



Staying in the Love of God

Jonathan K. Dodson | Jude 17-21 | October 16, 2016

The Bible can seem awfully harsh at times: judgment, eternal fire, etc. But the difficult sayings come from a place of profound love. In this passage we see two kinds of people — those who divide, trying to pull others away from the love of God and those who unite, trying to help one another stay in the love of God. Now imagine for a moment you are a Syrian refugee. You're fleeing your home but you and your family are captured. Men, women, and children are separated. An soldier comes up and drags your children away, kicking and screaming. How do you respond? Yell, scream, threaten the soldiers. You'll do anything to prevent your children *from being pulled away from your love*. That's what God's been doing in these letters. Issuing threats to keep us from being dragged away from his love. But here he whispers, gently showing us three ways stay in his love: build on the gospel, pray in the Spirit, wait for Jesus.

Build on the Gospel

"In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions. It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. But beloved" (19-20). Here we have two types, the scoffer and the beloved. The *scoffer* is a person who mocks, scorns, subverts faith in God. The Proverbs describe a scoffer as someone who hates to be wrong (9:8) and can't stand correction (15:12). The *beloved* is a person who used to be a scoffer but now believes, trusts, encourages faith in God. They've come face to face with the love of God in the cross of Christ and melted with gratitude. Which one are you? You might say, it depends on the day. Which is an answer from experience not from identity. These are polar opposite identities; you're one or the other. *But the reason Jude is writing this letter is that scoffing can get into the church*, like a silent disease and rot it from the inside out (12). Before you know it you are standing on the sidelines, out of the game, mocking your own team. That's why Jude says it's critical to keep ourselves in the love of God. It's a responsibility, like a marriage. Some days you don't feel like it but you keep showing up. What to do? First, you **build**. Building is communal. We build *one another* up. This means you look outward. You enter a room looking to help, edify, encourage, even correct if necessary. I need help to do this so I pray each day for the people I am going to meet with, that I will have wisdom from the Spirit to help them. Where does that wisdom to build come from? From *"our most holy faith."* As we saw last week, this is a reference to the gospel (4). Building is communal, yes, but you've got to have the right foundation, the **gospel**. The way a church becomes strong, safe, and majestic is by all of us taking part in this gospel project to root one another in Christ. It's not for a ministerial elite, elders, deacons, leaders; it's for everyone! The beloved build *together in the gospel*, but scoffers seek to divide. We can divide by letting a friend know how you feel about someone else, a judgmental comment on FB, or a comparison slips out in conversation. "I can't believe she bought that; I heard they are in debt bigtime." One young lady joined our church early on. She had a counseling degree, loved mercy ministry and scoffing. She frequently complained about any ministry she was in. Things always needed to change to suit her. Nothing was up to her standards. She couldn't stay in a friendship long because she ended up talking about them behind their back. She was prickly and people were afraid to confront her. The Proverbs describe a scoffer as someone who hates to be wrong (9:8) and can't stand correction (15:12). Eventually someone came



to me and confessed she viewed this young lady “as a problem and not a sister.” Instead of joining in on the scoffing, she decided to build her up, and to build sometimes you have to take out a wall. She met with her to ask what gospel has to say to her sin. What does it say? Scoffing makes us feel righteous in comparison to others: “I would run the ministry differently; *I* would call it X; I would lead it this way.” On the sidelines. Drawing self-righteousness from being above. The gospel tells us scoffing can’t give us the righteousness we desire. Only Jesus can. He stands over us in righteous judgement, but then he comes down beside us to serve our sentence and gives us a righteousness scoffing could never afford. Let’s build on Christ and build one another up in our most holy faith. It’s what the beloved do.

Pray in the Spirit

Now we’ll lack the love to build others up if you’re not [praying in the Holy Spirit](#) (second way to stay in God’s love). How do we do that? Since scoffers are “devoid of the Spirit,” it will be helpful to consider how *not* to pray in the Spirit. Sometimes we pray “**in our doctrine**”. Jesus warns of prayers that are for show, that have many words, or posture for attention. Over the years, I’ve noticed men often struggle with this. I have! They tend to *pray good theology instead of letting good theology pray*. What do I mean. I mean they try to word everything as though they are writing a systematic theology. It comes out doctrinally accurate but relationally cold, out of touch with the Spirit. It’s praying *before* others instead of *with* God. Often the Spirit doesn’t even use words; he groans (Rom 8). This happens when we are moved over truth, not meticulously arranging the truth. Another way we go wrong is by praying “**in a list**.” We might work down the Lord’s Prayer, thru prayer book, or a list of things we want from God as though reading a grocery list. The Lord is not a grocer. He does not have things for sale. He is a Person to be adored, loved, known, and inquired after. We can also “**pray in emotion**.” The emotional prayer looks more for an experience than for God. How do you know if this is you? You tend to judge the prayer time based on how emotionally stirred you are. Praying in the Spirit isn’t shorthand for speaking in tongues or having powerful dreams, *though the Spirit can certainly work that way*. Praying in the Spirit means to **pray in His presence**. How do you get into his presence? First we have to know who he is. On one end, there are those who see him as a spiritual energy to *use* for miraculous things. On the other end, the orphaned child of the Trinity *ignored* altogether. This phrase, in the Spirit, shows us a middle way, that praying in the Spirit is praying to (a person) and with his (guidance). He’s not an alien force or an absent partner but an eternal person. He does many things that a person does. He speaks, teaches, listens, guides, intercedes. He can also be lied to, obeyed, and grieved ([put list up](#)). Just like a person. In fact, St. Paul says, “[if there is any fellowship \(koinonia\) in the Spirit...be of the same mind](#)” (Phil 2:1). Praying in the Spirit is fellowship with the Spirit, and fellowship means more than ignoring or using; it means communing. How? Pray **with** the Spirit. 2 Ways: Take the Word; Take a Walk. Eph 6:18 tells us praying in the Spirit means to **take up the Word** “[the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication](#).” Many of us have the sword but don’t take it up. The war is raging, our flesh is flying, people getting dragged off, and we stand idly by with the sword in the corner. Paul says you wanna pray? Pray the Word! *Have you ever met someone who couldn’t speak English? I’ve missed buses, trains and almost a plane because I didn’t know the language in a foreign country*. The Bible gives us the language of God, to

understand his dialect, to know his Spirit and do his will. Which brings us to a second way to pray with the Spirit. Luther said, “Let the Spirit **take your thoughts for a walk.**” What did he mean? Sometimes I get stuck praying a list and I don’t allow myself to veer off to take in the sights of God’s glory, beauty, truth, and goodness. Sometimes you need to let the Spirit take you for a walk, to take in the wonder of your divine surroundings, and marvel at some truth about God, about his character, his ways, something in his word. I used to feel guilty when this happened because I would run out of time in getting through prayers for others, but God has taught me to not just *take up the Word but to take a Walk*. Pray in the Spirit, not in a doctrine, a list, or an emotion. Pray *to* the Spirit and *with* the Spirit and stay in the love of God.

Wait for Jesus

A final way we are to keep ourselves in the love of God is by [waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life](#) (21). Mercy, waiting, eternal life. Why wait for **mercy** if we’ve already received it in Jesus? After all, he came down from the judge’s seat and took our sentence. We need mercy because life can be hard. Mercy for the hardship of keeping ourselves in the love of God. Mercy from falling prey to scoffing. Mercy that keeps us from being dragged away from the love of God, from falling into sin, from the scoffers and from scoffing, mercy when we think we’ve reached the breaking point, and all we can eek out is Lord have mercy. He loves those prayers, prayers of the desperate, the weak, the feeble, the needy. This week our elders meeting was heavy, weighed down by pastoral care for struggling souls. At the end of it, all we could eek out was Lord have mercy. Mercy comes to those who **wait**. Those [“who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, will run and not grow weary; walk and not faint”](#) (Isa 40:31). Mercy is for those who wait. [“God works on behalf of those who wait for him”](#) (Isa 64:4). Recently, I’ve been *striving*. Thinking if God only brought me this or that, then I would be content, then I would be happy, then I would have enough. But then a friend sent me this from God’s Word: [“I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord, more than watchmen for the morning”](#) (Ps 130:5-6). Wait for the Lord; He is enough. Hope in his Word; it is reliable. More than a watchman waits for the morning, desperate for the sun to rise, to come down from the tower, and crash. More than the morning, wait for the Lord. He has brought mercy and he will bring mercy. Jude says mercy be multiplied to you. It has been and it will be. *There is a mercy coming that will finish off our building, fulfill the groaning, and introduce us to the world of never-ending mercy.* That’s why he says to wait for the mercy of Jesus that leads to eternal life. There is a mercy that has already come. Look back at the cross. And there is a mercy to come that leads (the word is into) eternal life. What is eternal life? [“this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent”](#) (Jn 17:3). Where there is Christ, there is eternal life. Wherever he goes, life goes. And he is saying there is a mercy coming that is already underneath the feet of the saints; it is the mercy of Christ’s sin-absorbing, evil-denouncing work at the cross, but also a mercy that moves into eternal life, into a renewed world where Christ is our visible Redeemer-King, presiding over a city whose gates never close because there’s no need for a watchman. There are no more threats. The city of God where the trees of life are for the healing of the nations. Wait, brothers and sisters, wait. Wait upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Mercy is coming; mercy is here! This is how we stay in the love of God.