep them faithful in contending for the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

We should thanking God that He is a persevering God and is the God of all perseverance Who will keep us forever.