

Sanctified By God

The epistle of Jude is short, sweet and concentrated. There are many beautiful phrases and powerful images contained in this message delivered to the church of Jesus Christ under the apostle's designation 'the common salvation'. We shall dwell on some of these in the coming weeks. Jude, or Judas, was one of the Lord's twelve disciples. He was, it seems, also called Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus. He is distinguished from Judas Iscariot who betrayed the Lord by his relationship to James, son of Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18, Acts 1:13).

A good question

The only incident recorded of this Jude in the gospels is in John 14:22 where during Christ's address to His disciples after the last supper Jude put the question, 'Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?' In answer the Lord replied, 'the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you'. We may therefore deduce that the things written in this little epistle are the Lord's teachings brought to mind by the Holy Spirit for the manifestation of Christ to His church.

A servant's role

As well as being brother to James by natural relations Jude identifies himself as 'the servant of Jesus Christ'. This title applies to all the Lord's people, however, it is used particularly to describe the special position in the church given by Christ to His apostles. These men were given to Christ in the covenant of grace. They were His possession by redemption. They were His by conversion and personal calling to service. It was their calling and function to be leaders in Christ's church and honoured ministers of the gospel of grace and peace.

Knowing your audience

The opening verse also tells us much about those to whom Jude wrote. Knowing the audience is a matter of great importance in properly understanding the apostles' writings and thereby the nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The apostles did not write their epistles to the whole world or to unbelievers. They addressed their writings specifically to the church, i.e. the redeemed people of the Lord. Jude is writing to believers. He is not writing to people who have no faith. He tells us clearly that his epistle is written 'to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called'.

'Sanctified by God'

We shall begin our study by examining these three distinguishing titles employed by Jude. Many people have a wrong notion about what sanctification is and imagine it to be a work of man to make himself more holy and more fit for heaven. Jude lays this fallacy to rest by clearly telling us that Christ's people are 'sanctified by God'. Sanctification is not a human work. It is not a combined effort between God and man. Holiness does not increase and decrease according to our works, nor ebb and flow according to our obedience.

A spiritual work

Believers are sanctified by God in Christ and made holy, acceptable and blameless by the cleansing blood and imputed righteousness of the spotless Lamb of God. We are 'preserved in Jesus Christ', Jude tells us. We are preserved under His protective shield of distinguishing love, free grace and sovereign mercy. Believers are not kept by their own personal commitment, determination and devotion to duty. Salvation is of the Lord and every spiritual blessing originates in heaven.

An effectual calling

God's covenant people have been called in eternal election, placed into union with the Lord Jesus Christ, effectually called to newness of life in regeneration and persuasively called by God the Holy Spirit in gospel preaching. The justification, sanctification and glorification of God's church, and each known and named individual in it, is a divine act of grace from the Triune God in election, redemption and conversion. Jude, with the other apostles, will have us know this because this knowledge is 'the faith which was once delivered unto the saints'.

Jude's mission

There is great comfort for God's people in seeing clearly, by faith, our completed salvation in Jesus Christ. This comfort is what Jude is bringing to his readers' awareness as he puts them in remembrance of the Lord's ways and dealings in the history of the church – more of this in coming weeks. Thereafter, gratitude and worship is the proper response of the church to the Lord God who has, as Paul says elsewhere, 'from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.'

Amen

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