**VOLUME 4; CHAPTER 19 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**"KEEP YOURSELVES IN THE LOVE OF GOD" by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Keep yourselves in the love of God.*

*Jude 21*

THESE WORDS ARE MOST REMARKABLE IN THE LIGHT OF their context. Taken apart therefrom, it would be the easiest thing in the world to misunderstand and misinterpret them. Let us, therefore, be patient while we remind ourselves of all that which we have read as a lesson. The words of this text may be said to be the center of Jude's advice in view of danger; danger, let it be carefully observed, threatening the called, beloved, kept, for so in the opening words he addressed those to whom he wrote, "them that are called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ."

To such he said, "Keep yourselves in the love of God."

It has often been pointed out that the theme on which Jude desired to write was that of our common salvation. While he gave all diligence to the great subject, preparing for his work he was turned aside from his purpose by the Holy Spirit of God, and constrained to write words of exhortation in view of perils threatening the called; the beloved of the Father, those kept for Jesus Christ.

He first described the perils, "There are certain men crept in privily, even they who were of old set forth unto this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." He did not enter into any fuller description of these men. We may be left very largely to speculation as to what the teaching was which they were advancing, or what the habits of life in which they were living. Having referred to the perils, he proceeded to remind those to whom he wrote by three instances that those once saved might by their own wrongdoing be fearfully punished. The Israelites delivered from Egypt, sinning in the wilderness, failing in faith, were destroyed. Angels who kept not their proper habitation, but left the appointed orbit of their being and service, were cast down from the heights, and reserved in darkness to the final assize. Sodom and Gomorrah, cities of the well-watered plain, having all the advantages of that wonderful country; failing to discover the Creator through the creation, and giving themselves over to all manner of uncleanness, were destroyed. Then, referring again to the evil workers, he compared them to Cain, the hater of God, who reddened his hands in the blood of his brother; to Balaam, who constrained and compelled of the Spirit to the uttering of truth in prophecy, did nevertheless, eventually seduce the people of God to idolatry, and hopelessly perished; and to Korah, who rebelled against the government of God, and was destroyed. Then follows that passage which we have so often read, and yet of which, as we read it together tonight, we felt the almost appalling force, showing the evil of lust and pronouncing judgment upon it. Then having referred to Israel, and illustrated his master thought, that privilege does not in itself ensure ultimate blessing, but brings grave responsibility to those who share it; he came to the positive part of his letter, "But ye, beloved, remember ye the words which have been spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; how that they said to you, in the last time there shall be mockers, walking after their own ungodly lusts. These are they who make separations, sensual, having not the Spirit. But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

I bring you the message of that injunction. I bring it to those of you in this assembly who are "called, beloved of the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ." While we shall not have time in the course of one evening meditation to go back over this ground and consider it in all its detail, let us recognize that this injunction is one born of a consciousness of peril, filling the heart of a man who turned aside from what might have appeared to him would have been a greater, more important work - that of writing of our common salvation - in order to write this one brief page of exhortation. The final message of it, that to which all the rest lends force, is contained in these words, "Keep yourselves in the love of God."

I want to lead you in meditation; first on the plain meaning of this injunction; second, on its importance; and finally on the method which Jude reveals, by which we shall be able to obey the injunction.

Be patient with me if I take two or three moments to ask you to remember what this text does not mean. We are not told to keep ourselves in such a state as to make God love us. I think a recognition of that at the very beginning will help us in the consideration which is to follow. I am not called upon to bring myself to a condition of life which will compel or constrain the love of God toward me. I am not called upon in my life as a child of God to maintain a certain attitude in order to make God continue to love me. Let us start with the recognition of the fact, that God's love is unsought, undeserved and unconditional. We cannot, in this life, put ourselves outside the love of God. It is a great, fundamental truth of the Christian religion that "God so loved the world." The world did not seek His love. The world as He saw it in its sin did not deserve His love, and He did not impose upon the world, conditions fulfilling which, He would love them. He loved the world. I can never think of this for myself, without there coming back to me these lines full of simplicity, full of beauty, written by Charles Wesley.

He came from above our curse to remove,

He hath loved, He hath loved us because He would love.

Love moved Him to die, and on this we rely,

He hath loved, He hath loved, though we cannot tell why.

Said a boy in a Sunday School class to his teacher many years ago: "Teacher, does God love naughty boys?" The teacher said, "No, certainly not!" It was terrible blasphemy. Of course He does. There is a man somewhere in this congregation who has been disappointed within the first five minutes of my message, and is saying, This message is not for me; if it is to the called, the beloved, the kept for Jesus Christ; it is not for me. There are certain senses in which you are quite right; but remember this; God loves men, not upon any condition, not because they seek His love; but, I dare to put it even more forcefully as the idea is suggested in Wesley's hymn, because He would love; nay, He could no other, for His is love. However far you may have wandered, however far, the far country may be; you may have wounded Him, and grieved His Holy Spirit, but you have not made Him cease to love you. You may have forgotten Him, but God has never ceased to love you.

If that be admitted, then we may proceed. What then did Jude mean when he said, "Keep yourselves in the love of God"? Quite simply he meant this. Being in the love of God; keep yourselves from all that which is unlike Him; from all that which violates love and grieves the heart of God; or to use the actual word of Paul, that which causes sorrow to the Spirit of God.

Mark again the introductory word of this brief letter; you are "called, beloved in God the Father, kept for Jesus Christ"; therefore, seeing that you are loved, that you are dwelling in love, that love encompasses you, is set upon your perfecting, "keep yourselves in the love of God." Correspond to that in which you dwell. Answer the love of God.

Therein is the point of our personal responsibility; if indeed we are called of God, if indeed we are beloved of God, if indeed we are being kept for Jesus Christ, then to us the word applies, "Keep yourselves in the love of God."

Go back to the illustration of the earlier part of the letter; What was the sin of Cain? It was that of hatred, which expressed itself in murder. What was the sin of Balaam? The sin of greed, of covetousness, which expressed itself in the wickedness by which he seduced the people of God from their allegiance, and brought them into evil relationships with idolatrous peoples. What was the sin of Korah? Envy in the heart against the arrangements and the government of God, which expressed itself in rebellion against Him. I refer to these again only to ask you to notice that in each case that love is violated. In each case the action is contrary to love. Cain; hatred, murder; impossible to love. Balaam; greed, seduction; impossible to love. Korah; envy, rebellion; impossible to love. These illustrations, used to show the evil of the men against whom Jude is warning us, serve also to illuminate the meaning of this great charge, "Keep yourselves in the love of God." Being in His love, do not become careless, but remember that you are responsible. The atmosphere in which you dwell creates responsibility. The great and gracious fact of the unsought, unconditional, love of God, into which you have been specially brought as you have been called, creates grave responsibility.

Last Sunday evening, we were speaking here of that great word of Paul, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus," and the final message I brought you in that consideration was this, that the love of God shed abroad in the heart of the child of God if allowed to have its own way and master the life will express itself in the attitudes of the life. Paul's injunction is "Let this mind be in you." Answer the movement of the Divine life by bowing to the inward impulse of that life.

There is the same thought here. In speaking on that theme last Sunday night, I dwelt upon it as a great inspiration and gospel of hope to the child of God. Tonight, I come back to it, and listen to the emphasis of solemn warning. "Keep yourselves in the love of God."

Mark the importance of the injunction. We are surrounded by seductive influences. We are in the love of God; and yet we live in an atmosphere in which, unless we learn the art of watchfulness, unless we discover our responsibility, and answer it in the economy of God, we shall wander, not away from His love, for He will still love, but from the possibility of realization and manifestation; we shall fail to fulfil its purpose, and to answer its great and gracious impulse.

Take again these three illustrations. Let us take them in all their bare and naked horror. What are the dangers threatening those upon whom God's love is set; threatening those who live and move and have their being within the very love of God? The dangers are suggested by these illustrations; murder; Cain hated his brother; enticement of other men to actual evil; Balaam seduced the people of God; rebellion against the actual and established government of God in the midst of Whose love we live; Korah led such a rebellion, When I say these things in this assembly, speaking to Christian people, I can quite believe that there are those who object and say, We cannot commit murder; we shall surely never be guilty of deliberately seducing the people of God from allegiance, and leading them into the practice of evil; we never can be guilty of leading a rebellion against God. In answer to that objection, I pray you to remember one or two simple things. First, Cain immediately prefaced the murder of his brother by bringing an offering to the Lord. Balaam, compelled by the Spirit of God, uttered a prophecy concerning Israel more wonderful than any other in certain respects. Korah led a popular movement, and was a man of the people. All the things that are things of horror as we look back at these illustrations, were prefaced by others we are compelled to admire. Let the conceptions of Jesus fall upon these ancient illustrations. Cain murdered his brother. We say, We shall never do so. The answer of Christ is this, "everyone who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment." The actual crime is not the worst sin. The capacity for it, the tendency toward it, the willingness in certain circumstances to harm another. We are nearer to vulgar sin than we know oftentimes. The man who in the presence of so solemn a warning as this epistle brings, says: "These things have no application to me, I cannot commit murder, I cannot be guilty of the sin of Balaam, I can never be guilty of the sin of Korah," may be by his own self-satisfaction on the very margin of those very sins. "Keep your- selves in the love of God."

The warning is needed, for we lose, ere we know it, the graces and glories of the Christian character. Before we know it, these things which result from His love, and which are full of beauty according to His will, have lost their bloom, lost their freshness, the withering process has begun. I am afraid - I would not utter it as a word of censorious criticism, I associate myself with the statement - I am afraid the Church of God is full of men and women who belong to God, who are not in the love of God as to their own character, as to their own conceptions. The forces that are about us are full of peril. Ere we know it, we have fallen - not out of His love - but from such correspondence thereto, as fulfils His will, and manifests His purpose, and accomplishes His work in the world.

Then we need to take one step further most solemnly, and to remember that our age-abiding and ultimate safety depends upon our correspondence to God. We are not to think our salvation is the result of grace, independently of our response thereto. We are not to imagine that at last He will present us as faultless before the throne of the glory of God unless we are faultless. Christ will not introduce us into heaven's fellowship unless there be correspondence to God. Unless there be that love of God shed abroad in our hearts, mastering the life, which expresses itself in holiness, compassion and sacrificial service. He will never present us before the throne of God. There is a grave and awful responsibility resting upon us. Let us remember it.

These thoughts are enforced by the illustrations of the earlier part of the letter. Israelites delivered from Egypt were destroyed in the wilderness. Angels who kept not the orbit of their high and holy service were cast into darkness. Cities dowered with all the values of the fairest valleys and the well-watered plain, were destroyed by fire.

Privilege is not enough. It creates responsibility; and responsibility not responded to, unanswered, not yielded to, issues in destruction. "Keep yourselves in the love of God." It is necessary that over and over again those of us who name His name should bring ourselves back to the measurement of His requirements, and test ourselves as by His love.

If the word of the living God is searching and trying you, do not forget that He loves you still. You are in His love; answer it, respond to it, yield to it. All that in you is contrary to that love; all of bitterness, of hatred, of injustice, of impurity, all that violates the perfect law of the universe which is love; all these things are to be put away. So, we are to keep ourselves in the love of God, responding to it, allowing it to be the perpetual test of our thinking, the criterion of our conduct. We are responsible in these matters.

How may we obey the injunction. The answer is given in the words lying immediately around our text. It may be remembered by the remembrance of three simple words, building, praying, looking. "Building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit … looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." These are the laws of fulfilment.

Building on faith. We hear a great deal today, I sometimes think too much, on the subject of character building, yet there is great value in the idea if it be rightly apprehended. How is character built? Character is built by thought and by action. Or, if I may take three words indicating a sequence: There is first the conception; then the conduct arising out of the conception; and finally there is the character resulting from the conduct. That is the whole process of character building, as I understand it. The matter of first importance is that of the conception, for "as a man thinketh in his heart so is he." According to our thinking, will be our doing; and according to our doing, resulting from our thinking, will be our being.

The foundation of the building is that of our most holy faith. When Jude used the term, he used it as expressive of truths which center in Christ. Enumerate, if you so will, the facts of the one great faith of Christ. "Christ; God incarnate. Christ; perfect, ideal Man, living a sinless life, Christ of the cross; God in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." Christ; "Declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead" Christ; sitting at the right hand of the Father. Christ; coming again to receive His people and to administer the affairs of the world. Are these the cardinal truths? The central thought is that of Christ Himself. He is the object of faith. The Lord Christ; of the sinless life, of the atoning death, of the triumphant resurrection; is the object of faith. We are to build on that foundation. That is to say, that all the activities of our life must harmonize with the faith which we exercised in Christ, and by which we entered into that inner circle of the love of God.

Let us apply the principle to the illustrations of the earlier part of the letter. Is it possible for any man to slay his brother while he is building up on that faith? Can there be harmony between murder and obedience to the ideals of Christ? Is it possible for a man to build on that faith, and seduce the people of God, or rebel against the rule of God? Let that faith be the master passion of the life, let that Christ be not merely the object upon which faith fastens for its first realization of life, but let the Christ be Lord of the life. Faith in Jesus Christ as an act of twenty years ago is useless for the present moment. Faith in Jesus Christ must be the maintained attitude of the life; so that all the habits of the life, the thinking, planning, and doing, shall forevermore be tested thereby. To build on that faith is to keep in the love of God. To be true to Christ in thinking, loving, willing, and doing, is to abide in the love of God. That is the first condition.

Are some of you saying in your hearts, "All this is so patent?" I know it. I know also how easily we forget and how constantly we disobey, and how insidiously there creep into our lives wrong motives, and we fail to build on our faith. We, who in the sanctuary hear the message and feel its force, drift into the world, and ere we know it, we have denied the faith, not by open word that affirms disbelief, but by answering impulses that were born in hell rather than in heaven. "Keep yourselves in the love of God." Keep yourselves by building on the faith.

Take the next word; "Praying in the Holy Spirit." Then even the building on the faith is not to be an action wholly of my own will and in my own strength. If it were so, I should be hopeless. I should know the truth and be unable to do it. I am to pray in the Spirit. The testing of my desires is to be that of the Holy Spirit of God. I am to pray in the light of His interpretation of Christ. The sacred office of the Holy Spirit is to make real to the consciousness of the believer the truth about Christ. Some newborn child of God may say to me, "you have charged us to build on this faith, to test all our living by Christ, how are we to know?" The Spirit of God is given for constant, direct, immediate interpretation of Christ. We are not to imitate the example of a Leader separated from us by two millenniums. We are to walk in the will of God interpreted in the inner life of each of us by the indwelling Spirit of God. "Praying in the Holy Spirit." All the desires of the life are to be submitted to His purification, to the fire of His presence, which burns up the dross of base desires. So am I to build.

Do not let us forget the last word of the three; "looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." The reference of Jude, without any doubt, is to that advent of our Lord for which we are bidden to look. I am convinced that the Church of God has lost, and is losing immeasurably because she has ceased to look for the coming One. When Paul was writing one of his earliest epistles, that to the Thessalonians, he described the new attitude of Christian men in these words, "Ye turned unto God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven." We still insist on men turning from idols to the true God. We insist today as perhaps never before upon serving the living God. Remember, the perfecting word is the last, "to wait for His Son from heaven." In our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ we have justification, sanctification, glorification. I know the words are old, but how full they are of value and meaning. I look back and say, "There and then I was saved." I think of the present process and say, "Today I am being saved." I look on and up and say, "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." The completion of the work will be at His coming. If we would keep ourselves in the love of God, we must be watchers for that morning. To remember that He may come and disturb me at my work, or in my play; will have wonderful effect upon my work, and on my play. I am so to live and toil and speak, that if the life were perfected, the toil ended, and the speech checked, by the flaming glory of His advent, I should not be ashamed from Him at His coming. "Keep yourselves in the love of God," by looking for the mercy.

Let our last thought be that suggested by the closing ascription of praise, "Now unto Him that is able to guard you from stumbling, and to set you before the presence of His glory without blemish in exceeding joy, to the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and power before all time, and now and for evermore."

Mark the beginning of the brief letter. Mark its central injunction. Listen to its final doxology. How did it begin? "To them that are called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ." How does it end? "Now unto Him that is able to guard you from stumbling." Between these two the charge, "Keep yourselves in the love of God." Let us test ourselves, whether we be in the faith or not, by asking ourselves whether we are in the love. Is there bitterness in the heart, anger in the soul against some other man? Is there the making of murder in you, greed, covetousness, a spirit of envy? While God still loves you, you are not keeping yourselves in the love of God. I pray you with Jude, remember Israel delivered from Egypt, perishing in the wilderness; angels keeping not their first estate, cast into darkness; the cities of the plain desolated. May He help us to understand and to keep ourselves in His love.