

## Jude 20-25     A Pure Church

### Introduction:

A pure church. A healthy church. A church that can overcome unhealthy or corrupting influences. That's what we want and that's what we need. More importantly that's what Christ desires for His bride.

Today Jude gives us some simple encouragement. He really wanted to say this when he started his letter. Then, as he considered how the faith was being challenged from within, he spent most of his letter dealing with a type of false teaching that was already beginning to corrupt the church – even in that 1<sup>st</sup> Century setting. With that done, he says in remarkably few words what he originally wanted to say.

We should think of him as speaking to us and showing us how to act as catalysts for a pure church, for a healthy church. A healthy body is naturally able to cleanse itself from impurities. Our bodies are doing that all the time. A healthy church should be able to do the same. Jude's simple instructions will us to keep this church pure and healthy and strong.

### Having a healthy church is partially dependent upon us, but requires us to depend upon God.

**20 beloved,** This marks a change of topic. Jude is turning away from the issue of those who are exercising a corrupting influence in the church to the faithful, to those he is trying to encourage and instruct. Think of him as speaking to us.

**build yourselves up** One of the pictures the NT gives for the Christian community is that of a temple. Just as if we were all working together on an actual brick and mortar temple, each of us, then, should be able to contribute to the spiritual growth of the whole community.

The foundation is **your most holy faith**, the true gospel message and all that comes with it, genuine Christian teaching instead of the false teaching of Jude's opponents. This is where Jude started way back in **v.3**. The basics of the faith are most important because on them everything else is built. Destroy the basics and we bring down the church.

Richard Bauckham explains that *“the gospel which they received from the apostles is to be the foundation for the church's life”* and *“when the church lives on the basis of the gospel, its life will be holy.”*

**praying in the Holy Spirit**     **“in the Spirit”** usually means something like “under the control or inspiration of the Holy Spirit.” The phrase appears frequently in New Testament and often in connection with prayer. Jude is underscoring that we pray better with the Holy Spirit's help than we can on our own.

**Romans 8:26** *Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*

Paul uses the term in connection with praying in tongues.

**1 Corinthians 14:13-15** <sup>13</sup>Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. <sup>14</sup>For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. <sup>15</sup>What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. ...

That doesn't mean praying in the Spirit is one and the same thing as praying in tongues, but it does mean that praying in tongues can be one valid way that praying in the Spirit happens. The main point again is that we need God's help to pray effectively.

**21 keep yourselves in the love of God** Jude is not implying that God's love for us is at risk or performance based. There is plenty in the Bible – and even right here in this passage of Jude – that would indicate otherwise. Still, our experience of the love of God is at least partially based on our willingly and purposefully receiving it. Obedience over the long haul will be a key.

**John 15:9-10** <sup>9</sup>“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. <sup>10</sup>If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

And we keep doing this looking forward to that day when we'll all be with Jesus for eternity. Look at how Jude mentions each Person of the Trinity in **20-21**.

**22 And on some have compassion, making a distinction** Translations differ here:

*And have mercy on those who doubt (ESV)*

*And you must show mercy to those whose faith is wavering. (NLT)*

People who are converted, but not yet grounded in the faith, can have a lot of concerns, questions and just plain wrong ideas on the way to becoming mature. Our responsibility is to remember that growth happens little by little. There is no such thing as instant maturity. We will need to be merciful toward people in numerous ways during the process. Having compassion means we can't give up on people even when there are misunderstandings, falls and frustrations in the midst of their growth.

**23 others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire** The next group of troubled Christians has already gone further than doubt; they are now playing with fire. They have begun to engage in the thinking and lifestyle of those “who turn the grace of our God into lewdness” (**v. 4**).

When Christians are convinced that behavior which the Bible calls immoral is actually acceptable, they won't see any reason to avoid it. This was the effect of the error of Balaam that Jude brought up back in **v.11**.

**Hating even the garment defiled by the flesh** The phrase Jude uses here is extremely vivid and indicates that the clothing is defiled by something like human excrement or a drunkard's vomit. That's how Jude views their sin. Richard Bauckham explains Jude's point,

*"The phrase suggests that Jude's readers, while exercising mercy toward these people, must maintain their abhorrence of their sin and everything associated with it, lest they themselves be infected by it."*

This imagery originally comes from the OT prophecies of Zechariah. It shows how God takes away our defilement and gives us a righteousness of his own.

**Zechariah 3:1-4** <sup>1</sup>Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him. <sup>2</sup>And the Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?" <sup>3</sup>Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel. <sup>4</sup>Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, "Take away the filthy garments from him." And to him He said, "See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes."

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**24 Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,** Believe it, people. God's grace and power is stronger than our sin. One reason we as Christians do not overcome sin is frequently that we try too hard to overcome it on our own. We can't do it. He can give us victory.

*"Is that rhetoric? Is that merely pulpit talk? Brethren, unless we lay firm hold of this faith, that God can and does touch and influence hearts that wait upon Him, so as by His Spirit and by His Word, which is the sword of the Spirit, to strengthen their feeble good, and to weaken their strong evil, to raise what is low, to illumine what is dark, and to support what is weak, we have not come to understand the whole wealth of possible good and blessedness which lies in the Gospel." – Alexander MacLaren (1826 – 1910)*

**Philippians 1:6** *being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;*

**Faultless** This word is used in the Bible in three ways:

1. It is used of the sacrificial animals in the OT, meaning that they had no blemish and were, therefore, fit to be offered to God.
2. It is used of Christ, who offered himself "without spot" to God (**Heb. 9:14, 1 Peter 1:19**)
3. Finally, it is used of us, because the blood of Christ removes every spot or fault or blemish that we have ever had. When we finally appear before God we shall be faultless – and our faultlessness, said Matthew Henry is,

*“Not as those who never have been faulty, but as those who, but for God’s mercy, and a Saviour’s sufferings and merits, might most justly have been condemned long ago.”*

In the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said,

**Matthew 5:8** *Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.*

**Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,** Unless God does a work within us to make us pure, His direct presence is essentially off limits to unholy creatures such as ourselves. He remains behind the veil of the Temple. We just don’t have the right credentials or authorization. We can’t go there.

**Personal Illustrations:** Taking pictures on railroad tracks in Toronto. Going up Skyscraper in Toronto – didn’t want to pay for the CN Tower. The Presidio in SF. Simply not allowed.

What’s more, sin causes genuine shame so that we actually fear God’s presence. In the early chapters of Genesis, one of the first consequences of human sin was that Adam and Eve could no longer feel comfortable in the presence of God.

**Genesis 3:8** *And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.*

But what does Jude remind us of here? That such timidity before God is no longer necessary for those whom He has declared pure. We will stand in His very presence with exceeding joy. It would be enough to stand in His presence and be unashamed. It’s more to think of seeing Him and rejoicing. But Jude uses a stronger word. Bible dictionaries define it as “exaltation,” “extreme joy,” “exuberant joy,” “rejoicing with song, dancing.” This is no ordinary joy. And the best part is there will never again be any need to stop. “Joy,” said C.S. Lewis, *“is the serious business of heaven.”*

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## Conclusions

1. **Build one another up in the faith.** We might think it's enough to try to grow in our faith ourselves. Jude might suggest that one reason we don't grow is because we haven't made it our goal to grow together. When we start looking for ways to build up others in the faith, we will inevitably grow ourselves.
2. **Pray in the Holy Spirit.** When you pray, pray for the Holy Spirit's help. If you are the sort that likes to pray in tongues, the Bible gives you permission – even encouragement – to do that. Paul did it, just not around other people. The point is that we grasp the fact that we need God's help to pray properly. More on this at the end.
3. **Take a genuine interest in those who are not doing well in their faith.**
  - a. Is someone doubting, wavering, needing encouragement in order to grow? One of the ways the Holy Spirit works is to reveal to us the distance between God's desires – as expressed in the Bible – and the way things are right now.
  - b. Is someone dabbling in error or harmful doctrines that potentially need correction? We should be there to help them get back on the right path.
4. **Trust that the Lord will complete the work he has started in your life – and in the lives of others.** All our efforts won't make any difference if we don't put forth those efforts in the context of complete trust in Him and an understanding that our life is his work. We are his workmanship. He keeps us from stumbling. He presents us faultless.
5. **Be confident before God even now.** Knowing that we will ultimately stand in God's glorious presence with total confidence and completely pure, we can be confident to come before Him even now. Jesus has already done the work that will ultimately purify us by shedding his blood and dying on the cross.

**Hebrews 4:16** *Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

And if we think back on the concept of praying in the Holy Spirit, we can be even more willing, confident, even excited about entering the presence of God. We can ask him to do the work of putting His thoughts in our minds and His desires in our hearts.

**TO THE SUPREME BEING**      **by: Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564)**

THE prayers I make will then be sweet indeed,  
If Thou the Spirit give by which I pray:  
My unassisted heart is barren clay,  
Which of its native self can nothing feed:  
Of good and pious works Thou art the seed,  
Which quickens only where Thou say'st it may;  
Unless Thou show to us Thine own true way,  
No man can find it: Father! Thou must lead.  
Do Thou, then, breathe those thoughts into my mind  
By which such virtue may in me be bred  
That in Thy holy footsteps I may tread;  
The fetters of my tongue do Thou unbind,  
That I may have the power to sing of Thee,  
And sound Thy praises everlastingly.

Translated into English by William Wordsworth (1770-1850). [http://www.poetry-archive.com/b/to\\_the\\_supreme\\_being.html](http://www.poetry-archive.com/b/to_the_supreme_being.html) (Accessed 5/22/2013)