

Sustaining Our Faith

I don't know how Ericka does it," said Kiyana.

"Does what?" asked Rozina.

"Get by like she does. And it doesn't even seem to bother her that Marcel left her practically destitute, with three small children, and under shameful circumstances," said Kiyana.

More than five years ago Marcel professed his love for his younger office coworker and refused any counseling or intervention and couldn't "take the ongoing anguish any longer but wanted to be happy." So, Marcel moved out of his home and marriage of eight years."

Ericka was devastated. She took all of her broken pieces to the Lord and believed, hoped, prayed, He would make her whole. And that is exactly what God had done! She had thought about giving up when times were dark, but God's love had been a constant balm—healing, soothing, nurturing, strengthening her.

Ericka had wrapped herself so tightly around the Lord during this time of turmoil in her life, and it seemed her faith had grown stronger. She had become stronger.

"Sisters, do you need help with these tables?" Ericka asked Kiyana and Rozina. The two were attacking leftover scraps of construction paper and other assorted arts and crafts materials left from the young girls' breakfast and fun day at the church.

"Yes, Sister Ericka," Rozina said, "We could use some help. You are just such a blessing."

1. What are some life situations that have tested and tried your faith?

2. Who are some of the examples in Scripture that most inspire you to persevere in challenging times?

3. What are some ways you've tried to keep your own faith strong? How well have these worked for you?

Keep Yourselves

Jude 17-23, KJV

17 But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ;

18 How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.

19 These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.

20 But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost,

21 Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

22 And of some have compassion, making a difference:

23 And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

Jude 17-23, NIV

¹⁷But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold.

¹⁸They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." ¹⁹These are the people who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.

²⁰But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

²²Be merciful to those who doubt; ²³save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

Prior to verses 17-19, Jude reminded his audience that long ago, the people of Israel had to deal with those "who did not believe" (vs. 5) in their midst. He linked the current "scoffers" (vs. 18) to those who followed "the way of Cain" (vs. 11) and rebelled against God like Korah did during the Exodus (Exod. 16). In fact, the apostles had already predicted that divisive people would come, and Jude says such people had slipped into their churches unnoticed. Jude was concerned that his audience would

give in to the teaching and lifestyle of these unbelievers.

Jude told the people that while these teachers may look like Christians, they were not the real deal. In reality, they were worldly people “who do not have the Spirit” (vs. 19), meaning they are not true followers of Christ. This reminder warns Christians to disbelieve teaching that is contrary to the faith that was delivered to them. These false teachers would “divide” the congregations because they followed their own desires and not the ways of God.

In verses 20-21, Jude encourages his readers to live in a way very different from the mockers. Their goal is to “keep [themselves] in God’s love” (vs. 21). This expression is similar to Jesus’ words to His disciples in John 15:9-10: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love.” Jude is likely also encouraging his audience to “remain” in God’s love by keeping his commandments.

Jude does not expect his readers to accomplish this by merely human effort and force of will. Jesus told His disciples in John 15 that they would produce fruit if they remained in Him, the true vine (vss. 4-5). Likewise, Jude says his readers will be sustained and strengthened in their work by “building [themselves] up in [their] most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit” (vs. 20). Jude calls them to delve deeply into the true faith rooted in the Scriptures and the teaching of the apostles and to pray in accordance with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Finally, Jude fixes his audience’s gaze on their ultimate goal: the coming of Christ that will bring them into life eternal. By focusing on Jesus’ coming, they will find motivation to cling to true teaching and God’s love in the midst of deceptive and immoral people.

Verses 22-23 bring the letter full circle to summarize how the people were to engage compassionately with those led astray by scoffers. They were to carefully strive to persuade people who were sympathetic to false teaching. Jude encouraged the believers to persuade two

categories of people.

First, they were to have “compassion” (vs. 22, KJV) for those who were sympathetic to false teachers. By being merciful, they should seek to make a “difference” in their lives by helping them to understand the holy faith.

Second, the beloved is to strive to “save” those who are more indoctrinated in false teaching by “snatching them from the fire” of judgment. Nevertheless, Christians must have “fear” or carefulness when interacting with proponents of false teaching to avoid being persuaded to join the scoffer’s side.

Christians must contend for the faith by putting their trust in Jesus and helping others to put their trust in Him. He is the only hope for those who are being led astray, and believers must point wayward people to Him.

4. *What are the warnings found in verses 17-19?*

5. *What are the three ways Christians keep themselves in the love of God?*

6. *How should Christians interact with false teachers and mockers?*

God Keeps You

Jude 24-25, KJV

24 Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,

25 To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

Jude 24-25, NIV

²⁴To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— ²⁵to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Verses 24-25 are a final assurance and doxology. These

two aspects of the end of this book serve as a perfect conclusion to a letter filled with warning and admonition. It would be easy for Jude's audience to become overburdened with the exhortation to watch out for false teachers and keep themselves in the love of God. If the beloved is not careful, they may think that the power to obey God comes from within rather than coming from God alone. Therefore, Jude is sure to summarize his letter with an ending filled with hope.

Verse 24 reminds believers that God is their final assurance. Jude's exhortation to "keep" yourselves fits seamlessly with the reminder that God is the one who has the power to keep them. Jude's audience must remember that the key to keeping themselves is to keep themselves in the one who has the power to keep them. Basically, the only work that they do in keeping themselves is empowered by God's grace that keeps them. Paul reiterates the same truth when he writes, "I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Cor. 15:10, KJV).

There is a forward-looking hope and the assurance that God will keep them. According to Jude, Christians must be careful to watch out for false teachings that lead to ungodly living. Yet, God will ensure Christians remain steady, so they might be presented on that final day as faultless before the presence of His glory. God's power to present as faultless comes only through the Savior Jesus Christ who shed His precious blood for all who trust Him. In this way, the believer can have an assurance that he will stand with "great joy" before God on that final day.

The greatest work Christians can do to sustain their faith is to put their trust in Christ.

7. Who has the power to keep Christians from stumbling?

8. What will Christians experience in God's presence?

9. What attributes of God are listed in verses 24-25?

When People Bring You Down

Jude writes about scoffers who will come in among the church members and create division among them. Maybe you can think of some situations like that today, when the church becomes divided over different doctrinal interpretations or various stands on social or political issues.

What do we do in those types of situations? Should we confront the people involved? Should we leave that fellowship and find another one?

Jude's advice focuses first on what we need to do for ourselves: remember that this has been prophesied, and we must build up our faith, particularly with prayer and patient endurance. But Jude also wants us to care about others who are being misled by destructive people and their teaching. He encourages us to try to save them while remaining careful not to be led astray ourselves. It's too easy to follow the crowd, especially when the crowd is large.

Jude doesn't suggest this is a problem we can solve, and we know historically this has always been an issue in the church. Rather than being discouraged about that, we can take care of our own responsibilities and look forward to the day when Jesus will sort it all out for good. Our task is to keep ourselves in God's love and be part of the solution, not part of the problem.

10. *Have you felt discouraged by the mockery of other people's convictions we sometimes see in the church, not only out in the world?*

11. *How can individual Christians and church leaders best manage these types of issues?*

12. *Give some examples of how you would approach someone whom you believe is being led astray by false teaching or un-Christlike behavior.*

How Prepared Are You?

The world is filled with those who don't believe in Jesus and even laugh at believing in Him. Even those who believe may be drawn away to false teachings that compromise biblical truths to accommodate society. Holding to the Savior can, as Jude says, "keep [us] from stumbling" and "present [us] before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy" (Jude 25).

► *Finish these sentences:*

When my faith is laughed at, I will_____.

When someone I know believes false teachings, I will_____.

KEY VERSES

But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

—Jude 20-21, KJV

But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying 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.

—Jude 20-21, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of March 4 through March 10

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. James 1:2-12—The Testing of Faith Produces Endurance.

Tues. James 1:13-18—The Sources of Temptations.

Wed. Psalm 139:1-12—God Has Searched and Known Us.

Thurs. Psalm 139:13-18, 23-24—God Knows All Things.

Fri. 2 Corinthians 11:22-33—God's People Boast in Weakness.

Sat. 2 Corinthians 12:1-10—Strength through Christ Alone.

Sun. 2 Corinthians 13:1-10—Live by Christ's Power in You.