

Survival Strategy for Apostate Times, Part 2

Scripture: Jude 20-21

Code: 65-13

And speaking of Jude, let's open our Bibles to this wonderful epistle and to the last section before the final benediction, verses 17 through 23...verses 17 through 23. Let me read it to you. "But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they were saying to you in the last time there shall be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts. These are the ones who cause divisions, or make separation, worldly minded, or sensual, 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. And have mercy on some who are doubting, save others, snatching them out of the fire and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh."

And with that paragraph just prior to his benediction, Jude instructs the beloved, that is believers, on how to survive in a time of apostasy. We know by now that this epistle is about apostasy and about apostates and we have had very careful teaching on how they infiltrate the church, something of their nature, something of their character, something of how they operate. And finally, starting in verse 17, he turns away from them to us and tells us how to survive and triumph in a time like this.

And obviously, in order to engage ourselves in this battle, we have to be able to be discerning. There is just one phrase I want to draw out by way of an introduction, in verse 20, and we'll go back and say more about it later, but it is this phrase, he says, "But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith." At the very heart of this matter of survival and triumph in a day of apostasy is being strong in the faith, the most holy faith. It's not talking about subjective faith, that is your believing, it is talking about objective faith, that is the content of the gospel. In order to survive in a time of apostasy, above all things it is absolutely essential that you be built up in your most holy faith, that you be strong in your understanding of Christian truth.

Now this issue which Jude addresses here is addressed in many places in Scripture and one of the enriching parts of Bible study for me, and I think for you as well, is to remember how much this very same warning and instruction is given throughout the rest of the New Testament. I want to just draw you to two passages as a sort of starting point. One is in 2 Corinthians chapter 11, 2 Corinthians chapter 11, and then one other one which I'll talk about awhile and then we'll get back to the text.

No book of the New Testament, for that matter no book of the Bible exists in isolation. Since they have one author, there is what we call the analogy of Scripture, Scripture is analogous to itself, that is

to say with one author it is absolutely inspired, inerrant and consistent and therefore it explains itself. The best explainer of the Bible is the Bible itself. And so inevitably in order to understand a given passage, we go to other passages as well. And in this case, 2 Corinthians chapter 11, and Paul writes to the Corinthians and says, "I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness, but indeed you are bearing with me." In other words, if he seems at some points redundant, if he seems at some points heavy handed, if he seems at some points repetitious, if he seems at some points intolerant, if he seems at some points excessively instructional or doctrinal, would you please bear with me. You have borne with me, will you please bear with me a little longer? Here is the reason, verse 2, "I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I betrothed you to one husband, that is to Christ, in order that I might present you to Him as a pure virgin." In other words, I...I have betrothed you to Christ and I want to make sure that when the wedding finally happens in the future, you are as faithful then as you were at the beginning. And my concern is in verse 3, "I am afraid lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of Christ...of devotion to Christ." The original text, simplicity and purity of Christ.

So Paul's concern is that having begun with a ground that is solid in the truth, people begin to wander away, sort of not on their own but having been led astray in their minds by the enemy and his deceivers. So in verse 4 he says if one comes and preaches another Jesus we haven't preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, different than the Holy Spirit, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you seem to bear this beautifully. In other words, you seem too tolerant. I wish that you were more intolerant of error. When somebody comes with another Jesus or another spirit or another gospel, you seem to bear it, you seem to endure it, you seem in some measure to accept it. This worries me because this is exactly how people are led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. And because I desire to present you to Christ as a pure virgin, without having committed adultery, that is to say bought in to some other gospel, some other Jesus, some other spirit, spiritual adultery, I have heavily laid upon you the burden of sound theology and holy living.

Now that is why we do this. That is why the Bible is so explicit about discernment. It is to protect. It's no different than your physical children. You warn them about all kinds of things that you believe will be a danger to them. You warn them about where they go and what they see and what they eat and with whom they associate with because you have brought them into the world, you understand the nature of their souls, you understand the tendency to drift. You've done your best to ground them and you want to do your best to protect that grounding. And this is no different in the spiritual realm. This is a pastor's heart. So if I belabor this issue a little bit of discernment, you understand that I share the same concerns that Paul did.

Now getting a bit more specific, turn to 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. First Thessalonians chapter 5 gets us to the specifics of being sure that you're not led astray. Verse 20, we'll just look at verse 20 through 22. "Do not despise," 1 Thessalonians 5:20, "Do not despise prophesying," or preaching is

really what this is saying. Those who have gifts to preach and teach. "Do not despise preaching, but...verse 21...examine everything carefully. Hold fast to that which is good and shun evil in every form." Those texts provide for us a broader base than just Jude. We are warned here to be discerning. Jude tells us if we're going to be protected in a time of apostasy from the subtleties of the deceivers that are all around us, we're going to have to be building ourselves up in the most holy faith and essentially he is saying what Paul is saying, we have to guard ourselves against deception. And here Paul says to do that you have to examine everything carefully. You cannot be gullible. You cannot accept everything. You cannot take everything in.

It was 1994, ten years ago, actually eleven years ago, when I wrote a book called *Reckless Faith....Reckless Faith*. You know, in those years I was writing, you know, maybe one book a year and one commentary or two and I wasn't writing as many books as they have me writing these days and books were, in a sense, to me in those years more like children, it was more like going through a year-long process to give birth to a book. And they were sort of capturing the essence of what I was thinking and feeling and believing and wanting to say. They sort of reflected a year or more of my heart wrapping itself around that kind of subject. And when I wrote *Reckless Faith* I was very impassioned about it because the subtitle is, "When the church loses its will to discern." And I was convinced that the church had lost its will to discern in 1994, I was convinced that evangelicals no longer cared about sorting truth from error, sorting out lies and deception, that they were gullible, that they literally could be led astray, that they were all embracing this idea of tolerance was coming in, it was coming in rapidly. We were going to have to accept everybody no matter what they believed. Nobody was going to be able to sit in judgment on anybody's belief or anybody's faith. Everybody had a right to his own convictions, etc., etc.

I was concerned, as was sort of mentor of mine, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones years before that when he said, "We could be seeing the end of evangelicalism as we know it." And he was writing several decades before 1994 and saying he could already see the death of evangelicalism. He could already see happening what Paul was fearful would happen and that was that people would depart from the simplicity and the purity of devotion to Christ because they would be led astray by the craftiness of Satan, even as Eve was, into another Jesus and another spirit and another message. He saw it decades before I noted it. But in 1994 I said that and so with great passion I produced that book and it had its little moment in the sun, as books tend to do, and it moved up the best-selling chart for a while and then I saw it sort of fall from there and it disappeared into the oblivion of dead books. And if you try to find one today, it's out of print.

Which sort of proves the point, doesn't it? The church has abandoned its interest in discernment and therefore abandoned its interest in any book that calls it not to abandon its interest and discernment. And so I think it may be time for me to write another book on even more severe treatment of this matter.

In the book I said, "The most serious problem in the Christian church was a lack of discernment which caused evangelicalism to be fighting for its very life." Some of you will remember the book. I...I opened the book by telling a story about traveling across America and ending up in a shack in Arkansas on the way looking for a quilt for Patricia, just because I love her and want to give her a gift. And we went into this ram shackled place through a screen door early in the summer and there was a very lovely toothless lady there to greet us and she was right out there in the hills of Arkansas. We were on a one..a two-lane road in the middle of nowhere and a little sign said "Quilts" and so I thought, "Well, we'll go there." And I'll never forget, she brought out a quilt that she had been working on and it was the ugliest thing I had ever seen in my life. It had no rhyme or reason, it had...it was a piece of everything that had ever happened in her life, every piece of cloth that had ever come across her vision was sewn in one four-square inch area of that quilt. So it was...I can't even describe it, it was indescribable. And all I could say was, "My, that is a quilt." And I said actually, I don't think it was the color I was looking for since it was no color at all and every color. I asked her if she had something other than that, and she had one a neighbor had made and it was beautiful and I bought it, it was blue. That made sense to me.

But while I was talking to her, her husband came in the room and we had a little bit of a conversation with her husband who was a very interesting guy. And he sat in this old chair in the living room and he piles of literature stacked all around the chair on all sides, piles of magazines, mailers, books, all kinds of stuff, videos and I began to sort through it just talking to him. His name was Johnny, so we had that in common. And he had everything from unity, Christian Science, the Mormons, the fundamentalists, the Roman Catholics, all this religious literature, Unitarians and everything. And I...I said, "You know, you've got an awful lot of different religious literature here." And he said, I'll never forget this line, he said, "And there's good in all of it...and there's good in all of it." And I realized she had quilted his theology. That quilt was a living tribute to his theology. There's not good in all of it, right? There's not good in all of it. There's evil in all of it except the truth. And that's how I began the book.

And then I began to talk about how evangelicalism was busy quilting itself in a morphous, non-descript eclectic syncretistic kind of perspective and disinterested in the main with being discerning. Wanting to be popular? Sure. Wanting to be academically acceptable? Sure. But discerning? Definitive? Doctrinal? Making distinctions? No. And I am always reminded, as the book of Acts in chapter 20 and verse 29 quotes the apostle Paul, "I know that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you not sparing the flock and from among your own selves men will arise speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I didn't cease to admonish each one with tears." Now Patricia said to me today, "How long have you been teaching Jude?" I can't remember exactly how long. And she said, "How many messages?" And I said, "I don't know, I think it's about 20." And then I was reminded just a few moments ago of this passage in which it says that Paul reminded them day

and night for a period of three years with tears about the encroachment of error.

I suppose you could, you know, beat it to death, but I'm not sure we're anywhere close to that in the time in which we live today. There is a serious lack of discernment and compounding that lack of discernment is a disinterest in discernment itself. And were I to approach a publisher today and say I'd like to write some kind of a book that we could sort of promote everywhere on the issue of discernment, it might be welcomed with massive amount of indifference. I'm not sure.

In Matthew 16 our Lord indicted the leaders of Israel for the utter absence of their ability to discern. The Pharisees, the Sadducees came up and they were testing Him, as always, asking Him to show them a sign from heaven. "But He answered and said to them," and this was really a very, very caustic rebuke. He says, "When it's evening you say it will be fair weather because the sky is red. And in the morning they'll be a storm today because the sky is red and threatening." They had their little sort of, I guess you could say, primitive ways of telling what was coming weather wise. A certain kind of sky indicated fair weather. A certain kind of sky at another time of day indicated threatening weather. And then He said to them, "Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky but can't discern the signs of the times?" And what He was saying was this. As primitive as your weather forecasting is, it's better than your theology. I don't know if you could come up with a more demeaning statement to the self-appointed theologians of Judaism than to say they were better weathermen than they were theologians because obviously their ability to tell the weather was extremely primitive. But they were better at that than their theology. And I would say the church is rapidly better at discerning the physical world than it is the spiritual. The church today is becoming better at discerning what's going on in the culture than it is the truth of God. So they are limited and lack discernment.

Let's for just a minute go back to 1 Thessalonians 5 and let me sort of just take that passage apart just a little bit. It says in verse 20, "Do not despise, do not belittle, do not downgrade *propheteia*, prophecies, preaching. That's going on today. I don't know if you know that. I mention it to you but it's going on in a wholesale level. Get rid of preaching. Probably the most...the newest popular writer in the Christian world today is a man named John Eldridge who has written a number of books who by his own admission stopped going to church years ago and had a great spiritual experience by not going to church. And now his church is to gather together with small group of his own friends. And if you follow his ecclesiology very far, there are many others who are saying similar things that he is saying. We've got to get away from the traditional church which is dominated by preaching. Well that's part of a lack of discernment. If you aren't sitting under somebody who can interpret the Scripture for you, you're not going to be able to discern. And so Paul warns us, "Don't despise *propheteias*, that is to say, don't despise the proclaiming of God's Word, the accurate interpretation of the divine will and purpose. Don't belittle it. Don't downgrade it. And that's what's going on today, preaching is being replaced by entertainment. Music dominates. Pastors are giving their insights and psychological messages. You know all of that.

But on the other hand, expose yourself to preaching but examine everything, *dokimazo*, test everything so as to determine its genuineness. It's like the noble Bereans who searched the Scripture to see if things were so. Examine everything, what is good, what is *kalos*, good in itself, true, genuine, right. Embrace it. Take possession of it and don't let go of it. On the other hand, evil in every *eidos*, every form, every sort, every kind. And evil, by the way, in a malignant sense. Shun it, push it away. And we've been saying all along that the worse form of evil is error, perversion of the true, spiritual lies because they're deadly.

Now sort of that background. It is critical that there be discernment. Why has this discernment disappeared? Why? Why is there such a lack of discernment? I'm going to give you five reasons why and then we'll jump back into Jude. Reason number one, because there's a weakening of doctrinal clarity and conviction. There is a weakening of doctrinal clarity and conviction. A cheap gospel, as it's called, easy believism, tolerance, unity, openness, there is a negative attitude toward being narrowed toward being doctrinal. There's even a negative attitude towards saying this is a true interpretation and that is not. It seems like everybody is entitled to his own spin on everything. The church has been invaded with liberalism, psychology, charismaticism, politicism. It's forced its way into the church and, of course, whenever error wants to find a place in the church, it has to find a way to get rid of dogmatism. The only way that error can be accepted in the church is if people are no longer going to hold a doctrinal standard. And so that's what happens. These forces that are outside the Bible demand acceptance, demand a place in the church and so they push dogmatism aside. The emphasis in the church then goes from preaching doctrine to the mind for the purpose of people giving greater glory to God through His Word, to inducing pleasant emotion, pleasant feeling, good feeling, fun, personal comfort, etc. Worship descends from singing truths about God, lyric-centered music full of theology, to that Seven-Eleven music, seven words repeated eleven times which is dominated by volume, rhythm, harmony, to induce warm, fuzzy and sensual moods. So you have a weakening of doctrinal clarity and conviction. People don't know what doctrines they believe, they're not clear on them and they don't have convictions about them.

Secondly, tied to that is a failure to be antithetical. I don't want to get too technical here, but a failure to be antithetical. Relativism prevails. It really does prevail in our world and it prevails even in the church. There is this sort of subjective attitude toward everything, a relativistic view. We want to accept everything and we don't understand how important it is to be antithetical. What I mean by antithetical is thesis/antithesis, there is true and there is false. There is what is right and there is what is wrong. And it's that clear. And the Bible is absolute. It is objective. It makes truth clear and it makes error clear. It confronts, it separates, it distinguishes truth from error. But that kind of black and white approach, that kind of antithetical approach, that is there is the truth and there is that which is antithetical to the truth is offensive to people and frankly it's becoming almost fanatical. You're almost viewed as a raving fanatic if you're very black and white. But the Bible is clearly that. If you look back at Scripture, the Garden of Eden had two trees, one allowed and one forbidden. Destiny, two places

to go, one heaven, one hell, only two ways, God's way and everybody else's way. People are either saved or lost, they either belong to God's people or the world. They either come into salvation through Christ or they do not. There is Mount Gerizim, the mount of blessing, Ebal, the mount of cursing. There's the narrow way and the broad way, eternal life, eternal destruction. All of those outside of...all of those around us, I should say, are either for us or against us, Jesus said there is life and death, truth and falsehood, good and bad, light and darkness, kingdom of God, kingdom of Satan, love and hate, spiritual wisdom, the wisdom of the world, etc., etc. The Bible is always very black and white. Even in the Old Testament the Israelites were taught clean and unclean distinctions. All of life was antithetical. There was God's way and there was any other way. We've lost that perspective on truth and reality.

Third contributor to this drift is what I like to call preoccupation with image, as a key to evangelism...preoccupation with image as a key to evangelism. It's about style, it's about generating an image that makes you popular with people. It's about, according to James 4:4, friendship with the world, friendship with the world...trying to make friends of the world and James wrote, "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God. Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." That ought to bring down the whole movement. You want to be a friend of the world, you're going to be God's enemy. You have to be. In order to be a friend of God, you have to be the enemy of the world. You can't adapt the culture. Today, this preoccupation with image becomes the key to evangelism, to somehow make a friend of the world.

Now there's a fourth contributor, and I'm giving you a brief look at these. If you have a copy of that book around, you can get a lot more detail than this. But the fourth one is a failure to properly interpret the Scripture....a failure to properly interpret the Scripture. We are told in the Bible to study to show ourselves approved unto God, or be diligent to be approved by God, a workman that need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth. We're told to be like the noble Bereans, in Acts 17:11, who searched the Scripture to see if these things were so. People move into error not by design, not motivated to move into error. They move into error because of laziness, because of carelessness, because of indifference, because of lack of conviction regarding Scripture. There is a failure to properly interpret the Scripture. We're going to see that next week when we look back at the Pharisees and the scribes, the final statement Jesus makes about them is that they have discarded the key of knowledge. And the key of knowledge is proper interpretation. If you want to know what the Scripture means, you have to interpret it right. And we have a very indifferent church today with regard to biblical interpretation in many cases.

So, you're looking at reasons why there is a diminished discernment in the church. It's because of a lack of doctrinal clarity and conviction. It's because of a failure to understand that things are objective and absolute. It's because of a pre-occupation with image as somehow the key to evangelism, making friends with the world. And the disinterest in interpreting the Scripture properly.

I would even throw in a fifth and that would be a failure to discipline in the church...a failure to discipline in the church. You say, "What is that problem?" That problem is simply this, the church accumulates heretics and the church accumulates sinners who have no real insight into the Scripture. And as the church accumulates the unregenerate and those who teach and believe wrongly, it dulls hopelessly the edge of discernment. We make those in error and sin feel comfortable and if we're committed to doing that, we can't say anything that's going to offend them.

And then one last contributor, spiritual immaturity...spiritual immaturity. A superficial understanding of Scripture, a weak grasp of sound doctrine, a deficient view of God is the manifestation of spiritual immaturity. Discernment belongs to the mature. That's Hebrews 5. The actual application of this is to unbelievers, but certainly the principle is the same. Hebrews 5:12, "Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God. You have come to need milk and no solid food, for everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the Word of righteousness for he is a babe, but solid food is for the mature who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil." It's the mature who have discernment. I mean, that's just true in a human sense, isn't it? We say that about children, they lack discernment. They don't make good decisions. That's why parents were invented. Spiritual discernment, critical...critical.

And all of these elements that I've given you briefly are forces that work against it. Now let's go back to Jude. Jude then says, at the heart of being able to survive in a time of apostasy is building yourselves up on your most holy faith. That's critical, as we noted in verse 20.

Now let's go back and pick up our outline from last time. If we are to survive, there's four necessary elements. Number one, remember...remember. Verse 17, "But you, beloved, ought to remember and to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ that they were saying to you, in the last time there shall be mockers following after their own ungodly lusts. These are the ones who cause divisions, or makes separations, worldly minded or sensual, devoid of the Spirit."

And the first thing he says is if you're going to survive, remember...remember that the Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ said this would happen. And by the way, verse 18 is a quote from 2 Peter 3:3. Peter was one of the Apostles and the one that He uses as an illustration, although it isn't just an Apostle of our Lord Jesus who prophesied this, THE Apostles all did and He just quotes as an illustration from Peter's epistle written earlier, 2 Peter 3:3.

The point is this, when you see apostasy around you, don't be surprised as if something has happened to upset God's plan, as if God has been dethroned, as if things aren't working out the way

God intended them to, this was predicted. You understand that's very, very important that the Scripture predicts this because this is, apart from a prediction, very hard to understand. It would almost seem like all the efforts of God and Christ, all the efforts of the Holy Spirit in the founding of the church had gone awry and gone awry very early as the church began to disintegrate in the first century. So that by the end of the century you have those seven letters to the churches in the book of Revelation, chapters 2 and 3, five of the churches have already defected from the truth from one degree or another, and it's all downhill from there. And one would say, "Well this is a horrible thing, whatever the Lord intended to accomplish He was unable to accomplish except for the fact that you will remember that the prophet said this would happen. And it is inevitable because whatever it is that God designs to do with His truth, Satan is going to design to attack with his lies and deception and he is going to have the measure of success which God permits him to have. And so we are not surprised that these people, these false leaders come and mock the truth, following their ungodly lusts, they separate themselves as if they are higher than everybody else, truthfully they are sensual rather than spiritual and devoid of the Holy Spirit. They're just like those Pharisees we saw about this morning who have no change on the inside.

So the first response then to the surrounding world of apostates is to remember that the Apostles said they were coming and they would be discernable because of these characteristics. They separate themselves, elevate themselves, appear to be holier than everybody else. They are in fact not spiritual but sensual and they do not know God or possess His Spirit. Rather they are void of the Spirit.

Second thing, first to remember the words of the Apostles that said it would come, to remain is number two...to remain. To remember the words of the Apostles and to remain in the disciplines of sanctification. To remain in the disciplines of sanctification. This is a very, very important element. To protect yourself from being led astray, to sustain yourself in the process of sanctification, to maintain your usefulness there are some basic disciplines to be pursued. And so in verse 20, "But you, beloved," as he said in verse 17, the same thing, "But you, beloved," and here come four commands, four commands. Three of them are actually participles with imperative force, the other is an imperative verb.

The first command, and, of course as I said, the foundational one is building yourselves up on your most holy faith. This is how you protect yourself. This is how you resist. This is how you protect the truth. This is how you preserve the truth. This is how you fight the battle, you become doctrinally strong, building yourselves up on your most holy faith. This verb, by the way, edifying yourself, or building yourself up, refers to a metaphorical building, obviously, to spiritual development, spiritual progress, spiritual growth. And it calls the church back to the priority of sound doctrine, the priority of the truth. Most holy faith is objective. It can't be subjective. It can't be your personal faith because your personal faith isn't most holy. Would you agree with that? Your personal faith is a mixture. But the truth is the most holy faith. That is to say that truth which comes from God. That truth which

comes from God. It is His holy truth. And so we are called then to building ourselves up on the foundation of our most holy faith.

Now this basically comes down to studying the Word of God and studying it with a view toward obedience, I guess you could say learning and applying the Word of God. Back to Acts 20, and this is so very basic and I know many of you may know this, but to many others of you, this will be new. Listen to Acts 20:32. That twentieth chapter of Acts is sort of a...sort of a summation of all Paul's teaching to the church in his epistles, and in verse 32 he says, "I commend you to God and to the Word of His grace which is able to build you up." It is the Word that builds you up. And so if you're going to build yourself up, you must do so by means of the Word. It is the Word that builds us up.

First Peter is another passage that bears on this. "Putting aside all malice and all guile," 1 Peter 2:1, "and hypocrisy and all slander, like newborn babes long for the pure milk of the Word that by it you may grow." By it you may grow. This is, as you well know if you're a student of Scripture at all, this is the repeated emphasis to edification through the study of the Word of God and its faithful application. There are people who study it and don't apply it, and then it becomes a hardening agent.

First Corinthians 14:26, "Let all things be done for edification...for edification." You teach for edification. You give a revelation from God for edification. You interpret a language for edification. You have a Psalm or a song for edification. Everything the church does is designed for building up. The leaders of the church, Ephesians 4 and verse 11, "He gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers for the building up of the saints." And what do apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers do? They teach and preach the Word of God which builds you up. There is no other agency, no other means to do that. That is the tool that God has given us for our own spiritual development.

In Colossians 2, "As you receive Christ Jesus...verse 6...walk in Him, firmly rooted and built up in Him and established in your faith just as you were instructed." Established in that faith which has become personal to you.

And so, this is the bottom line in all spiritual development. One other passage that we looked at in 1 John as a reminder a few months ago, 1 John 2. It wouldn't be possible to cover this point without referring to it. First John 2:12, "I'm writing to you, little children, cause your sins are forgiven for His namesake." Okay? We are all like little children, in one sense, our sins have been forgiven. Then he sorts us out into three groups of gradual maturity, "I'm writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I'm writing to you, young men, because you've overcome the evil one. I've written to you, children, because you know the Father. I've written to you, fathers, because you know Him who is from the beginning. I've written to you, young men, because you're strong, the Word of God abides in you and you have overcome the evil one." There are three stages of spiritual development: little children, young men and fathers.

Little children know God, that's about the extent of what they know, not much else. Young men are strong, the Word of God abides in them and they've overcome the evil one because the evil one is primarily a deceiver. Spiritual fathers then go beyond just knowing the Word, and they begin to know God in an intimate way because of their exposure to Him through His Word. So there are three levels of spiritual growth and it all depends upon the learning and applying of the Word of God. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God," writes the Apostle Paul to Timothy, "and it is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, training and righteousness that the man of God may be perfect, equipped for every good work." You can't get through the sanctification process without Scripture. I might just say at this point, one of the things, of course, that we try to convey to these pastors when they're here like this week or any other time is that we're not talking about giving people your ideas, telling stories and punctuating them with Bible verses. And that's what I did for one solid day, the first day was to show them that, the unintended consequences of a failure to exposit the Scripture. We're not talking about just proof texting your ideas, we're not talking about a minimal understanding of Scripture, we're talking about plummeting into the Scripture to perceive the deep things of God. And so, the New Testament calls us repeatedly to this discipline of the study of the Word of God and understanding and grasping its deep and profound truths so that they may be applied to our lives.

So the first thing that is necessary if you want to remain in the progress of sanctification in the midst of apostasy is to be building yourself up in your most holy faith. You do everything you can to be in a place where you are being edified by the Word of God through the preaching and the teaching and the resources that are provided by your church and in every other area and by the community of God's people, the body of Christ as well as your own personal study and the work of the Spirit in the Word when you learn it yourself.

Second, along with this comes praying in the Holy Spirit...praying in the Holy Spirit. Building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit. This means that while I'm learning, it doesn't replace my dependence on God. Dependence is always on God. What does it mean "praying in the Holy Spirit?" There are some people who would jump on this and say it means speaking in tongues. It doesn't mean that at all. It doesn't have anything to do with that. What is it to pray in the Holy Spirit? It simply means to pray consistent with the Spirit's will, to pray consistently with the Spirit's will. To pray yielded to the Holy Spirit.

Look at Romans 8, it explains the meaning of this. This is a very, very rich passage of Scripture, Romans chapter 8. We often quote verse 28, but the two verses that come before set it up. Romans 8:26, it says, "The Holy Spirit helps our weakness for...the middle of verse 26...we don't know how to pray as we should." We don't know how to pray as we should. What does that mean? Well, first place, I don't know what God wants. I know He wants righteousness and not sin. I know He wants to be honored and not dishonored, I know that. But when it comes to the issues of life, I don't know how God wants me to go. I don't know what His purposes over here, over there, I don't know what His will

about this matter or that matter is, we don't know how to pray as we should. We don't know because we don't know the future. We don't know what's coming. We can't interpret the issues of life. We don't know how to pray as we should. But the Holy Spirit intercedes for us. This is an amazing reality. The Holy Spirit who lives within us carries on constant intercession for us. And then it says, "With groanings too deep for words...with groanings too deep for words."

The Holy Spirit groans within us. The Holy Spirit, as it were, expresses a certain pain, a certain agony, a certain concern, a certain passion, a certain sympathy toward God on our behalf. And it's not in words. There are again charismatic people who think this is speaking in tongues. Listen, this doesn't say we speak words, it says the Spirit speaks but He doesn't speak words He speaks in groanings too deep for words. This isn't us talking gibberish, this is the Spirit of God passionately interceding for us before God the Father with groanings that the Father understands and there are no words required. And verse 27 says, "He who searches the hearts," that's God, Father, "knows the mind of the Spirit because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."

Here's the point. The Spirit's praying for you all the time. You know, we have an advocate in heaven, Jesus Christ our High Priest, who intercedes for us in heaven. We have also an advocate and an intercessor living in us, your body's the temple of the Holy Spirit. Your whole lifelong as a Christian, the Spirit of God intercedes before God on your behalf and the Spirit does so with compassion and sympathy and empathy and concern for you. And He goes to the throne of God in intertrinitarian communication that has no words. But the Father understands perfectly the mind of the Spirit because they are one and the Father knows that the Spirit intercedes according to His will. So the Holy Spirit is before God all the time in perfect harmony with God's will. And that's why verse 28 is true, "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

So what does it mean the Holy Spirit is praying for us like that, what does it mean to pray in the Spirit? It simply means this, if you're praying in the Spirit, you're praying consistently with the will of God. It's the same as saying, "Pray in Jesus' name." What does "pray in Jesus' name" mean? It doesn't mean tack Jesus' name on the end and that just sort of sanctifies everything and gets you whatever you ask for. Praying in Jesus' name means praying consistently with His will. If you ask anything in My name, the Father will hear it and do it, John 14 says. That is anything consistent with who I am and what I wish. Praying in the Spirit is simply lining up with the will of God so that on the one hand I am imbibing the Word of God, I'm taking it in, on the other hand, my whole life is just laid before God with this overarching prayer which is the driving force in my life and it is simply this, "Lord, do what You will...do what pleases You." I want my prayers to be consistent with the Holy Spirit's prayers. Praying in the Spirit, praying yielded to the Holy Spirit, praying that the will of the Father and the will of the Spirit and the will of the Son be done, praying consistently with God's will. And there is then a yieldedness to the Spirit of God. It's as if we rest on His will and His power. So on the one hand we're called to this discipline of study. On the other hand, we're called to this discipline of

submission.

And then there's a third necessary element in remaining and it is this, keep yourselves in the love of God...keep yourselves in the love of God. This verb is not a participle but it is an imperative. And in a sense it could be seen as sort of the heart of this as if all the other participles surround it and really it works that way. Building yourselves up, praying in the Holy Spirit, and even the fourth one, waiting...waiting for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ to come in the future. They all sort of, in a sense, surround the main idea of keeping yourself in the love of God.

What does this mean, keeping, or keep yourselves in the love of God? It means to stay in the sphere of God's love. You say, "But wait a minute, nothing can separate me from the love of God in Christ, nothing, Romans 8 says, nothing can." Well he's not talking about keeping yourselves saved, he's not saying, "Stay saved...don't get yourself in a position where God is all of a sudden going to hate you." We know he's not saying that because verse 24 says, "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy." And verse 1 says you are called, you are beloved, and you are kept. He begins with our security, he ends with our security. He's not here questioning our security and telling us to stay saved. It's true, Romans 8:28 all the way down to the end of the chapter says nothing is ever going to separate us from His love.

Well what in the world is he talking about here, keep yourselves in the love of God? He simply means this, keep yourself in the place where you experience the blessing that God's love brings. Don't get on the bad side of God, is what he means. I mean, you understand that as a parent, I think. You know what it is for your children to keep themselves in the place where they enjoy the fullness of your love, right? It means don't get yourself in a position where you're going to feel His wrath, His chastening, His punishment. In John 15, I think, you have an illustration that should clarify this. John 15:9 and 10, it says this, "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have loved you. Abide in My love." What do You mean abide in My love? "If you keep My commandments you will abide in My love." I kept My Father's commandments now I abide in His love.

What does it mean to keep yourself in the love of God? It means to keep yourself obedient. And when you remain obedient, you will enjoy all the fullness of God's love. I always remember that as an "O," big O. That's the circle where God's love comes down with all its blessings and it represents obedience. As long as I live in obedience, I will enjoy the full shower of God's love and blessing. As soon as I become disobedient, I step out of that place of blessing into the place of discipline. I find myself then in Hebrews, don't I, in chapter 12 where we read about the discipline of the Lord, He scourges every son whom He receives. I would rather be in the place of blessing than the place of discipline, wouldn't you? Do you want to survive? Grow up in your understanding of the Word? Submit yourself to the will of God, that is praying in the Holy Spirit, as it were, submitting to whatever it is that the Spirit of God wants to do and to His leadership and direction in your life, which, of course, always connects perfectly with the Word. And stay in the place of obedience. Stay in the sphere

where love is poured out even in the midst of apostasy.

And there's a fourth element and the fourth element is this, waiting anxiously, verse 21, for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. Waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.

It simply means live in the light of the return of Christ. Live in the light of eternity. Live in the light of the future. Live in eager anticipation of the Lord's return. Wait anxiously for Christ to come. Set your affections on that. First Thessalonians verse 10 describes the Thessalonians as those who were eager to wait for His Son from heaven, to love His appearing. John said, "This is a purifying hope." This is a hope that purifies your life when you know He's coming and you're eager to see Him and to give an account for your life. Paul writes in Titus 2:13, "Looking for the blessed hope in the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Christ Jesus." And when we do that, it instructs us to deny ungodliness, worldly desires, to live sensibly, righteously and godly in this present age. Live in the light of Christ's return and your rewards and you're seeing Him face to face and hearing, "Well done."

The verb here, waiting anxiously, *prosdexomai* means that, to wait with great expectancy. Literally living your whole life eager for the Lord to come, rather than saying, "Boy, I hope the Lord doesn't come next Tuesday when I've planned to do this." "Hope the Lord doesn't come when I'm doing this." "I hope the Lord doesn't come until I've gone through this little scheme that I'm working here," in some level of dishonesty or unfaithfulness or whatever. "I hope the Lord doesn't come." You ought to live every moment ready for Him to come at any moment and never to be ashamed were He to appear at any second in your life.

So, we are called then to this discipline, a discipline of building ourselves up in the most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, that is always and ever our prayers rise submitted to the will of the Spirit. Keeping ourselves in the love of God, that is staying in the place of obedience to His commandments. And waiting expectantly and eagerly and always ready for that final mercy. I love that, that final mercy of all mercies, the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that brings us eternal life. That's a unique expression to describe His coming. We receive mercy at salvation, Ephesians 2:4. His great mercy saved us. And now His mercies are new every morning, Lamentations 3. And in Jude 2 we learn that His mercies are multiplied to us, "May mercy, peace and love be multiplied to you." But Jude isn't thinking of a past mercy or a present mercy, he is thinking of the greatest mercy of all, the most undeserved mercy, that is eternal life in all its fullness. That is the mercy of all mercies. We understand that, don't we? You don't deserve to go to heaven, do you? Neither do I. That is the ultimate mercy. Paul writes in this first chapter in the first letter to Timothy, "It's a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am foremost and yet for this reason I found mercy." And what was that mercy? That mercy was that I would receive eternal life. And that's why he says, "To the King, eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen." Bursts into a doxology when he thinks about that

final and eternal mercy. It is mercy that you are forgiven and justified. It is mercy that you are being sanctified. But the ultimate mercy is His mercy to glorify you. That's why Psalm 138 verse 8 says, "His mercy endures...how long?...forever." Our glorification is the final mercy.

And so, we live our whole lives like this. We live our whole lives, as it were, an island in a sea of apostasy, strengthened, secure, protected, useful because we are built up in the faith, praying in the Spirit, obedient to God and therefore in the circle where His love pours out blessing upon blessing, and we live in the light of His return and our eternal life, our final mercy. These are the core disciplines of Christian living...Bible study, prayer, obedience, and hope. To this we are called in this world.

Well, we'll have to wrap it up next time. The third point in my little outline, I'll give it to you and tell you about it next week, remember, remain and reach out. Have mercy on some who are doubting and save others, snatching them out of the fire. In the midst of this apostasy we are, in a sense, an island in a sea of deception, but we can't be isolated. And we'll look at that next time and then that glorious benediction.

Father, we thank You for our time this evening. It is just such a treat week in and week out to dig into Your Word and it never ever disappoints, never. In fact, we always, always feel like we just barely scratched the surface of its richness. We thank You that You've given a path to us to follow. You've given us a survival system, Your word, prayer, obedience and hope. And all these things become the elements of our purification. The Word prunes and purges and purifies us. Prayer of necessity sanctifies us as we live our whole lives conscious of Your presence we are thereby living, as it were, in the Holy of Holies and aware of the slightest iniquity. And as we pursue obedience we are protected and oh how important it is that we should love Your appearing, we should love the fact of Your eternal life, look forward to what is to come and knowing as John said, "Whoever has this hope purifies himself." So, Lord, this is what You require of us if we are not just to survive but to triumph over all that goes wrong around us. Help us to be faithful to remain, to remain in the disciplines that You've laid out for us. And we thank You for what You will do in us and through us to Your glory, in Christ's name. Amen

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