

“A Call To Persevere”

If you have ever seen the film, **“The Hiding Place”**, you will remember a scene that takes place immediately after the ten Boom family has been visited by their pastor. The ten Booms were devout Dutch Christians who were secretly risking their lives by making their home available as a hiding place for Jews who were trying to get out of Holland during the time of the Nazi occupation of their country. What astounded the ten Boom family was that their pastor was voicing strong Nazi sympathies and warned them against any acts of resistance. When he leaves, Corrie says something like, “I don’t understand how that man can claim to be a Christian!” Her father answers back, “Just because a mouse gets in the cookie jar, it doesn’t make him a cookie.”

I call this to your remembrance because Jude (apparently a brother of Jesus) spends much of his brief letter trying to warn vulnerable Christians to beware of certain false teachers who were making their presence felt in and around young churches. These false teachers

were apparently what we would call forerunners of a philosophical/religious movement call Gnosticism that would come to full-flower in the second century A.D. To explain the finer points of Gnosticism would take longer than the time available to us at this moment, but suffice to say that they claimed to have the real insiders' scoop on the secret teachings of Jesus, they appealed to Christians who wanted to be a cut above "common" Christians by joining an elite inner circle of spiritually enlightened Christians; and they perversely pushed the idea that if you became one of those in-the-know enlightened Christians, you could sin any way you want sexually because you were saved by grace and therefore your sins would no longer be held against you.

And what is weird is that twenty centuries later, particularly in the last twenty to thirty years, the church has been plagued by a resurgence of various forms of gnosticism. It is a classic case of the saying that "what is old is new again". As a matter of fact, if you will take a moment to skim through any current secular book club catalog and check out their "religious" or "spirituality" selections, you will find them almost exclusively comprised of what we would call "neo" (or

new) gnostic books. They won't always identify themselves with the label of "gnosticism" but they amount to a newly minted version of the same basic themes. Whether it's "The DaVinci Code", or "The Gospel According To Thomas" or "Misquoting Jesus", they all claim to give us the insider's scoop on what Jesus "really" taught; they appeal to the spiritual snob in us that may want to be at least one cut above the ordinary and unenlightened rabble sitting next to us at this very moment, and therefore, more than a few of them are ready to dismiss the "petty moralism" of the "Bible-thumpers" who are still locked-in to believing they should obey what the Bible teaches because it's "The Word of God" (smirk, smirk). You see, I wouldn't waste my time even mentioning these books, except that I know some lifelong Christians who have swallowed some of these books hook-line-and-sinker, and have subsequently either abandoned their faith or have done a permanent disconnect from the church. What they have done, in effect, is to jettison a lifetime of solid biblical teaching, as well as their rightful place in the Body of Christ, because they let one essentially false teacher over-rule the truth in which they used to be grounded.

And Jude is begging us to persevere and not be led astray by false teachers who gleefully contradict the timeless witness of the law, the prophets, the apostles, and of the Lord Jesus Christ. He says, “But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. They said to you, ‘In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires’. These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.”

How do we know that teachers of false doctrine do not have the Spirit? Not because we presume to judge their inner spiritual reality, but because what they are teaching flatly contradicts the long-held content of the Scriptures, which we have been taught were written by human authors “carried along by the Holy Spirit”. And we do not believe that the Holy Spirit today would contradict what the Holy Spirit taught the church in its historic past. God cannot lie. And his truth is the same yesterday, today, and forever. I think Jude’s word to us is, if in doubt, measure the new teaching we are hearing over against what the Scriptures teach, and in every case, trust the Word of God to be your unimpeachable source of truth.

And what is the antidote to the spiritually poisonous and divisive influences of false teachers? Jude says, “But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.” We can’t help but notice here that Jude wants each of us to be active participants in establishing our own spiritual and doctrinal stability. There is no hint here that we can be passive spectators hoping that someone else will produce growth in us. Jude says, “But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith...(you) Pray...(you) keep yourselves anchored in God’s continuing and fiercely committed love.” Christian faith and vitality is not something that can be produced for us by the perspiration of someone else’s efforts. We have to get actively engaged in the process of thinking and learning and praying and growing in our relationship with Jesus Christ and his truth. Otherwise, we will always be coasting on someone else’s spiritual coat tails, and that will leave us dangerously vulnerable to false teachers and bogus theology.

And I love how Eugene Peterson paraphrases this next part (verses 22 and 23); “Go easy on those who hesitate in the faith. Go after those who take the wrong way. Be tender with sinners, but not soft on sin. The sin itself stinks to high heaven..” That is a good and biblically appropriate balance. If someone is struggling with doubt, we don’t attack their uncertainties, we come alongside them with kindness and offer whatever help we can. If someone loses their spiritual bearings we don’t write them off with a critical evaluation, we seek them out and hope to gently walk them back home. We hate and grieve what sin does to human lives, but we are exquisitely tender with sinners because we know that our own sins make it so we could never pull rank on them. If you want to get into trouble spiritually, start pretending that your sins really aren’t that bad. If I start thinking I don’t need God’s grace or the forgiveness that comes through the cross, I may be an inch away from being lost forever.

And that’s why we need the reassurance of Jude’s closing words to remind us of God’s disposition toward us and his power to hold us fast. He writes, “(and now) To him who is able to keep you from falling, 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 forever more! Amen”. And to that we can only say, Amen.
Amen? Amen!**