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Preface

An Exposition, With Practical Observations, of The General Epistle of Jude

This epistle is styled (as are some few others) *general* or *Catholic*, because it is not immediately directed to any particular person, family, or church, but to the whole society of Christians of that time, lately converted to the faith of Christ, whether from Judaism or paganism: and it is, and will be, of standing, lasting, and special use in and to the church as long as Christianity, that is, as time, shall last. The general scope of it is much the same with that of the second chapter of the second epistle of Peter, which having been already explained, the less will need to be said on this. It is designed to warn us against seducers and their seduction, to inspire us with a warm love to, and a hearty concern for, truth (evident and important truth), and that in the closest conjunction with holiness, of which charity, or sincere unbiased brotherly-love, is a most essential character and inseparable branch. The truth we are to hold fast, and endeavour that others may be acquainted with and not depart from, has two special characters:—It is *the truth as it is in Jesus* (Eph. 4:21; and it is *truth after* (or *which is according to*) *godliness*, Tit. 1:1. The gospel is the gospel of Christ. He has revealed it to us, and he is the main subject of it; and therefore we are indispensably bound to learn thence all we can of his person, natures, and offices: indifference as to this is inexcusable in any who call themselves *Christians*; and we know from what fountain we are wholly and solely to draw all necessary saving knowledge. Further, it is also a doctrine of godliness. Whatever doctrines favour the corrupt lusts of men cannot be of God, let the pleas and pretensions for them be what they will. Errors dangerous to the souls of men soon sprang up in the church. *The servants slept and tares were sown*. But such were the wisdom and kindness of Providence that they began sensibly to appear and show themselves, while some, at least, of the apostles were yet alive to confute them, and warn others against them. We are apt to think, If we had lived in their times, we should have been abundantly fenced against the attempts and artifices of seducers; but we have their testimony and their cautions, which is sufficient; and, if we will not believe their writings, neither should we have believed or regarded their sayings, if we had lived among them and conversed personally with them.

Chapter 1

We have here, I. An account of the penman of this epistle, a character of the church, the blessings and privileges of that happy society (v. 1, 2). II. The occasion of writing this epistle (v. 3). III. A character of evil and perverse men, who had already sprung up in that infant state of the church, and would be succeeded by others of the like evil spirit and temper in after-times (v. 4). IV. A caution against hearkening to and following after such, from the severity of God towards the unbelieving murmuring Israelites at their coming out of Egypt, the angels that fell, the sin and punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 5-7). V. To these the apostle likens the seducers against whom he was warning them, and describes them at large, (v. 8 to 10, inclusive). VI. Then (as specially suitable to his argument) he cites an ancient prophecy of Enoch foretelling and describing the future judgment (v. 14, 15). VII. He enlarges on the seducers' character, and guards against the offence which honest minds might be apt to take at the so early permission of such things, by showing that it was foretold long before that so it must be (v. 16-19). VIII. Exhorts them to perseverance in the faith, fervency in prayer, watchfulness against falling from the love of God, and a lively hope of eternal life (v. 20, 21). IX. Directs them how to act towards the erroneous and scandalous (v. 22, 23). And, X. Closes with an admirable doxology in the last two verses.

Verses 1-2

Here we have the preface or introduction, in which,

I. We have an account of the penman of this epistle, *Jude*, or *Judas*, or Judah. He was name-sake to one of his ancestors, the patriarch—son of Jacob, the most eminent though not the first-born of his sons, out of whose loins (lineally, in a most direct succession) the Messiah came. This was a name of worth, eminency, and honour; yet 1. He had a wicked name-sake. There was one Judas (one of the twelve, surnamed *Iscaiot*, from the place of his birth) who was a vile traitor, the betrayer of his and our Lord. The same names may be common to the best and worst persons. It may be instructive to be called after the names of eminently good men, but there can be no inference drawn thence as to what we shall prove, though we may even thence conclude what sort of persons our good parents or progenitors desired and hoped we should be. But, 2. Our Judas was quite another man. He was an apostle, so was Iscaiot; but he was a sincere disciple and follower of Christ, so was not the other. He was a faithful servant of Jesus Christ, the other was his betrayer and murderer; therefore here the one is very carefully distinguished from the other. Dr. Manton's note upon this is, that God takes great care of the good name of his sincere and useful servants. Why then should we be prodigal of our own or one another's reputation and usefulness? Our apostle here calls himself a servant of Jesus Christ, esteeming that a most honourable title. It is more honourable to be a sincere and useful servant of Christ than to be an earthly king, how potent and prosperous soever. He might have claimed kindred to Christ according to the flesh, but he waives this, and rather glories in being his servant. Observe, (1.) It is really a greater honour to be a faithful servant of Jesus Christ than to be akin to him according to the flesh. Many of Christ's natural kindred, as well as of his progenitors, perished; not from want of natural affection in him as man, but from infidelity and obstinacy in themselves,

which should make the descendants and near relatives of persons most eminent for sincere and exemplary piety *jealous over themselves with a godly jealousy*. A son of Noah may be saved in the ark from a flood of temporal destruction, and yet be overwhelmed at last in a deluge of divine wrath, and suffer *the vengeance of eternal fire*. Christ himself tells us *that he that heareth his word and doeth it* (that is, he only) *is as his brother, and sister, and mother*, that is, more honourably and advantageously related to him than the nearest and dearest of his natural relatives, considered merely as such. See Mt. 12:48–50. (2.) In that the apostle Jude styles himself a servant, though an apostle, a dignified officer in Christ's kingdom, it is a great honour to the meanest sincere minister (and it holds proportionably as to every upright Christian) that he is *the servant of Christ Jesus*. The apostles were servants before they were apostles, and they were but servants still. Away then with all pretensions in the ministers of Christ to lordly dominion either over one another or over the flocks committed to their charge. Let us ever have that of our dear Redeemer in actual view, *It shall not be so among you*, Mt. 20:25, 26.—*And brother of James*, to wit, of him whom the ancients style *the first bishop of Jerusalem*, of whose character and martyrdom Josephus makes mention, ascribing the horrible destruction of that city and nation to this wicked cruelty, as one of its principal causes. Of this James our Jude was brother, whether in the strictest or a larger (though very usual) acceptation I determine not. He however reckons it an honour to him that he was the brother of such a one. We ought to honour those who are above us in age, gifts, graces, station; not to envy them, yet neither to flatter them, nor be led merely by their example, when we have reason to think they act wrong. Thus the apostle Paul withstood his fellow-apostle Peter to the face, notwithstanding the high esteem he had for him and the affectionate love he bore to him, when he saw that he was to be blamed, that is, really blameworthy, Gal. 2:11, and following verses.

II. We are here informed to whom this epistle is directed; namely, to all those *who are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called*. I begin with the last—*called*, that is, called *Christians*, in the judgment of charity, further than which we cannot, nor in justice ought to go, in the judgments or opinions we form or receive of one another; for what appears not is not, nor ought to come into account in all our dealings with and censures of one another, whatever abatements the divine goodness may see fit to make for an honest though misguided zeal. The church pretends not (I am sure it ought not) to judge of *secret or hidden things* (things drawn into the light before time), lest our rash and preposterous zeal do more harm than good, or I am afraid ever will do. *The tares and wheat* (if Christ may be Judge) *must grow together till the harvest* (Mt. 13:28–30); and then he himself will, by proper instruments, take timely care to separate them. We ought to think the best we can of every man till the contrary appear; not being forward to receive or propagate, much less invent, disadvantageous characters of our brethren. This is the least we can make of the apostle's large and excellent description of charity (1 Co. 13), and this we ought to make conscience of acting up to, which till we do, the Christian churches will be (as, alas! they are at this day) filled with *envying and strife, confusion and every evil work*, Jam. 3:16. Or, the apostle may speak of their being *called to be Christians*, by the preaching of the word, which they gladly received, and professed cordially to believe, and so were received into the society and fellowship of the church—Christ the head, and believers the members; real believers really, professed believers visibly. Note, Christians are the called, called out of the world, the evil spirit and temper

of it,—above the world, to higher and better things, heaven, things unseen and eternal,—called from sin to Christ, from vanity to seriousness, from uncleanness to holiness; and this in pursuance of divine purpose and grace; *for whom he did predestinate those he also called*, Rom. 8:30. Now those who are thus called, are, 1. Sanctified: *Sanctified by God the Father*. Sanctification is usually spoken of in scripture as the work of the Holy Spirit, yet here it is ascribed to God the Father, because the Spirit works it as the Spirit of the Father and the Son. Note, All who are effectually called are sanctified, *made partakers of a divine nature* (2 Pt. 1:4); *for without holiness no man shall see the Lord*, Heb. 12:14. Observe, Our sanctification is not our own work. If any are sanctified, they are so by God the Father, not excluding Son or Spirit, for they are one, one God. Our corruption and pollution are of ourselves; but our sanctification and renovation are of God and his grace; and therefore if we perish in our iniquity we must bear the blame, but if we be sanctified and glorified all the honour and glory must be ascribed to God, and to him alone. I own it is hard to give a clear and distinct account of this, but we must not deny nor disregard necessary truth because we cannot fully reconcile the several parts of it to each other; for, on that supposition, we might deny that any one of us could stir an inch from the place we are at present in, though we see the contrary every day and hour. 2. The called and sanctified are *preserved in Christ Jesus*. As it is God who begins the work of grace in the souls of men, so it is he who carries it on, and perfects it. Where he begins he will perfect; though we are fickle, he is constant. *He will not forsake the work of his own hands*, Ps. 138:8. Let us not therefore trust in ourselves, nor in our stock of grace already received, but in him, and in him alone, still endeavouring, by all proper and appointed means, to keep ourselves, as ever we would hope he should keep us. Note, (1.) Believers are *preserved* from the gates of hell, and to the glory of heaven. (2.) All who are preserved are preserved in Jesus Christ, in him as their *citadel and stronghold*, no longer than they abide in him, and solely by virtue of their union with him.

III. We have the apostolical benediction: *Mercy to you*, etc. From the mercy, peace, and love of God all our comfort flows, all our real enjoyment in this life, all our hope of a better. 1. The *mercy* of God is the spring and fountain of all the good we have or hope for; mercy not only to the miserable, but to the guilty. 2. Next to mercy is *peace*, which we have from the sense of having obtained mercy. We can have no true and lasting peace but what flows from our reconciliation with God by Jesus Christ. 3. As from mercy springs peace, so from peace springs *love*, his love to us, our love to him, and our brotherly love (forgotten, wretchedly neglected, grace!) to one another. These the apostle prays may be multiplied, that Christians may not be content with scraps and narrow scantlings of them; but that souls and societies may be full of them. Note, God is ready to supply us with all grace, and a fulness in each grace. If we are straitened, we are not straitened in him, but in ourselves.

Verses 3-7

We have here, I. The design of the apostle in writing this epistle to the lately converted Jews and Gentiles; namely, to establish them in the Christian faith, and a practice and conversation truly consonant and conformable thereunto, and in an open and bold profession thereof, especially in times of notorious opposition, whether by artful seduction or violent and inhuman persecution. But then we must see to it very carefully that it be really the Christian faith that we believe, profess, propagate, and contend for; not the discriminating badges of this or the other party, not any thing of later date than the inspired writings of

the holy evangelists and apostles. Here observe, 1. The gospel salvation is a common salvation, that is, in a most sincere offer and tender of it to all mankind to whom the notice of it reaches: for so the commission runs (Mk. 16:15, 16), *Go you into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature*, etc. Surely God means as he speaks; he does not delude us with vain words, whatever men do; and therefore none are excluded from the benefit of these gracious offers and invitations, but those who obstinately, impenitently, finally exclude themselves. *Whoever will may come and drink of the water of life freely*, Rev. 22:17. The application of it is made to all believers, and only to such; it is made to the weak as well as to the strong. Let none discourage themselves on the account of hidden decrees which they can know little of, and with which they have nothing to do. God's decrees are dark, his covenants are plain. "All good Christians meet in Christ the common head, are actuated by one and the same Spirit, are guided by one rule, meet here at one throne of grace, and hope shortly to meet in one common inheritance," a glorious one to be sure, but what or how glorious we cannot, nor at present need to know; but such it will be as vastly to exceed all our present hopes and expectations. 2. This common salvation is the subject-matter of the faith of all the saints. The doctrine of it is what they all most heartily consent to; they esteem it as a *faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance*, 1 Tim. 1:15. It is the faith once, *or at once, once for all, delivered to the saints*, to which nothing can be added, from which nothing may be detracted, in which nothing more nor less should be altered. Here let us abide; here we are safe; if we stir a step further, we are in danger of being either entangled or seduced. 3. The apostles and evangelists all wrote to us of this common salvation. This cannot be doubted by those who have carefully read their writings. It is strange that any should think they wrote chiefly to maintain particular schemes and opinions, especially such as they never did nor could think of. It is enough that they have fully declared to us, by inspiration of the Holy Ghost, all that is necessary *for every one to believe and do*, in order to obtain a personal interest in the common salvation. 4. Those who preach or write of the common salvation should give all diligence to do it well: they should not allow themselves to offer to God or his people that which costs them nothing, or next to nothing, little or no pains or thought, 2 Sa. 24:24. This were to treat God irreverently, and man unjustly. The apostle (though inspired) gave all diligence to write of the common salvation. What then will become of those who (though uninspired) give no diligence, or next to none, but say to the people (even in the name of God) *quicquid in buccam venerit—whatever comes next*, who, so that they use scripture-words, care not how they interpret or apply them? Those who speak of sacred things ought always to speak of them with the greatest reverence, care, and diligence. 5. Those who have received the doctrine of this common salvation must contend earnestly for it. *Earnestly*, not *furiously*. Those who strive for the Christian faith, or in the Christian course, must strive lawfully, or they lose their labour, and run great hazard of losing their crown, 2 Tim. 2:5. *The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God*, Jam. 1:20. Lying for the truth is bad, and scolding for it is not much better. Observe, Those who have received the truth must contend for it. But how? As the apostles did; by suffering patiently and courageously for it, not by making others suffer if they will not presently embrace every notion that we are pleased (proved or unproved) to call faith, or fundamental. We must not suffer ourselves to be robbed of any essential article of Christian faith, by the cunning craftiness or specious plausible pretences of any who *lie in wait to deceive*, Eph. 4:14. The apostle Paul tells us he preached the gospel (mind it was the gospel) *with much contention* (1 Th. 2:2), that is (as I understand it), with earnestness,

with a hearty zeal, and a great concern for the success of what he preached. But, if we will understand *contention* in the common acceptance of the word, we must impartially consider with whom the apostle contended, and how, the enlarging on which would not be proper for this place.

II. The occasion the apostle had to write to this purport. As evil manners give rise to good laws, so dangerous errors often give just occasion to the proper defence of important truths. Here observe, 1. Ungodly men are the great enemies of the faith of Christ and the peace of the church. Those who deny or corrupt the one, and disturb the other, are here expressly styled *ungodly men*. We might have truth with peace (a most desirable thing) were there none (ministers or private Christians) in our particular churches and congregations but truly godly men—a blessing scarcely to be looked or hoped for on this side heaven. Ungodly men raise scruples, merely to advance and promote their own selfish, ambitious, and covetous ends. This has been the plague of the church in all past ages, and I am afraid no age is, or will be, wholly free from such men and such practices as long as time shall last. Observe, Nothing cuts us off from the church but that which cuts us off from Christ; namely, reigning infidelity and ungodliness. We must abhor the thought of branding particular parties or persons with this character, especially of doing it without the least proof, or, as it too often happens, the least shadow of it. Those are ungodly men who live *without God in the world*, who have no regard to God and conscience. Those are to be dreaded and consequently to be avoided, not only who are wicked by sins of commission, but also who are ungodly by sins of omission, who, for example, restrain prayer before God, who dare not reprove a rich man, when it is the duty of their place so to do, for fear of losing his favour and the advantage they promise themselves therefrom, who *do the work of the Lord negligently*, etc. 2. Those are *the worst of ungodly men who turn the grace of God into lasciviousness*, who take encouragement to sin more boldly because the grace of God has abounded, and still abounds, so wonderfully, who are hardened in their impieties by the extent and fulness of gospel grace, the design of which is to reduce men from sin, and bring them unto God. Thus therefore to wax wanton under so great grace, and turn it into an occasion of working all uncleanness with greediness, and hardening ourselves in such a course by that very grace which is the last and most forcible means to reclaim us from it, is to render ourselves the vilest, the worst, and most hopeless of sinners. 3. Those who turn the grace of God into lasciviousness do in effect *deny the Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ*; that is, they deny both natural and revealed religion. They strike at the foundation of natural religion, for they *deny the only Lord God*; and they overturn all the frame of revealed religion, for they deny *the Lord Jesus Christ*. Now his great design in establishing revealed religion in the world was to bring us unto God. To deny revealed religion is virtually to overturn natural religion, for they stand or fall together, and they mutually yield light and force to each other. Would to God our modern deists, who live in the midst of gospel light, would seriously consider this, and cautiously, diligently, and impartially examine what it is that hinders their receiving the gospel, while they profess themselves fully persuaded of all the principles and duties of natural religion! Never tallies answered more exactly to each other than these do, so that it seems absurd to receive the one and reject the other. One would think it were the fairer way to receive both or reject both; though perhaps the more plausible method, especially in this age, is to act the part they do. 4. Those who turn the grace of God into lasciviousness are ordained unto condemnation. They sin against the last, the greatest, and most perfect remedy; and so are without excuse. Those who

thus sin must needs die of their wounds, of their disease, are of old ordained to this condemnation, whatever that expression means. But what if our translators had thought fit to have rendered the words *palai progegrammenoi*—of old fore-written of, as persons who would through their own sin and folly become the proper subjects of this condemnation, where had the harm been? Plain Christians had not been troubled with dark, doubtful, and perplexing thoughts about reprobation, which the strongest heads cannot enter far into, can indeed bear but little of, without much loss and damage. Is it not enough that early notice was given by inspired writers that such seducers and wicked men should arise in later times, and that every one, being fore-warned of, should be fore-armed against them? 5. We ought to contend earnestly for the faith, in opposition to those who would corrupt or deprave it, such as have *crept in unawares*: a wretched character, to be sure, but often very ill applied by weak and ignorant people, and even by those who themselves creep in unawares, who think their *ipse dixit* should stand for a law to all their followers and admirers. Surely faithful humble ministers are helpers of their people's joy, peace, and comfort; *not lords of their faith!* Whoever may attempt to corrupt the faith, we ought to contend earnestly against them. The more busy and crafty the instruments and agents of Satan are, to rob us of the truth, the more solicitous should we be to hold it fast, always provided we be very sure that we fasten no wrong or injurious characters on persons, parties, or sentiments.

III. The fair warning which the apostle, in Christ's name, gives to those who, having professed his holy religion, do afterwards desert and prove false to it, v. 5-7. We have here a recital of the former judgments of God upon sinners, with design to awaken and terrify those to whom warning is given in this epistle. Observe, The judgments of God are often denounced and executed *in terrorem*—for warning to others, rather than from immediate or particular displeasure against the offenders themselves; not that God is not displeased with them, but perhaps not more with them than with others who, at least for the present, escape. *I will put you in remembrance.* What we already know we still need to be put in remembrance of. Therefore there will always be need and use of a standing stated ministry in the Christian church, though all the doctrines of faith, the essentials, are so plainly revealed in express words, or by the most near, plain, and immediate consequence, that he who runs may read and understand them. There wants no infallible interpreter, really or conceitedly such, for any such end or purpose. Some people (weakly enough) suggest, "If the scriptures do so plainly contain all that is necessary to salvation, what need or use can there be of a standing ministry? Why may we not content ourselves with staying at home, and reading our Bibles?" The inspired apostle has here fully, though not wholly, answered this objection. Preaching is not designed to teach us something new in every sermon, somewhat that we knew nothing of before; but *to put us in remembrance*, to call to mind things forgotten, to affect our passions, and engage and fix our resolutions, that our lives may be answerable to our faith. *Though you know these things*, yet you still need to *know them better*. There are many things which we have known which yet we have unhappily forgotten. Is it of no use or service to be put afresh in remembrance of them?

Now what are these things which we Christians need to be put in remembrance of?

1. The destruction of the unbelieving Israelites in the wilderness, v. 5. Paul puts the Corinthians in mind of this, 1 Co. 10. The first ten verses of that chapter (as the scripture is always the best commentary upon itself) are the best explication of the fifth verse of this epistle of Jude. None therefore ought to presume upon their privileges, since many who were brought out of Egypt

by a series of amazing miracles, yet perished in the wilderness by reason of their unbelief. *Let us not therefore be high-minded, but fear*, Rom. 11:20. *Let us fear lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it*, Heb. 4:1. They had miracles in abundance: they were their daily bread; yet even they perished in unbelief. We have greater (much greater) advantages than they had; let their error (their so fatal error) be our awful warning.

2. We are here put in remembrance of the fall of the angels, v. 6. There were a great number of the angels who *left their own habitation*; that is, who were not pleased with the posts and stations the supreme Monarch of the universe had assigned and allotted to them, but thought (like discontented ministers in our age, I might say in every age) they deserved better; they would, with the title of *ministers*, be *sovereigns*, and in effect their Sovereign should be their minister-do all, and only, what they would have him; thus was pride the main and immediate cause or occasion of their fall. Thus they quitted their post, and rebelled against God, their Creator and sovereign Lord. But God did not spare them (high and great as they were); he would not truckle to them; he threw them off, as a wise and good prince will a selfish and deceitful minister; and the great, the all-wise God, could not be ignorant, as the wisest and best of earthly princes often are, what designs they were hatching. After all, what became of them? They thought to have dared and outfaced Omnipotence itself; but God was too hard for them, he cast them down to hell. Those who would not be servants to their Maker and his will in their first state were made captives to his justice, and are *reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness*. Here see what the condition of fallen angels is: they are *in chains*, bound under the divine power and justice, bound over *to the judgment of the great day*; they are *under darkness*, though once *angels of light*; so horribly in the dark are they that they continue to fight against God, as if there were yet some small hope at least left them of prevailing and overcoming in the conflict. Dire infatuation! Light and liberty concur, chains and darkness how well do they agree and suit each other! The devils, once angels in the best sense, are *reserved*, etc. Observe, There is, undoubtedly there is, a judgment to come; the fallen angels are *reserved to the judgment of the great day*; and shall fallen men escape it? Surely not. Let every reader consider this in due time. Their chains are called everlasting, because it is impossible they should ever break loose from them, or make an escape; they are held fast and sure under them. The decree, the justice, the wrath of God, are the very chains under which fallen angels are held so fast. Hear and fear, O sinful mortals of mankind!

3. The apostle here calls to our remembrance the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, v. 7. *Even as*, etc. It is in allusion to the destruction of *Pentapolis*, or the five cities, that the miseries of the damned are set forth by a lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; they were guilty of abominable wickedness, not to be named or thought of but with the utmost abhorrence and detestation; their ruin is a particular warning to all people to take heed of, and fly *from, fleshly lusts that war against the soul*, 1 Pt. 2:11. "These lusts consumed the Sodomites with fire from heaven, and they are now *suffering the vengeance of eternal fire*; therefore take heed, imitate not their sins, lest the same plagues overtake you as did them. God is the same holy, just, pure Being now as then; and can the beastly pleasures of a moment make amends for your suffering the vengeance of eternal fire? *Stand in awe, therefore, and sin not*," Ps. 4:4.

Verses 8-15

The apostle here exhibits a charge against deceivers who were now seducing the disciples of Christ from the profession and practice of his holy religion. He calls them *filthy dreamers*, forasmuch as delusion is a dream, and the beginning of, and inlet to, all manner of filthiness. Note, Sin is filthiness; it renders men odious and vile in the sight of the most holy God, and makes them (sooner or later, as penitent or as punished to extremity and without resource) vile in their own eyes, and in a while they become vile in the eyes of all about them. *These filthy dreamers* dream themselves into a fool's paradise on earth, and into a real hell at last: let their character, course, and end, be our seasonable and sufficient warning; like sins will produce like punishments and miseries. Here,

I. The character of these deceivers is described.

1. They *defile the flesh*. The flesh or body is the immediate seat, and often the irritating occasion, of many horrid pollutions; yet these, though done in and against the body, do greatly defile and grievously maim and wound the soul. *Fleshly lusts do war against the soul*, 1 Pt. 2:11. and in 2 Co. 7:1 we read of *filthiness of flesh and spirit*, each of which, though of different kinds, defiles the whole man.

2. They *despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities*, are of a disturbed mind and a seditious spirit, forgetting that *the powers that be are ordained of God*, Rom. 13:1. God requires us to *speak evil of no man* (Tit. 3:2.); but it is a great aggravation of the sin of evil-speaking when what we say is pointed at magistrates, men whom God has set in authority over us, by blaspheming or speaking evil of whom we blaspheme God himself. Or if we understand it, as some do, with respect to religion, which ought to have the dominion in this lower world, such evil-speakers despise the dominion of conscience, make a jest of it, and would banish it out of the world; and as for the word of God, the rule of conscience, they despise it. The revelations of the divine will go for little with them; they are a rule of faith and manners, but not till they have explained them, and imposed their sense of them upon all about them. Or, as others account for the sense of this passage, the people of God, truly and specially so, are the dignities here spoken of or referred to, according to that of the psalmist, *Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm*, Ps. 105:15. They *speak evil*, etc. Religion and its serious professors have been always and every where evil spoken of. Though there is nothing in religion but what is very good, and deserves our highest regards, both as it is perfective of our natures and as it is subservient to our truest and highest interests; yet *this sect*, as its enemies are pleased to call it, *is every where spoken against*, Acts 28:22.

On this occasion the apostle brings in *Michael the archangel*, etc., v. 9. Interpreters are at a loss what is here meant by *the body of Moses*. Some think that the devil contended that Moses might have a public and honourable funeral, that the place where he was interred might be generally known, hoping thereby to draw the Jews, so naturally prone thereto, to a new and fresh instance of idolatry. Dr. Scott thinks that by the body of Moses we are to understand the Jewish church, whose destruction the devil strove and contended for, as the Christian church is called the body of Christ in the New-Testament style. Others bring other interpretations, which I will not here trouble the reader with. Though this contest was mightily eager and earnest, and Michael was victorious in the issue, yet he would not *bring a railing accusation against the devil himself*; he knew a good cause needed no such weapons to be employed in its defence. It is said, *he durst not bring*, etc. Why durst he not? Not that he

was afraid of the devil, but he believed God would be offended if, in such a dispute, he went that way to work; he thought it below him to engage in a trial of skill with the great enemy of God and man which of them should out-scold or out-rail the other: a memorandum to all disputants, never to bring railing accusations into their disputes. Truth needs no supports from falsehood or scurrility. Some say, Michael would not bring a railing accusation against the devil as knowing beforehand that he would be too hard for him at that weapon. Some think the apostle refers here to the remarkable passage we have, Num. 20:7–14. Satan would have represented Moses under disadvantageous colours, which he, good man, had at that time, and upon that occasion, given but too much handle for. Now Michael, according to this account, stands up in defence of Moses, and, in the zeal of an upright and bold spirit, says to Satan, *The Lord rebuke thee*. He would not stand disputing with the devil, nor enter into a particular debate about the merits of that special cause. He knew Moses was his fellow-servant, a favourite of God, and he would not patiently suffer him to be insulted, no, not by the prince of devils; but in a just indignation cries out, *The Lord rebuke thee*: like that of our Lord himself (Mt. 4:10), *Get thee hence, Satan*. Moses was a dignity, a magistrate, one beloved and preferred by the great God; and the archangel thought it insufferable that such a one should be so treated by a vile apostate spirit, of how high an order soever. So the lesson hence is that we ought to stand up in defence of those whom God owns, how severe soever Satan and his instruments may be in their censures of them and their conduct. Those who censure (in particular) upright magistrates, upon every slip in their behaviour, may expect to hear, *The Lord rebuke thee*; and divine rebukes are harder to be borne than careless sinners now think for.

3. *They speak evil of the things which they know not*, etc., v. 10. Observe, Those who speak evil of religion and godliness *speak evil of the things which they know not*; for, if they had known them, they would have spoken well of them, for nothing but good and excellent can be truly said of religion, and it is sad that any thing different or opposite should ever be justly said of any of its professors. A religious life is the most safe, happy, comfortable, and honourable life that is. Observe, further, Men are most apt to speak evil of those persons and things that they know least of. How many had never suffered by slanderous tongues if they had been better known! On the other hand, retirement screens some even from just censure. *But what they know naturally*, etc. It is hard, if not impossible, to find any obstinate enemies to the Christian religion, who do not in their stated course live in open or secret contradiction to the very principles of natural religion: this many think hard and uncharitable; but I am afraid it will appear too true in *the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God*. The apostle likens such to *brute beasts*, though they often think and boast themselves, if not as the wisest, yet at least as the wittiest part of mankind. *In those things they corrupt themselves*; that is, in the plainest and most natural and necessary things, things that lie most open and obvious to natural reason and conscience; even in those things they corrupt, debase, and defile themselves: the fault, whatever it is, lies not in their understanding or apprehensions, but in their depraved wills and disordered appetites and affections; they could and might have acted better, but then they must have offered violence to those vile affections which they obstinately chose rather to gratify than to mortify.

4. In v. 11 the apostle represents them as followers of *Cain*, and in v. 12, 13, as atheistical and profane people, who thought little, and perhaps believed not much, of God or a future world—as greedy and covetous, who, so they could but gain present

worldly advantages, cared not what came next—rebels against God and man, who, like Core, ran into attempts in which they must assuredly perish, as he did. Of such the apostle further says, (1.) *These are spots in your feasts of charity*—the *agapai* or *love-feasts*, so much spoken of by the ancients. They happened, by whatever means or mischance, to be admitted among them, but were spots in them, defiled and defiling. Observe, It is a great reproach, though unjust and accidental, to religion, when those who profess it, and join in the most solemn institution of it, are in heart and life unsuitable and even contrary to it: *These are spots*. Yet how common in all Christian societies here on earth, the very best not excepted, are such blemishes! The more is the pity. The Lord remedy it in his due time and way, not in men's blind and rigorous way of plucking up the wheat with the tares. But in the heaven we are waiting, hoping, and preparing for, there is none of this mad work, there are none of these disorderly doings. (2.) *When they feast with you, they feed themselves without fear*. Arrant gluttons, no doubt, there were; such as minded only the gratifying of their appetites with the daintiness and abundance of their fare; they had no regard to Solomon's caution, Prov. 23:2. Note, In common eating and drinking a holy fear is necessary, much more in feasting, though we may sometimes be more easily and insensibly overcome at a common meal than at a feast; for, in the case supposed, we are less upon our guard, and sometimes, at least to some persons, the plenty of a feast is its own antidote, as to others it may prove a dangerous snare. (3.) *Clouds they are without water*, which promise rain in time of drought, but perform nothing of what they promise. Such is the case of formal professors, who at first setting out promise much, like early-blossoming trees in a forward spring, but in conclusion bring forth little or no fruit.—*Carried about of winds*, light and empty, easily driven about this way or that, as the wind happens to set; such are empty, ungrounded professors, and easy prey to every seducer. It is amazing to hear many talk so confidently of so many things of which they know little or nothing, and yet have not the wisdom and humility to discern and be sensible how little they know. How happy would our world be if men either knew more or practically knew how little they know. (4.) *Trees whose fruit withereth*, etc. Trees they are, for they are planted in the Lord's vineyard, yet fruitless ones. Observe, Those whose fruit withereth may be justly said to be without fruit. As good never a whit as never the better. It is a sad thing when men seem to *begin in the Spirit and end in the flesh*, which is almost as common a case as it is an awful one. The text speaks of such as were *twice dead*. One would think to be once dead were enough; we none of us, till grace renew us to a higher degree than ordinary, love to think of dying once, though this is appointed for us all. What then is the meaning of this being twice dead? They had been once dead in their natural, fallen, lapsed state; but they seemed to recover, and, as a man in a swoon, to be brought to life again, when they took upon them the profession of the Christian religion. But now they are dead again by the evident proofs they have given of their hypocrisy: whatever they seemed, they had nothing truly vital in them.—*Plucked up by the roots*, as we commonly serve dead trees, from which we expect no more fruit. They are *dead, dead, dead; why cumber they the ground?* Away with them to the fire. (5.) *Raging waves of the sea*, boisterous, noisy, and clamorous; full of talk and turbulency, but with little (if any) sense or meaning: *Foaming out their own shame*, creating much uneasiness to men of better sense and calmer tempers, which yet will in the end turn to their own greater shame and just reproach. The psalmist's prayer ought always to be that of every honest and good man, "*Let integrity and uprightness preserve me* (Ps. 25:21), and, if it will not, let me be unpreserved." If honesty signify little now, knavery will signify much less, and that

in a very little while. Raging waves are a terror to sailing passengers; but, when they have got to port, the waves are forgotten as if no longer in being: their noise and terror are for ever ended. (6.) *Wandering stars*, planets that are erratic in their motions, keep not that steady regular course which the fixed ones do, but shift their stations, that one has sometimes much ado to know where to find them. This allusion carries in it a very lively emblem of false teachers, who are sometimes here and sometimes there, so that one knows not where nor how to fix them. In the main things, at least, one would think something should be fixed and steady; and this might be without infallibility, or any pretensions to it in us poor mortals. In religion and politics, the great subjects of present debate, surely there are certain *stamina* in which wise and good, honest and disinterested, men might agree, without throwing the populace into the utmost anguish and distress of mind, or blowing up their passions into rage and fury, without letting them know what they say or whereof they affirm.

II. The doom of this wicked people is declared: *To whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever*. False teachers are to expect the worst of punishments in this and a future world: not every one who teaches by mistake any thing that is not exactly true (for who then, in any public assembly, durst open a Bible to teach others, unless he thought himself equal or superior to the angels of God in heaven?) but every one who prevaricates, dissembles, would lead others into by-paths and side-ways, that he may have opportunity to make a gain or prey of them, or (in the apostle's phrase) to make merchandize of them, 2 Pt. 2:3. But enough of this. As for the blackness of darkness for ever, I shall only say that this terrible expression, with all the horror it imports, belongs to false teachers, truly, not slanderously so called, who *corrupt the word of God, and betray the souls of men*. If this will not make both ministers and people cautious, I know not what will.

Of the prophecy of Enoch, (v. 14, 15) we have no mention made in any other part or place of scripture; yet now it is scripture that there was such prophecy. One plain text of scripture is proof enough of any one point that we are required to believe, especially when relating to a matter of fact; but in matters of faith, necessary saving faith, God has not seen fit (blessed be his holy name he has not) to try us so far. There is no fundamental article of the Christian religion, truly so called, which is not inculcated over and over in the New Testament, by which we may know on what the Holy Ghost does, and consequently on what we ought, to lay the greatest stress. Some say that this prophecy of Enoch was preserved by tradition in the Jewish church; others that the apostle Jude was immediately inspired with the notice of it: be this as it may, it is certain that there was such a prophecy of ancient date, of long standing, and universally received in the Old-Testament church; and it is a main point of our New-Testament creed. Observe, 1. Christ's coming to judgment was prophesied of as early as the middle of the patriarchal age, and was therefore even then a received and acknowledged truth.—*The Lord cometh with his holy myriads, including both angels and the spirits of just men made perfect*. What a glorious time will that be, when Christ shall *come with ten thousand of these!* And we are told for what great and awful ends and purposes he will come so accompanied and attended, namely, *to execute judgment upon all*. 2. It was spoken of then, so long ago, as a thing just at hand: "*Behold, the Lord cometh; he is just a coming, he will be upon you before you are aware, and, unless you be very cautious and diligent, before you are provided to meet him comfortably.*" He *cometh*, (1.) *To execute judgment upon the wicked*. (2.) *To convince them*. Observe, Christ will condemn none without precedent, trial, and conviction, such conviction as shall at least silence themselves. They

shall have no excuse or apology to make that they either can or dare then stand by. Then *every mouth shall be stopped*, the Judge and his sentence shall be (by all the impartial) approved and applauded, and even the guilty condemned criminals shall be speechless, though at present they want not bold and specious pleas, which they vent with all assurance and confidence; and yet it is certain that the mock-trials of prisoners in the jail among themselves and the real trial at the bar before the proper judge soon appear to be very different things.

I cannot pass v. 15 without taking notice how often, and how emphatically, the word *ungodly* is repeated in it, no fewer than four times: ungodly men, ungodly sinners, ungodly deeds, and, as to the manner, ungodly committed. Godly or ungodly signifies little with men now-a-days, unless it be to scoff at and deride even the very expressions; but it is not so in the language of the Holy Ghost. Note, Omissions, as well as commissions, must be accounted for in the day of judgment. Note, further, Hard speeches of one another, especially if ill-grounded, will most certainly come into account at *the judgment of the great day*. Let us all take care in time. "If thou," says one of our good old puritans, "smite (a miscalled heretic, or) a schismatic, and God find a real saint bleeding, look thou to it, how thou wilt answer it." It may be too late to say before the angel that it was an error, Eccl. 5:6. I only here allude to that expression of the divinely inspired writer.

Verses 16-25

Here, I. The apostle enlarges further on the character of these evil men and seducers: they *are murmurers, complainers*, etc., v. 16. Observe, A murmuring complaining temper, indulged and expressed, lays men under a very bad character; such are very weak at least, and for the most part very wicked. They murmur against God and his providence, against men and their conduct; they are angry at every thing that happens, and never pleased with their own state and condition in the world, as not thinking it good enough for them. Such *walk after their own lusts*; their will, their appetite, their fancy, are their only rule and law. Note, Those who please their sinful appetites are most prone to yield to their ungovernable passions.

II. He proceeds to caution and exhort those to whom he is writing, v. 17–23. Here,

1. He calls them to remember how they have been forewarned: *But, beloved, remember*, etc., v. 17. "*Remember*, take heed that you think it not strange (so as to stumble and be offended, and have your faith staggered by it) that such people as the seducers before described and warned against should arise (and that early) in the Christian church, seeing all this was foretold by *the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ*, and consequently the accomplishment of it in the event is a confirmation of your faith, instead of being in the least an occasion of shaking and unsettling you therein." Note, (1.) Those who would persuade must make it evident that they sincerely love those whom they would persuade. Bitter words and hard usage never did nor ever will convince, much less persuade any body. (2.) The words which inspired persons have spoken (or written), duly remembered and reflected on, are the best preservative against dangerous errors; this will always be so, till men have learnt to speak better than God himself. (3.) We ought not to be offended if errors and persecutions arise and prevail in the Christian church; this was foretold, and therefore we should not think worse of Christ's person, doctrine, or cross, when we see it fulfilled. See 1 Tim. 4:1, and 2 Tim. 3:1, and 2 Pt. 3:3. We must not think it strange, but comfort ourselves with this, that in the midst of all this confusion Christ will maintain his church, and make good his promise, that *the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*, Mt.

16:18. (4.) The more religion is ridiculed and persecuted the faster hold we should take and keep of it; being forewarned, we should show that we are fore-armed; under such trials we should stand firm, and *not be soon shaken in mind*, 2 Th. 2:2.

2. He guards them against seducers by a further description of their odious character: *These are those who separate*, etc., v. 19. Observe, (1.) Sensualists are the worst separatists. They separate themselves from God, and Christ, and his church, to the devil, the world, and the flesh, by their ungodly courses and vicious practices; and this is a great deal worse than separation from any particular branch of the visible church on account of opinions or modes and circumstances of external government or worship, though many can patiently bear with the former, while they are plentifully and almost perpetually railing at the latter, as if no sin were damnable but what they are pleased to call *schism*. (2.) Sensual men have not the Spirit, that is, of God and Christ, the Spirit of holiness, which whoever *has not, is none of Christ's*, does not belong to him, Rom. 8:9. (3.) The worse others are the better should we endeavour and approve ourselves to be; the more busy Satan and his instruments are to pervert others, in judgment or practice, the more tenacious should we be of sound doctrine and a good conversation, *holding fast the faithful word, as we have been (divinely) taught, holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience*, Tit. 1:9; 1 Tim. 3:9.

3. He exhorts them to persevering constancy in truth and holiness.

(1.) *Building up yourselves in your most holy faith*, v. 20. Observe, The way to hold fast our profession is to hold on in it. Having laid our foundation well in a sound faith, and a sincere upright heart, we must build upon it, make further progress continually; and we should take care with what materials we carry on our building, namely, *gold, silver, precious stones*, not *wood, hay, stubble*, 1 Co. 3:12. Right principles and a regular conversation will stand the test even of the fiery trial; but, whatever we mix of baser alloy, though we be in the main sincere, we shall suffer loss by it, and though our persons be saved all that part of our work shall be consumed; and, if we ourselves escape, it will be with great danger and difficulty, as from a house on fire on every side.

(2.) *Praying in the Holy Ghost*. Observe, [1.] Prayer is the nurse of faith; the way to *build up ourselves in our most holy faith* is to *continue instant in prayer*, Rom. 12:12. [2.] Our prayers are then most likely to prevail when we *pray in the Holy Ghost*, that is, under his guidance and influence, according to the rule of his word, with faith, fervency, and constant persevering importunity; this is praying in the Holy Ghost, whether it be done by or without a set prescribed form.

(3.) *Keep yourselves in the love of God*, v. 21. [1.] "Keep up the grace of love to God in its lively vigorous actings and exercises in your souls." [2.] "Take heed of throwing yourselves out of the love of God to you, or its delightful, cheering, strengthening manifestations; keep yourselves in the way of God, if you would continue in his love."

(4.) *Looking for the mercy*, etc. [1.] Eternal life is to be looked for only through *mercy*; mercy is our only plea, not merit; or if merit, not our own, but another's, who has merited for us what otherwise we could have laid no claim to, nor have entertained any well-grounded hope of. [2.] It is said, not only through the mercy of God as our Creator, but through the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ as Redeemer; all who come to heaven must come thither through our Lord Jesus Christ; for *there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*, but that of the Lord Jesus only, Acts 4:12, compared with v. 10. [3.] A believing expectation of eternal life will arm us against the snares of sin (2 Pt. 3:14); a lively faith of the blessed hope

will help us to mortify our cursed lusts.

4. He directs them how to behave towards erring brethren: *And of some have compassion*, etc., v. 22, 23. Observe, (1.) We ought to do all we can to rescue others out of the snares of the devil, that they may be saved from (or recovered, when entangled therein, out of) dangerous errors, or pernicious practices. We are not only (under God) our own keepers, but every man ought to be, as much as in him lies, his *brother's keeper*; none but a wicked Cain will contradict this, Gen. 4:9. We must watch over one another, must faithfully, yet prudently, reprove each other, and set a good example to all about us. (2.) This must be done with *compassion, making a difference*. How is that? We must distinguish between the weak and the wilful. [1.] *Of some* we must *have compassion*, treat them with all tenderness, *restore them in the spirit of meekness*, not be needlessly harsh and severe in our censures of them and their actions, nor proud and haughty in our conduct towards them; not implacable, nor averse to reconciliation with them, or admitting them to the friendship they formerly had with us, when they give evident or even strongly hopeful tokens of a sincere repentance: if God has forgiven them, why should not we? We infinitely more need his forgiveness than they do, or can do, ours, though perhaps neither they nor we are justly or sufficiently sensible of this. [2.] *Others save with fear*, urging upon them *the terrors of the Lord*; "Endeavour to frighten them out of their sins; preach hell and damnation to them." But what if prudence and caution in administering even the most just and severe reproofs be what are primarily and chiefly here intimated—(I do but offer it for consideration); as if he had said, "Fear lest you frustrate your own good intentions and honest designs by rash and imprudent management, that you do not harden, instead of reclaiming, even where greater degrees of severity are requisite than in the immediately foregoing instance." We are often apt to over-do, when we are sure we mean honestly, and think we are right in the main; yet the very worst are not needlessly, nor rashly, nor to extremity, to be provoked, lest they be thereby further hardened through our default.—"*Hating even the garment spotted with the flesh*, that is, keeping yourselves at the utmost distance from what is or appears evil, and designing and endeavouring that others may do so too. Avoid all that leads to sin or that looks like sin," 1 Th. 5:22.

III. The apostle concludes this epistle with a solemn ascription of glory to the great God, v. 24, 25. Note, 1. Whatever is the subject or argument we have been treating of, ascribing glory to God is fittest for us to conclude with. 2. God is able, and he is as willing as able, *to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory*; not as those who never have been faulty (for what has once been done can never be rendered undone, even by Omnipotence itself, for that implies a contradiction), but as those whose faults shall not be imputed, to their ruin, which, but for God's mercy and a Saviour's merits, they might most justly have been.—*Before the presence of his glory*. Observe, (1.) The glory of the Lord will shortly be present. We now look upon it as distant, and too many look upon it as uncertain, but it will come, and it will be manifest and apparent. *Every eye shall see him*, Rev. 1:7. This is now the object of our faith, but hereafter (and surely it cannot *now* be long) it will be the object of our sense; whom we now believe in, him we shall shortly see, to our unspeakable joy and comfort or inexpressible terror and consternation. See 1 Pt. 1:8. (2.) All real sincere believers shall be presented, and the Lord Redeemer's appearance and coming, by him their glorious head, to the Father, in order to his approbation, acceptance, and reward. They were given to him of the Father, and *of all that were so given to him he has lost none*, nor will lose any one, not an individual,

a single soul, but will present them all perfectly holy and happy, when he shall surrender his mediatorial kingdom to *his God and our God, his Father and our Father*, Jn. 6:39, with ch. 17:12, 1 Co. 15:24. (3.) When believers shall be presented faultless it will be with exceeding joy. Alas! now our faults fill us with fears, doubts, and sorrows. But *be of good cheer*; if we be sincere, we shall be, our dear Redeemer has undertaken for it, we shall be *presented faultless*; where there is no sin there will be no sorrow; where there is the perfection of holiness, there will be the perfection of joy. Surely, the God who can and will do this is worthy to have *glory, majesty, dominion, and power*, ascribed to him, *both now and for ever!* And to this we may well, with the apostle, affix our hearty *Amen*.