

**“KEEP YOURSELVES  
IN THE LOVE OF GOD”—  
A STUDY OF JUDE 20-23**

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**I. INTRODUCTION**

Jude, one of the shortest letters in the NT, presents believers with a perhaps puzzling prescription for dealing with the threat of false teachers. What should we do when faced with men of influence who, as they arise within the local church body, are simply not what they appear to be? For this malady, the Lord’s half-brother, Jude, is content in offering his audience only the briefest of instructions: “keep yourselves in the love of God” (v 21), “on some have compassion” (v 22), “but others save with fear” (v 23). Yet within these simple admonitions are details which raise important questions: how do I keep myself in God’s love (v 21)? What distinction should I be making among people (v 22)? What is the fire mentioned in v 23 and how could I save anyone from it? Am I personally in danger of this same fire also? And what does Jude mean when he expects me to hate somebody’s garments (v 23)?

The purpose of this article is to examine Jude’s response to a church in turmoil. I will discuss the spiritual condition of his audience, the danger appearing within their own church, and the expected response to such danger as commanded by Jude himself. Lastly I will show how to apply this letter to our lives as well.

## II. THE SPIRITUAL CONDITION OF JUDE'S AUDIENCE

Jude provides us with numerous details in the first step to understand the spiritual condition of his original audience. As with all letters of the NT, this element is quite important to determine, for if Jude imagines his audience as being unregenerate, then he will naturally include instructions explaining how to receive eternal life.<sup>1</sup> If, however, his audience is perceived to be in possession of eternal life already, then Jude's purpose for writing will be something altogether different.

First, we see that his letter is addressed to "those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ" (v 1). While the general designation "called" (*kleitos*) could be used simply for service (e.g., Rom 1:1), the designation "sanctified by God the Father" removes the possibility that anyone other than regenerated believers are in view here. This triad (called, sanctified, and preserved) alone brings sufficient evidence to conclude that Jude considered his audience as believers already.<sup>2</sup>

Second, Jude writes that together they share a "common salvation" (v 3). Continuing in the same verse, we see that this salvation is spiritual and comes from the faith shared by all saints. Jude begins his letter by reminding his audience that he is on *their* side as opposed to the ungodly men he will discuss shortly. Although the noun "salvation" (*sōtēria*) itself does not automatically refer to the possession of eternal life, the fact that Jude does not mention any need for his audience to receive eternal life

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<sup>1</sup> For example, in John's Gospel the Apostle specifically mentions his purpose for writing in 20:30-31. See also John 1:12, 3:16, and 5:24 for just a few of the many examples of how he expects his unregenerate audience to receive eternal life.

<sup>2</sup> This is the first of many triads in Jude's letter. See also vv 2, 8, and 19. In addition, three examples of rebellion are used in vv 5-7 and again in v 11. Jude addresses his audience as "beloved" three times. The formula "faith, hope and love" could possibly be seen in vv 20-21 as well.

allows for us to presume that Jude’s audience already had everlasting life.

Third, as I will soon discuss in more detail, v 20 shows that Jude’s desire is for his audience to “build themselves up” in the faith that is already theirs. Unbelievers do not have faith in Christ, and that is their problem. Jude wants his readers to rely on what they already know, namely, that Jesus Christ is both the Author of eternal life and He will soon be returning physically.

In short, there is no reasonable explanation to view Jude’s audience as being in danger of eternal condemnation. Ample proof exists for his original audience as already being regenerate. This is a very important point to remember as we examine Jude’s instructions for this audience in vv 20-23.

### III. THE PURPOSE OF THE LETTER

While Jude had originally planned a correspondence celebrating, and perhaps detailing, his readers’ spiritual salvation, he now has no time for reminiscing (v 3). Already, this particular body of believers, possibly once in Jude’s own care, now faces an enemy from within their very ranks. The problem is significant: ungodly men, without bringing attention to themselves, have arisen from among the brethren and have achieved some form of influence over these believers.<sup>3</sup>

What is Jude’s charge against these enemies? Though he cites no specific prophecies, Jude first mentions that condemnation (*krima*) for these men has been declared beforehand (v 4). While he does not elaborate as to what this condemnation looks like, he is likely referring to his own

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<sup>3</sup>Jude and Peter use similar grammar and style in dealing with very similar predicaments. See Brad Doskocil, “The Epistle of Jude,” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin, vol. 2 (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 1241; Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter*, (Dallas: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2002), 136ff.

judgment, inspired by God, against them.<sup>4</sup> Jude then lists the various reasons for such a judgment: these men are ungodly; they turn the grace God gives into lewdness; and they deny the Lord Jesus Christ (v 4).<sup>5</sup> These men sensuously defile their own bodies (vv 8, 10, 19) and wickedly reject all in authority who disagree, including possibly the angels (vv 8-9). They use their tongues for evil, speaking ignorantly, grumbling, complaining and seeking self-advantage (v 16). Without the benefit of the Holy Spirit, they are destroying the unity of Jude's audience (v 19).

Adding to the seriousness of his charge, Jude spends the majority of his short letter either listing the vices of these men or comparing their behavior to past examples of Biblical wickedness. It is worth commenting on which examples Jude has chosen to represent the doom awaiting such men.

The first on Jude's list is an incident involving the Exodus generation as they left their former captors (v 5). Over a million of God's people were saved from the physical bondage of Pharaoh only to die in the wilderness due to unbelief. Curiously, this number includes the prophet and leader Moses himself, as well as his brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam. Only two from that generation escaped the punishment of dying in the wilderness without stepping foot into the Promised Land.<sup>6</sup> That Jude, of all possible OT examples of rebellion and unbelief, lists one that includes believers of such high standing, indicates

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<sup>4</sup> For various suggestions regarding which condemnation Jude is referring to here, see Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, ICC, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1902), 346; Bauckham, *Jude*, 36.

<sup>5</sup> Compare 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7.

<sup>6</sup> Numbers 14:26-35. Argument could be made that Jude is referring not to the Israelites themselves but rather to the unbelieving Egyptian army in pursuit, destroyed in Exod 14:28, since the adverbial function "afterwards" (*to deuterios*) isn't specific as to which time the adjective (functioning as an adjective with temporal force) is referring. However, Heb 3:12-19 reminds us that the exiting Israelites *did suffer because of unbelief*. This includes Moses (Num 20:12; Deut 34:4-5).

that disobedience of this magnitude is possible even for believers, including Jude’s own audience.<sup>7</sup>

The examples that follow include the fall of the angels (v 6), the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (v 7), the murderer Cain (v 11), the greedy Balaam (v 11), and the followers of Korah (v 11). The ungodly men are then compared by Jude to unstable clouds, dead trees, destructive waves of the ocean, and shooting stars (vv 12-13). In listing these examples, Jude illustrates both the destruction that comes from such behavior as well as the end result of choosing rebellion. All rebellion leads to judgment. None can escape it. The wandering Israelites lost the privilege of living in the Promised Land and died homeless. The angels lost their privilege of serving God and were banished forever. The deviants of Sodom and Gomorrah literally faced God’s burning vengeance and were destroyed. Cain was banished from his homeland. Balaam was later killed. Korah and his followers were destroyed.

Jude’s point in spending so much of his epistle linking the ungodly men to past examples of rebellion is to illustrate for his readers the seriousness of their predicament and to assure them that all behavior is judged (vv 14-15). This leads to the final section of the letter where only

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<sup>7</sup> See Daskocil, “Jude,” 1241; Moo simply says it was the Israelites, Douglas J. Moo, *2<sup>nd</sup> Peter, Jude*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 285. Davids agrees but states that it referred to “those who did not believe, that is, were not committed to him/did not trust him” and that “the issue is not intellectual belief but trust/commitment,” Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2006), 48. Walls and Anders say it was Israel but that not all were “true believers,” David Walls and Max Anders, *1st & 2nd Peter, I, II & III John, Jude*, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 262. Schreiner, after warning against a works righteousness, says a lack of perseverance means lack of salvation, Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, electronic ed., New American Commentary vol. 37, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2007), 447. Kistemaker writes that it referred to physical death for believers Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and the Epistle of Jude*, New Testament Commentary, ed. William Hendriksen (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001), 377.

then does Jude recommend a response from his listeners (vv 20-23). It is this response that will next be examined.

#### IV. THE EXHORTATION TO KEEP YOURSELVES IN THE LOVE OF GOD

In observing Jude's ending exhortation (vv 20-23), the first imperative, "keep" (*tērēsate*), in v 21 is of primary importance. The three participles translated as "building," "praying," and "looking" all modify "keep" as participles of means and answer for us the question, "How are we to keep ourselves in the love of God?"

Aorist imperatives may indicate a sense of urgency. In this particular context, the dangers of the ungodly men (vv 4, 8, 10, 12, 16, and 19) obviously warrant immediate action.<sup>8</sup>

As the New English Translation (NET) points out, vv 20 and 21 can be translated as one sentence (contra the NIV). Unfortunately, by translating *tērēsate* as "maintain," the NET Bible loses the morphological connection between Jude's use of *tēreō* or "keep" in vv 1 and 6 (two times), and v 20. Jude's original audience would have grasped it immediately, for just as he began his letter by reminding them that they are *kept* safe by God the Son (v 1), he concludes by giving them the admonition to *keep* themselves in that same love (v 20).<sup>9</sup> Sandwiched between is an example of how some angels didn't keep their proper domain (v 6) and thus are now kept for judgment. It is urgent that Jude's audience follow his instructions and keep themselves in God's love. Now this obviously means that if we do not keep His commandments we do not abide

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<sup>8</sup> While the context allows the label of ingressive aorist, stress should be placed on the unlikelihood of Jude expecting such action to cease.

<sup>9</sup> See Moo, *Jude*, 285. Moo sees four separate commands rather than one imperative delineated with three descriptions. For more on the imperative with three modifying clauses, see Davids, *Jude*, 92; Bauckham, *Jude*, 111; Walls and Anders, *Jude*, 266; J.P. Lange, *The Epistle General of Jude* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960), 30.

(remain) in His love. So while God’s love is always *available*, benefiting from it is not unconditional.<sup>10</sup>

## A. IN GOD’S LOVE

The expression “keep yourselves in God’s love” is an odd choice since the Lord and all NT writers taught eternal security. Once a person has everlasting life, he has it forever (e.g. John 6:35; 11:26; Rom 8:31-39). Notice how Jude does not instruct his readers to “keep [themselves] born again,” nor to “keep [themselves] justified.”

The issue here is the need for Jude’s audience to remain in the sphere of God’s love. This might refer to one’s position or to one’s experience. The latter must be in view since one cannot lose God’s love in terms of position. However, if a believer strays, he ceases to live in the sphere of God’s love and thus moves into the sphere of God’s wrath.

It is this particular sphere of God’s love, the sphere of His fellowship or friendship, that Jude is addressing. His audience has been presented with a choice: partake of the dangerous fellowship being offered by ungodly men, or remain in the safe fellowship offered by God to all believers.<sup>11</sup> Jude obviously expects his readers to choose God’s fellowship, since he has spent the majority of his letter describing how the characteristics of ungodly men warrant the promise of God’s judgment.

So how does one actually keep themselves in this love? Jude provides a three-tiered approach which we will now examine.

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<sup>10</sup> M.S. Mills, *The Life of Christ: A Study Guide to the Gospel Record*, electronic ed. (Dallas: 3E Ministries, 1999), John 15:9–13.

<sup>11</sup> Bauckham and Davids both point out the option of taking the “love” in Jude 21 as either a subjective genitive (God’s love for us) or an objective genitive (our love for God) (Bauckham, *Jude*, 113-15; Davids, *Jude*, 96). Both agree with seeing keeping in line with John 15:9. See also R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of The Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966), 646.



## B. BUILDING, PRAYING, AND LOOKING

Having seen Jude's main concern, that his audience actively keep themselves in God's love until Jesus returns, let us examine the participles Jude uses to elaborate on just how his audience can practically fulfill this command to "keep yourself in God's love." Jude's audience is to be busy "building," "praying," and "looking" as the way for them to sustain their fellowship with the Lord.

The first way they are to keep themselves in the love of God is to be actively "building" themselves up on their "most holy faith." The Louw-Nida lexicon lists *epoikodomeō* ("building") as meaning "to increase the potential of someone or something, with focus upon the process involved."<sup>12</sup> While the Greek word for "faith" (*pistis*) is often used to describe the means by which one receives eternal life, it is also used to refer to a general body of teaching.<sup>13</sup> In this particular case, the body of teaching would be the commands handed down by the apostles. This body of teaching, or *faith*, is the weapon Jude advises his audience to choose, not for offense but rather for defense. Interestingly, nowhere in Jude's epistle does he advocate for his readers to personally challenge the ungodly men. While the flock is to be protected from enemies both outside the fold and from within, Jude's chief concern does not seem to be a public refutation of the troublemakers. What Jude is teaching his audience first is that they are to shield themselves from both the teachings and behavior of the ungodly men among them. This is done by "building" (*epoikodomeō*) themselves up using the teachings handed down by the apostles. Jude is encouraging them to continue with what they were doing in v 3: contending earnestly for the apostles' doctrine.

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<sup>12</sup>Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 74.

<sup>13</sup>William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 820.



The second way they are to keep themselves in the love of God is to continue “praying in the Holy Spirit.” Jesus and His apostles commonly gave this command (Mark 12:36; John 4:23-24; Eph 6:18; Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 14:16). The command stands in contrast to those who were acting in a manner without regards to the Spirit (v 19). While the divisive persons were submitting their lives to whatever sensual whim enticed them, Jude points his readers to another way. That is, they should submit themselves, especially their prayers, to the desires of the Holy Spirit.<sup>14</sup>

The third way Jude’s audience could keep themselves in the love of God was to be anticipating or “looking for the mercy” of Jesus Christ. The prepositional phrase “unto eternal life” (*eis zōēn aiōnion*) is currently being interpreted in several ways. Moo states that the connection between “eternal life” and the rest of the verse is not clear and that while the eternal life could be seen as potentially being experienced *because* they keep themselves in the love of God, syntax makes this option less likely.<sup>15</sup> Bigg suggests that while it may possibly be a reference to the First Book of Enoch and that Christ Himself *is* the eternal life they anticipate seeing, difficulty still lies in determining the syntactical force for *eis*.<sup>16</sup> Schreiner points to the NIV’s translation “...wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life” as being the most accurate, and suggests that Jude conceived of eternal life as something given to believers at the end times.<sup>17</sup> Bauckham agrees, describing it as a future offering, the “resurrection life...the gift which Christ will bestow on the faithful Christians at the Parousia.”<sup>18</sup> Davids agrees as well, writing that “this is the type of mercy at the return of Jesus

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<sup>14</sup> Doskocil, “Jude,” 1246. For discussion on v 20 being a reference to *glos-solalia*, see Bauckham, *Jude*, 113 and Moo, *Jude*, 285 as they each interact with J. D. G. Dunn’s work *Jesus and the Spirit* (London: SCM, 1975).

<sup>15</sup> Moo, *Jude*, 285.

<sup>16</sup> Bigg, *Jude*, 340.

<sup>17</sup> Schreiner, *Jude*, 484.

<sup>18</sup> Bauckham, *Jude*, 114.

out of which he will grant eternal life (the life of the age to come) to his followers.”<sup>19</sup>

If such diversity of opinion exists among learned evangelical scholars concerning *when* believers receive eternal life, no wonder we find confusion in both the pulpits and the pews. It is true that a few passages, when mentioning eternal life, refer to it as a possible future reward (e.g., Matt 19:29; Gal 6:7-9). In those cases a richer experience of everlasting life is in view. However, there are scores of examples of eternal life being described as a present possession (John 3:36; 5:24; 6:47, 54; 10:28; 17:2; 1 John 3:15; 5:13) obtained upon faith in Christ. Thus, while eternal life can be possessed and enjoyed here and now, it will only be fully experienced and enjoyed in the eschaton (1 John 3:2). As believers, Jude’s audience had the life that is in Jesus Christ. Only they were not yet conformed to His image. This will take place at Christ’s return, and this is the mercy awaiting Jude’s audience (as opposed to the judgment awaiting the ungodly).<sup>20</sup> This anticipation for what was to come gave them impetus to carry on with Jude’s commands, thereby keeping themselves in fellowship with Christ.

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<sup>19</sup> Davids, *Jude*, 97.

<sup>20</sup> While Jude is juxtaposing judgment and mercy in order to contrast the ungodly with his audience, he still leaves room to mention in v 24 the judgment he expects his audience to face upon Christ’s return. The Judgment Seat of Christ or Bema (Rom 14:10; 2 Cor 5:10) is the reason for Jude’s audience to take care to remain in the love of God, for Jude wants to have them stand *faultless* and *with exceeding joy* before Christ, something which will not occur if they leave the love of God and engage with their ungodly counterparts. While we cannot lose our eternal life, we may find ourselves lacking in approval if continuing in a lackluster life. For more on the possibility of admonishment at the Bema, see Robert N. Wilkin, *Secure and Sure: Grasping the Promises of God* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2005), chapter 12; *Confident in Christ: Living by Faith Really Works* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), chapter 16; *The Road to Reward: Living Today in the Light of Tomorrow* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2003), chapter 5; Zane Hodges, “We Believe in: Rewards,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* vol. 4 no. 2 Autumn, 1991 (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1991): 100; Samuel L. Hoyt, “The Judgment Seat of Christ in Theological Perspective Part 1,” and “The Judgment Seat of Christ in Theological Perspective Part 2” *BibSac* vol. 137 no. 545 and vol. 137 no. 546 (January and April 1980).

## V. THE EXHORTATION TO HAVE CONCERN FOR OTHERS

Having thus supplied his readers with orders regarding their own welfare, Jude now directs their focus towards the safety of others. How should his audience regard those who are becoming victim to the hazards of the ungodly clique? Jude’s priority with such brethren is both preservation and restoration. A distinction should be seen between the two, at Jude’s own counsel, and a point of discussion will be made concerning why.

### A. HAVE COMPASSION ON SOME

The second imperative within the discourse unit of vv 20-23 focuses on the safety of others. Jude expects his audience to “have compassion” (*eleaō*) on some, while “making a distinction” (*dikrinomenoi*).<sup>21</sup> Just as the readers are the recipients of mercy, so too should they be merciful to others.<sup>22</sup> Jude does not give details concerning just how this compassion should be shown. Rather, it is to be seen as an attitude towards others. Likely, Jude is expecting his audience to help others under attack with the same set of instructions they have been given. He is expecting a proactive approach by his readers in response to the trouble being caused by the ungodly men. He wants them to mercifully protect other believers who are under the same attack as they are experiencing.

But what distinction is Jude asking his audience to make? This can be seen by first reminding ourselves of the context of his letter. We know that he is warning his readers of the dangers of certain men (v 4), men who carry an influence that, while unnoticed (v 4), still cause division (vv 8 and 19) and corrupt the local body (v 12). The

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<sup>21</sup>The Critical Text reads *dikrinomenous*, accusative plural, whereas the Majority Text reads *dikrinomenoi*, nominative plural. For details on the possibility of three classes of people rather than two (due to textual variations), see Moo, *Jude*, 286.

<sup>22</sup>Doskocil, “Jude,” 1246.

outcome of such a group attacking this church is that two kinds of victims naturally emerge: believers who are currently fighting the pressure to conform, and believers who have conformed to the pressure already. Men who seek to corrupt are viewed as dangerous and the reason for this is simple: it is possible for saints to be corrupted. Jude advises two forms of action to take, one for those who, like his audience, are suffering the assault of the ungodly men, and one for those who have already succumbed to the influence of those Jude has been warning about.

It is this second group that I now address.

## B. SAVE OTHERS WITH FEAR

Compassion is not to be limited to simply those who haven't yet been duped. Yet when Jude refers to the rescue of those who have *already* fallen under the influence of the ungodly, he chooses to supply stronger language. He expects this second group to be treated in a much different manner.

It is this second group that his readers should "save with fear," by pulling them "out of the fire." That this "fire" (*pur*) is referring to something besides hell is not obvious to all.<sup>23</sup> When referring to hell in v 7, Jude provided the noun, *fire*, with the adjective "eternal" (*aiōnios*) to function as a descriptive genitive. This left little room for doubt as to what Jude meant nor the duration of such torment. Likewise, when describing the future of fallen angels in v 6, he provides the predicative adjective "everlasting" (*aidios*) to the metaphor "chains." He uses "forever" (*aiōn*) and "eternal" (*aiōnios*) in vv 7 and 21 to specify the duration. The fact that he uses no such modifier here in v 23 suggests that Jude is using a metaphor for something

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<sup>23</sup>Walls and Anders see this second group as unsaved and in danger of eternal punishment (Walls and Anders, *Jude*, 267). Evangelicals Moo and Davids see them as Christians in danger of hell (Moo, *Jude*, 288; Davids, *Jude*, 101-103). Schreiner, like Bauckham, sees the danger as hell but only describes this second group as being "in the church" (Schreiner, *Jude*, 488; Bauckham, *Jude*, 115).

besides hell. If Jude is referring to fellow believers who are to be rescued from the fire, as the context implies, it would then be impossible that he is referring to the dangers of eternal damnation. Most likely, Jude is warning against temporal judgment (Luke 9:54; John 15:6; Heb 11:34), the kind which every believer faces when wandering outside the sphere of God’s love.<sup>24</sup> It is this temporal judgment that God often uses to bring wayward sheep back into the fold (1 Cor 11:30-32; 1 Tim 5:24; Heb 12:3-11; Jas 1:21, 5:19) and to use for the instruction of others (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Tim 1:9-20). Jude isn’t telling his readers to save this group from hell, but rather to save them from temporal judgment.

Caution or “fear” (*phobos*) is to be used when dealing with those who have, under the influence of ungodly men, caused their “garments” (*chitōn*) to be “defiled” (*spiloō*). If the believer attempting the rescue is not fearful of falling into the fire himself, he is much more susceptible to that fate. Compare Gal 6:1 where Paul limits the ministry of rescue to “you who are spiritual” and adds, “considering yourself lest you also be tempted.”

Jude is describing the Christian walk in the same way other NT writers often do—using the figure of wearing a particular set of clothes that can be either sparkling white (Matt 17:2; Rev 19:8) or incredibly filthy (Rev 17:4, 18:16). Believers who follow the way of the ungodly thereby corrupt their Christian walk, ruining their spiritual appearance. Admonishing a wayward brother is difficult but warranted (Matt 18:15-17; Luke 17:3; 1 Cor 5:9-11; 2 Thess 3:14-15; 1 Tim 5:20; Titus 3:10; Jas 5:19-20) and should be done with the utmost vigilance (1 Cor 10:12; Gal 6:1; 2 Pet 3:17).

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<sup>24</sup> If the second group included unbelievers, then they would be facing eternal separation from God above all else. But unbelievers can face God’s temporal wrath the same way believers can, and without any modifiers in v 23 to suggest otherwise, the fire being warned about here is temporal. For a discussion on the use of fire with regards to temporal judgment, see Wilkin, *Confident in Christ*, 155.

## VI. APPLYING JUDE'S LETTER TO OUR OWN LIVES

If Jude were certain that the evil men infiltrating his original audience would have no negative impact on the spiritual health of the congregation, he wouldn't have written this letter. We would have no inspired record of Jude's warnings and exhortations regarding such a group. Unfortunately, both Jude and the rest of the NT writers confirm that there is a very real danger accompanying people who use their tongues for evil, especially when such people situate themselves within a local assembly. This was the cause of Jude's letter, and this is the situation involving many church bodies today.

Although Jude spends the majority of his short epistle detailing the likes of the ungodly and the judgment which awaits them, he includes a series of instructions for his audience that carries application into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The believers he writes to are exhorted to keep themselves in the love of God by building themselves up on their faith, praying in the Spirit, and looking to the coming mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then, they are to turn their attention towards other believers within their midst, making a distinction between those who need compassion and those who require more careful attention. Care should be taken when dealing with this second group lest the rescuers fall into the fire and thereby experience God's temporal judgment.

It is from these specific entreaties that we as believers can apply Jude's letter to our own Christian walk. How healthy is our local church? Is the teaching Scripturally accurate? Are there those in leadership positions who act in or prescribe ungodly ways? Simply put, do any of our leaders potentially match the characteristics of Jude's antagonistic infiltrators?

Our ultimate hope is focused on seeing the risen Christ again and spending our lives forever with Him. This is

both our motivation to endure and our reason for taking our Christian walk seriously, since Christ will come with His Judgment Seat, ready to reward or chastise depending on our obedience.

But we are not to be so concerned about ourselves that we ignore the plight of believers around us. Our hearts should be concerned for others as well, both for those who resist the wiles of the ungodly as well as for those who yield to the flattery of deceptive men. There is a very real danger of God’s temporal judgment looming over His church, and this hazard should provide for us a sense of urgency in dealing with such matters. Our Heavenly Father is a God of love (1 John 4:19) yet a father nonetheless, and He may use temporal chastisement in the hopes of bringing wayward children back into fellowship (Heb 10:31; 12:6, 10). Rather than misunderstanding such warnings as a potential loss of everlasting life (which is impossible), let us hold fast to the Biblical understanding of these warnings: everlasting life lasts forever, and God desires our fellowship and the fellowship of those around us so that we might experience everlasting life more abundantly, as God intends for His children (John 10:10).