

LIFE-STUDY OF JUDE

MESSAGE ONE

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH

Scripture Reading: Jude 1-7

With this message we begin the life-study of the book of Jude. The subject of Jude is contending for the faith. In verse 3 Jude entreats us to "contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints." In this message we shall cover the first seven verses of this Epistle.

INTRODUCTION

Verses 1 and 2 are the introduction to the book of Jude. In these verses Jude says, "Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ: mercy to you and peace and love be multiplied." Both Jude and James were brothers of the Lord Jesus in the flesh (Matt. 13:55). James was one of the apostles (Gal. 1:19) and one of the elders in Jerusalem (Acts 15:2, 13; 21:18), reputed with Peter and John to be a pillar of the church (Gal. 2:9). He also wrote the Epistle of James (James 1:1). Jude was not listed among the twelve, nor are we told that he was an elder in a church. Nevertheless, he wrote this Epistle, a short yet excellent book.

According to verse 1, this book is addressed to "those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ." The Greek word rendered "by" may also be translated "for." "By" denotes the strength and means of keeping; "for" denotes the purpose and object of keeping. All the believers have been given to the Lord by the Father (John 17:6), and they are being kept for Him and by Him.

Many Bible teachers believe that this Epistle, like 1 and 2 Peter, was written to Jewish believers in Christ. In

Jude's words, these believers were called, beloved in God the Father, and kept by Jesus Christ.

In verse 2 Jude says, "Mercy to you and peace and love be multiplied." The fact that mercy is mentioned instead of grace in this greeting may be due to the church's degradation and apostasy (see vv. 21-22). In 1 and 2 Timothy Paul includes God's mercy in his opening greeting. God's mercy reaches farther than His grace. In the degraded situation of the churches, God's mercy is needed.

As sinners, we were in a pitiful situation. But God's mercy reached us and brought us out of that situation and qualified us to receive His grace. In principle, grace requires that we be in a somewhat good condition. However, because mercy reaches farther than grace, it is able to reach those who are in a most pitiful condition.

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH

Verse 3 says, "Beloved, using all diligence to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you, entreating you to contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints." Here Jude speaks of our common salvation. This is general salvation, which is common to and held by all believers, like the common faith (Titus 1:4).

Some Christians misapply Jude's word about contending for the faith. They think that to contend for the faith means to contend for matters such as baptism and foot washing. Some argue concerning head covering or about the kind of bread used in the Lord's table. However, the faith in verse 3 does not refer to such matters.

The faith in this verse is not subjective; it is objective. It does not refer to our believing, but refers to our belief, to what we believe. The faith denotes the contents of the New Testament as our faith (Acts 6:7; 1 Tim. 1:19; 3:9; 4:1; 5:8; 6:10, 21; 2 Tim. 2:18; 3:8; 4:7; Titus 1:13), in which we believe for our common salvation. This faith, not any doctrine, has been delivered once for all to the saints. For this faith we should contend (1 Tim. 6:12).

In the Old Testament God gave Abraham a promise. Later, through Moses God gave the law to the children of Israel. In the Gospel of John we are told that when the Lord Jesus came, grace came (1:17). Here we have three important matters: promise, law, and grace. Some Bible teachers speak of the dispensation of promise, the dispensation of law, and the dispensation of grace.

In order to understand the truth in the New Testament, we need to see that God first gave a promise to Abraham. We may say that this promise was on the "main track" of God's dealing with man. But because of the ignorance and unbelief of God's chosen people, it was necessary for God to give the law to the children of Israel. In the book of Galatians Paul likens the law to Hagar, Abraham's concubine, not to Sarah, Abraham's wife (Gal. 4:21-25). This means that Hagar was a type, or prefigure, of the law. Hence, the position of the law is not that of the wife, but that of a concubine. Now in the New Testament God gives faith instead of the law.

With the faith given by God there is both a subjective side and an objective side. The subjective side concerns our believing, and the objective side concerns the things we believe. In verse 3 the faith does not denote our ability to believe; rather, it refers to what we believe. Hence, the faith refers to the contents of the New Testament.

Peter tells us in his second Epistle that like precious faith has been allotted to us (2 Pet. 1:1). This faith is subjective and refers to the faith that is within us. This differs from the faith in Jude 3, for the faith here is objective.

The faith in the objective sense is equal to the contents of God's will given to us in the New Testament. The law includes the contents of the Ten Commandments and all the subordinate ordinances. The law was given in the Old Testament, but what God gives in the New Testament is the faith that includes all the items of God's new will. This will even includes the Triune God. However, it does not include such matters as head covering, foot washing, or methods of baptism. Nevertheless, some believers contend

for such things, thinking that they are contending for the faith. But that is not the correct understanding of what Jude means by contending for the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

To contend for the faith is to contend for the basic and crucial matters of God's new will. One of these basic matters is Christ's death for our redemption.

Suppose a modernist tells you that Jesus died on the cross not for redemption, but because He was a martyr and sacrificed Himself for His teachings. This understanding of the death of Christ is heretical. It is contrary to one of the main items of God's new will. We need to contend for the truth concerning Christ's redemption.

Many years ago in China we contended for the truth of redemption when we fought against the book *For Sinners Only*, a book which claims that a sinner can be favored by God or saved apart from the blood of Jesus. The Bible clearly says that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (Heb. 9:22). We fought against that heretical book and inoculated the believers against its modernistic teachings.

We thank the Lord that in this country today many fundamental Bible teachers are also fighting against heretical, modernistic teachings. This is to contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. This faith has been delivered to the saints once for all, and what we need to do now is to contend for it.

THE HERESIES OF THE APOSTATES

In verse 4 Jude goes on to say, "For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who of old have been written of beforehand for this judgment, ungodly men, perverting the grace of our God into licentiousness, and denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." Verses 4 through 19 of Jude are in close parallel with chapter two of 2 Peter. This indicates that the Epistle of Jude was written in the time of the church's apostasy and degradation.

In verse 4 Jude says that certain men have "crept in unnoticed." Literally the Greek means to get in by the side,

or slip in by a side door. We may compare this with "secretly bring in" in 2 Peter 2:1. As the enemy crept in to sow tares among the wheat (see Matt. 13), the apostates have crept in unnoticed.

The words "this judgment" refer to the judgment of the creeping in unnoticed of the apostates, the judgment unfolded in the following verses. Judgment here is the condemnation for punishment, and it refers to being condemned to be punished.

Here Jude speaks of ungodly men, who pervert the grace of God into licentiousness and deny our Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. The evil of these heretical apostates is twofold: perverting the grace of God into wantonness, that is, into the abuse of freedom (see Gal. 5:13; 1 Pet. 2:16) and denying the headship and lordship of the Lord. These two go together. Turning the grace of God into an abused freedom for wantonness requires denying the Lord's rule and authority.

HISTORICAL EXAMPLES OF THE LORD'S JUDGMENT UPON APOSTASY

The Children of Israel

In verses 5 through 7 Jude gives some historical examples of the Lord's judgment upon apostasy. The first example is that of the children of Israel: "But I intend to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord, having saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe" (v. 5). There was apostasy among those who were led out of the land of Egypt. This means that the unbelieving children of Israel became apostates. In this verse Jude tells us that the Lord destroyed those who did not believe.

The Angels Who Did Not Keep Their Own Principality

Verse 6 says, "And angels who did not keep their own principality, but abandoned their own dwelling place, He has kept in eternal bonds under gloom for the judgment of the great day." The angels here are the same as those in

2 Peter 2:4; they are the "sons of God" in Genesis 6. The Greek word translated "principality" is *arche*. This word means the beginning of power, the first place of authority; hence, original dignity in a high position. The fallen angels did not keep their original dignity and position, but abandoned their own dwelling place, which is in heaven, to come to earth at Noah's time to commit fornication with the daughters of men (Gen. 6:2; 1 Pet. 3:19). The "gloom" is the gloomy pits of Tartarus (2 Pet. 2:4), and the judgment of the great day will probably be the final judgment of the great white throne.

Sodom and Gomorrah

In verse 7 Jude continues, "As Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, who in like manner with these gave themselves over to fornication and went after other flesh, are set forth as an example, undergoing the penalty of eternal fire." The word "as" here is important and means in the same manner as. This word proves that the angels in the preceding verse are the sons of God in Genesis 6:2, who committed fornication with strange flesh and were condemned by God for the judgment of the great day, for immediately following that was the judgment on Sodom, Gomorrah, and the cities around them. The relative pronoun "who" in verse 7 refers to Sodom, Gomorrah, and the cities around them.

The phrase "in like manner" means in the manner of committing fornication with strange flesh, as the fallen angels did. The fallen angels committed fornication with another race, which to them was strange flesh. The Sodomites indulged their lusts with males (Rom. 1:27; Lev. 18:22), with flesh different from and strange to what God ordained by the nature of His creation for human marriage (Gen. 2:18-24). In verse 7 "other flesh" denotes flesh that is strange or different, and "these" refers to the fornicating angels in the preceding verse.

If we compare Jude with 2 Peter, we shall see that these two Epistles cover many of the same points. This indicates that the apostles and early teachers must have

had fellowship regarding these matters. Otherwise, how could Peter and Jude have written in a way that is so similar? These two brothers, both of whom had a Jewish background and bore the responsibility to sound the trumpet for the New Testament truths, condemned the same things and emphasized the fact that anyone who takes the way of apostasy will suffer God's judgment.

It is extremely serious to deny the Lord's Person and His redemptive work. Certain modernists who deny the Lord in this way have suffered God's judgment even in their lifetime. When the Oxford movement, or Buchmanism, was active in China, some modernists were so bold as to say that Jesus Christ was not the Son of God born of a virgin, but was the illegitimate son of Mary. This is not only heretical; it is blasphemous. What blasphemy it is to claim that our Lord Jesus Christ was the illegitimate son of Mary! Eventually, some of those who taught such heretical and blasphemous things did not have a good end in life. Not only will they be judged by God in the future--they were judged by God during their lifetime. As a result, the ending of their life was not at all good.

We need to learn from the books of Jude and 2 Peter to fear God and to be very careful concerning the Lord's Person and His redemptive work. Because we live in a perverted age, the young people especially need to be on the alert. We all must have a basic understanding of the Word of God. This will protect us. As Peter says, the Word will be a lamp shining within us (2 Pet. 1:19). Then if we come in contact with apostates and heretics, we will know that their teaching concerning the Person of Christ and His redemptive work is false and blasphemous, and we will not listen to them. Because we fought against modernism when we were in China, the Christians there were protected. Of course, other Christians were also faithful to fight against heretical teachings. Today we all need to be faithful to contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

LIFE-STUDY OF JUDE

MESSAGE TWO

EVILS OF THE APOSTATES AND THEIR PUNISHMENT UNDER THE LORD'S JUDGMENT

Scripture Reading: Jude 8-19

In the foregoing message we saw that the subject of the Epistle of Jude is contending for the faith. Jude charges us to contend for the faith, and then he goes on to speak concerning apostasy (v. 4). In verses 5 through 7 he gives some historical examples of the Lord's judgment upon apostasy. Now in verses 8 through 19 he points out the evils of the apostates and their punishment under the Lord's judgment. Let us consider these verses one by one and pay attention to certain crucial points.

DESPISING LORDSHIP

Verse 8 says, "Yet in like manner these dreamers also defile the flesh and despise lordship and revile dignities." The ungodly men spoken of in verse 4 are dreamers, bearing the name of Christians yet doing things as in dreams, such things as perverting the grace of God into licentiousness to defile their flesh and denying Jesus Christ as our only Master and Lord, despising His lordship and reviling the authorities in His heavenly government.

According to what we have observed throughout the years, those who deny the Lord Jesus and refuse to believe the holy Word eventually cast off the feeling in their conscience. In Paul's words, their conscience has been seared (1 Tim. 4:2) and does not function properly. As a result, they may become unclean and immoral. Once a person's conscience has become seared, he no longer has a protection or safeguard.

The apostates defile the flesh, despise lordship, and

revile dignities because they do not care for God's government. Having no regard for God's authority, they are altogether lawless. They despise lordship; that is, they despise the lordship of Christ, which is the center of the divine government, dominion, and authority (Acts 2:36; Eph. 1:21; Col. 1:16). They also revile dignities, which probably refer to both angels and men in power and authority.

In verse 9 Jude continues, "But Michael the archangel, when disputing with the Devil, arguing concerning the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a reviling judgment against him, but said, The Lord rebuke you." The body of Moses was buried by the Lord in a valley in the land of Moab, in a place known by no man (Deut. 34:6). It must have been purposely done in this manner by the Lord. When Moses and Elijah appeared with Christ on the mount of transfiguration (Matt. 17:3), Moses must have been manifested in his body, which was kept by the Lord and resurrected. Probably, in view of this, the Devil attempted to do something to his body, and the archangel argued with him concerning this. The reference in 2 Peter 2:11 is general, but this is a definite case, concerning the body of Moses.

Jude points out that Michael did not bring a reviling judgment against the Devil, but said, "The Lord rebuke you." This indicates that, in the Lord's heavenly government, the Devil, Satan, was even higher than the arch-angel Michael. God appointed and set him so (Ezek. 28:14). In any case, Satan was under the Lord. Therefore, Michael said to him, "The Lord rebuke you." Michael kept his position in the order of divine authority.

REVILING WHAT THEY DO NOT KNOW

Verse 10 says, "But these revile whatever they do not know; and whatever they understand naturally, as animals without reason, in these they are being corrupted." The first mention of the word "these" in verse 10 refers to the dreamers in verse 8. In Greek the word "know" here denotes a deeper sensing of invisible things, and the word

for "understand" denotes a superficial realization of visible objects. We need both an understanding of visible things and a knowing of invisible things.

The Greek word rendered "naturally" also means instinctively. These dreamers revile what they do not know, things which they should know; and what they understand they understand naturally, instinctively, without reason, as animals of instinct. They do not exercise the deeper and higher knowledge of man with reason, including the consciousness of man's conscience. What they practice is the shallow and base instinctive understanding, like that of animals without human reason. By behaving this way they are being corrupted or destroyed.

THE WAY OF CAIN, THE ERROR OF BALAAM, AND THE REBELLION OF KORAH

Verse 11 says, "Woe to them! Because they have gone in the way of Cain, and poured themselves out in the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the rebellion of Korah." Here Jude refers to the way of Cain, the error of Balaam, and the rebellion of Korah. The way of Cain is the way of serving God religiously after one's own will and rejecting heretically the redemption by blood required and ordained by God. Those who follow the way of Cain are according to the flesh and envy God's true people because of their faithful testimony to God (Gen. 4:2-8).

Today some so-called Christians follow the way of Cain in that they serve God according to their own will. Because they like to do things a certain way, they do them that way. This is to serve God religiously after one's own will.

We have pointed out that Cain rejected redemption by blood as required by God, and he was also envious of his brother, Abel. Abel was a true child of God, and his testimony was faithful to God and accepted by Him. God was pleased with Abel's offering. But Cain envied his brother to such an extent that he killed him. In principle, this has happened throughout the last nineteen centuries. The ones accepted by God suffer at the hands of those who serve God religiously according to their own will.

In verse 11 Jude says that the apostates have "poured themselves out in the error of Balaam for reward." For the apostates to pour themselves out in this way means that they gave themselves up to this error, rushed headlong into it, ran riotously into it.

The error of Balaam is the error of teaching wrong doctrine for reward, although the one teaching knows that it is contrary to the truth and against the people of God. The error of Balaam also involves abusing the influence of certain gifts to lead the people of God astray from the pure worship of the Lord to idolatrous worship (Num. 22:7, 21; 31:16; Rev. 2:14). Balaam knew that what he taught was against God's truth and against His people, and he knowingly taught it for gain.

Today certain Bible teachers and preachers have fallen into the error of Balaam. Some of these know the deeper truths of the Word. However, fearing the loss of financial support, they do not dare to teach these truths. For example, in 1963 I had a pleasant fellowship with a particular preacher. He told me that he knew the truth concerning the church. But he said that he could not teach this truth, because if he did so, his organization would lose financial support. This indicates that he taught only those things that would enable him to receive financial support. At least to some extent, he practiced the error of Balaam.

If we know the truth, we should teach it and preach it at any cost. But if we dare not teach and preach the truth because we fear loss or because we desire financial gain, we are practicing the error of Balaam. What a shame that certain preachers do not preach the truth because they fear the loss of financial support! In principle, this is the error of Balaam.

In verse 11 Jude also speaks of those who perished in the rebellion of Korah. The Greek word translated "rebellion" here literally means contradiction, speaking against. The rebellion of Korah was a rebellion against God's deputy authority in His government and His word spoken by His deputy (like Moses). This brings in destruction (Num. 16:1-40).

Moses was God's deputy in authority and also in the speaking of His word. But Korah and two hundred fifty others rebelled against Moses' authority and speaking. Actually, this authority and speaking were of God, not of Moses. Moses' authority was God's authority, and his speaking was God's speaking. Nevertheless, Korah and his group rebelled against this. As a result, Korah and those with him suffered a serious judgment: the earth opened and swallowed them all.

We know from history that God always speaks through a deputy authority. To rebel against this authority and speaking is, in principle, to be in the rebellion of Korah.

HIDDEN REEFS

In verse 12 Jude goes on to say, "These are hidden reefs in your love feasts, feasting together with you without fear, shepherds that feed themselves, waterless clouds, carried along by winds, autumn trees without fruit, having died twice, rooted up; wild waves of the sea, foaming out their own shames, wandering stars, for whom the gloom of darkness has been kept for eternity." The Greek word translated "hidden reefs," *spilades*, originally meant a rock. It may allude here to a sunken rock with the sea over it (Darby); hence, hidden rocks. The Greek word *spiloi* for "spots" in 2 Peter 2:13 is very close to *spilades*; hence, some translations render this spots. Actually, these two words refer to two different things. The spots are defects on the surface of precious stones; the hidden rocks are at the bottom of the water. The early heretics were not only spots on the surface but also hidden rocks at the bottom, both of which were a damage to the believers in Christ.

The love feasts mentioned in verse 12 were feasts of love motivated by God's love (*agape*--1 John 4:10-11, 21). In the early days the believers were accustomed to eating together in love for fellowship and worship (Acts 2:46). This kind of feasting was joined to the Lord's supper (1 Cor. 11:20-21, 33) and called a love feast.

Jude calls the apostates "shepherds that feed themselves." The pleasure-seeking heretics (2 Pet. 2:13)

pretend to be shepherds, but at the love feasts they only fed themselves, having no concern for others. To others, they were waterless clouds, having no life supply to render.

TREES WITHOUT FRUIT

These heretics are also called "autumn trees without fruit, having died twice, rooted up." Autumn is a season for reaping fruit. The self-seeking apostates seem to be fruit trees in season, but they have no fruit to satisfy others. They have died twice, not only outwardly in appearance as most trees do in autumn, but also inwardly in nature. They are thoroughly dead; they should be uprooted.

WILD WAVES AND WANDERING STARS

In verse 13 Jude goes on to speak of the heretics as "wild waves of the sea, foaming out their own shames, wandering stars, for whom the gloom of darkness has been kept for eternity." Shepherds, clouds, trees, and stars are positive figures in biblical metaphor, but hidden reefs, waves, and the sea are negative. These apostates are false shepherds, empty clouds, dead trees, and wandering stars. They are hidden reefs and wild, raging waves of the sea, foaming out, without restraint, their own shame. The metaphor of wandering stars indicates that the erratic teachers, the apostates, are not solidly fixed in the unchanging truths of the heavenly revelation, but are wandering about among God's star-like people (Dan. 12:3; Phil. 2:15). Their destiny will be the gloom of darkness, which has been kept for them for eternity.

THE LORD COMING WITH MYRIADS OF SAINTS

In verse 14 Jude continues, "And Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied also of these, saying: Behold, the Lord came with myriads of His saints." The coming of the Lord spoken of here must be the appearing of the Lord's parousia (coming), as mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2:8; Matthew 24:27, 30; and Zechariah 14:4-5. The Greek words rendered "myriads of His saints" may also be translated

"His holy myriads." These myriads probably include, as in Zechariah 14:5, the saints (1 Thes. 3:13) and the angels (Matt. 16:27; 25:31; Mark 8:38).

Different opinions may be held concerning the myriads of the saints, or the holy myriads, in verse 14. Some may claim that the saints here are angels, and others may say that these saints are believers. According to the Scriptures, when the Lord Jesus comes back to judge all persons and things, He will come both with the holy angels and with the holy believers. In His sight, both these angels and believers are holy ones. When the Lord Jesus comes back, He will come with His angels and with the overcomers. The overcomers will make up Christ's bride, who will also be His army. Therefore, the Lord will come with these saints and angels to fight against Antichrist and his army.

JUDGMENT UPON THE UNGODLY

We see from verse 15 that the Lord will come "to execute judgment against all, and to convict all the ungodly concerning all their ungodly works which they have done in an ungodly way, and concerning all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him." The Lord's coming will be to carry out God's governmental judgment, and by this judgment all the ungodly ones will be dealt with.

In verse 15 Jude uses the word "ungodly" four times. He speaks of the ungodly and their ungodly works which they have done in an ungodly way. He also mentions the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against the Lord. All this will be judged by the Lord at His coming.

In verse 16 Jude says that these ungodly ones are murmurers and complainers. They go on according to their own lusts, their mouths speak great swelling things, and they admire persons for the sake of advantage. Then in verses 17 and 18 Jude reminds the believers of the words spoken by the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ that in the last time there will be mockers going on according to their ungodly lusts.

NOT HAVING SPIRIT

In verse 19 Jude says, "These are those who make separations, soulish, not having spirit." The Greek word translated "soulish" is *psychikos*, the adjective form of *psyche*, which means soul. "The *psyche* (soul) is the center of the personal being, the 'I' of each individual. It is in each man bound to the spirit, man's higher part, and to the body, man's lower part; drawn upwards by the one, downwards by the other. He who gives himself up to the lower appetites, is *fleshy*; he who by communion of his *spirit* with God's Spirit is employed in the higher aims of his being, is *spiritual*. He who rests midway, thinking only of self and self's interest, whether animal or intellectual, is the *psychikos*, the selfish (*soulish*) man, the man in whom the spirit is sunk and degraded into subordination to the subordinate *psyche* (soul)" (Alford).

In verse 19 Jude speaks of the apostates as "not having spirit." This is the human spirit, not the Spirit of God. The apostates are devoid of spirit. They "have not indeed ceased to have a spirit, as a part of their own tripartite nature (1 Thes. 5:23), but they have ceased to possess it in any worthy sense: it is degraded beneath and under the power of the *psyche* (soul), the personal life, so as to have no real vitality of its own" (Alford). They do not care for their spirit or use it. They do not contact God by their spirit in communion with the Spirit of God; neither do they live and walk in their spirit. They have been drawn downward by their flesh and have become fleshy, so that they have lost the consciousness of their conscience and become animals without reason (Jude 10).

LIFE-STUDY OF JUDE

MESSAGE THREE

CHARGES TO THE BELIEVERS

Scripture Reading: Jude 20-25

In verses 20 through 23 Jude gives certain charges to the believers. In verses 20 and 21 he charges the believers to build themselves up in the holy faith and to live in the Triune God. Then in verses 22 and 23 he charges the believers to care for others with mercy in fear.

BUILDING OURSELVES UP IN OUR MOST HOLY FAITH

In verse 20 Jude says, "But you, beloved, building up yourselves in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit." The faith here is objective faith and refers to the precious things of the New Testament in which we believe for our salvation in Christ. On the foundation of this holy faith and in the sphere of it, through praying in the Holy Spirit, we build up ourselves. The truth of the faith in our apprehension and the Holy Spirit through our prayer are necessary for our building up. Both the faith and the Spirit are holy.

It is correct to say that faith in verse 20 is objective faith. However, we need to realize that this objective faith produces subjective faith. Faith first refers to the truth contained in the Word of God and conveyed by the Word. The written word of God in the Bible and the spoken word in the genuine and proper preaching and teaching contain the truth and convey the truth to us. By truth we mean the reality of what God is, the reality of the process through which God has passed, and the reality of what He has accomplished, attained, and obtained. Hence, truth as reality includes all the facts concerning what God is, what God has passed through, what God has accomplished and

what God has attained and obtained. All this is revealed in the New Testament. We may read about this in the Bible, or we may hear it through someone's preaching and teaching. But in either case this reality is contained in the holy Word and conveyed by the Word to us.

As we listen to the word that contains the truth, the Spirit of Christ works within us. The Spirit of Christ always works according to the Word and with the Word. This means that the Spirit of Christ cooperates with the Word. As a result of this cooperation, eventually in our experience there is a "click," like that made by the shutter of a camera, and the "scene" of what is contained in the Word is impressed on our spirit and becomes our faith. As we pointed out in the Life-study of 2 Peter, this is the faith allotted to us as our portion from God (2 Pet. 1:1), and this portion is nothing less than the New Testament inheritance.

This faith is both objective and subjective. As we build ourselves up in our most holy faith, we build ourselves up in a faith that is not only objective but especially subjective. The subjective faith comes out of the objective faith. In other words, faith implies both what we believe in and also our believing. This is the most holy faith.

This faith is not something of ourselves. In ourselves we do not have such a faith. The most holy faith is a great blessing given to us from God, of God, and even with God. When this faith comes into us, it comes with God, with all that God is, with all that God has passed through, with all that God has accomplished in Christ and through the Spirit, and with all that God has obtained and attained. All this comes into us with God in this faith. As long as we have this faith, we have the processed God, redemption, regeneration, the divine life, and all things related to life and godliness. We are also positioned and privileged to partake of the divine nature and enjoy it. Therefore, once we have this faith, we have everything. Now we need to build ourselves up in this holy faith.

With what materials do we build ourselves up in our holy faith? The answer is that this faith is both the

materials with which we build and also the base or foundation on which we build. If we do not have faith, we do not have the materials, and we do not have the base, the foundation, on which to build. This means that without faith we have nothing to build on and nothing to build with. As believers, we build ourselves up with the content of our most holy faith, and we build ourselves up on this faith as a foundation. Praise the Lord that we have such a faith!

The Chinese version of the Bible translates the Greek word for faith in verse 20 with a word that means "the true word." Faith in this verse surely implies the true word, for faith is produced out of the contents of the true word, God's revelation. The word of God's revelation contains the divine reality of God's being, process, redemptive work, accomplishment, and attainment, and this word conveys all this divine reality into us. When we hear the words concerning this reality, the Holy Spirit works within us in a way that corresponds to these words. The outcome is faith.

Although faith implies the true word, it implies much more than this. According to the New Testament, faith is all-inclusive. As long as we have faith, we have all the divine things. Therefore, with these divine things as the material and foundation, we may build ourselves up in our most holy faith.

To build ourselves up in the faith does not mean to build ourselves up with theological doctrines or biblical knowledge. Mere doctrine or knowledge is too objective and also empty. But truth as the reality of the holy Word is not empty. This truth is the content of the most holy faith. Therefore, with this content we have something real and solid with which and on which to build.

The building up in the most holy faith is not individualistic; rather, this building is a corporate matter. Jude is speaking to the believers corporately when he charges them to build up themselves in their most holy faith. If we would build up ourselves in the faith, we must do it in a corporate way; that is, we must do it in the Body,

in the church life. Apart from the church life, we cannot build ourselves up in the faith. Outside the church life, there is not such a building. Actually, to build up ourselves in the most holy faith is to build up the Body of Christ.

PRAYING IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

According to verse 20, if we would build up ourselves in our most holy faith, we need to pray in the Holy Spirit. Faith is related to the Word, and in the Holy Spirit we have life. In this verse the Holy Spirit mainly refers to life, not to power. However, some Christians today understand the Holy Spirit mainly in terms of power. In Romans 8.2 Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of life. From experience we know that praying in the Holy Spirit is much more a matter of life than a matter of power. When we pray we may not sense power; however, we often have the sense of life. Life is more precious than power.

Regarding praying in the Holy Spirit, Pentecostal people may relate this more to power than to life because their emphasis is on power instead of on life. There is a great difference between emphasizing life and emphasizing power. Actually, real spiritual power comes from spiritual life.

Genuine power is a matter of life. We may use seeds as an illustration. Seeds of every kind are small. I have never seen a seed as large as a baseball. But although a seed is small, it is dynamic and full of life. Because a seed is full of life, it is powerful. After you sow a seed in the ground, it sprouts and grows into a plant or tree. Although the sprouts may be very tender, they have the power to break through the soil. This power comes from the life in the seed. In a similar way, building ourselves up by praying in the Holy Spirit is mainly a matter of life.

KEEPING OURSELVES IN THE LOVE OF GOD

In verse 21 Jude says, "Keep yourselves in the love of God, awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." We should keep ourselves in the love of God by building up ourselves in the holy faith and praying in

the Holy Spirit. In this way we should await and look for the mercy of our Lord so that we may not only enjoy eternal life in this age, but also inherit it for eternity (Matt. 19:29).

The way to keep ourselves in the love of God is by building ourselves up in our most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit. If we do not build up ourselves in the faith and if we do not pray in the Holy Spirit, it will be easy for us to depart from the love of God. Actually, the words "in the love of God" mean in the enjoyment of the love of God. Here Jude does not speak of the love of God in an objective way; he speaks of the love of God in a subjective way, in the way of enjoying this love. Hour after hour, we need to enjoy the love of God. We should be in the love of God not only objectively but also subjectively. We need to keep ourselves always in the enjoyment of God's love by building ourselves up and by praying. Building up ourselves is related to the holy Word, and praying is related to the Holy Spirit. Therefore, if we have the Word applied to us and the Spirit working within us, we shall be kept in the enjoyment of God's love as we await the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

In verses 20 and 21 Jude not only charges the believers to build themselves up in the holy faith, but also charges them to live in the Triune God. The entire blessed Trinity is employed and enjoyed by the believers by their praying in the Holy Spirit, keeping themselves in the love of God, and awaiting the mercy of our Lord unto eternal life. In these verses we have the Spirit, God the Father, and the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. We need to pray in the Holy Spirit, keep ourselves in the love of God, and await the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, in these verses we definitely have the Triune God.

According to Jude 20 and 21, we need to live in the Triune God. But how can we live in the Triune God? We live in the Triune God by praying in the Holy Spirit, keeping ourselves in the love of God, and awaiting the mercy of the Lord Jesus.

It is significant that, once again, Jude speaks of mercy

and not of grace. Peter emphasizes grace, but Jude emphasizes mercy. In verse 2 of this Epistle Jude says, "Mercy to you and peace and love be multiplied." We have pointed out that mercy reaches further than grace does. While we are praying in the Spirit and keeping ourselves in the love of God, we should await further mercy from the Lord.

UNTO ETERNAL LIFE

Jude concludes verse 21 with the words "unto eternal life." Here the word "unto" means issuing in or resulting in. The enjoyment and inheritance of eternal life, the life of God, is the goal of our spiritual seeking. Because we aim at this goal, we want to be kept in the love of God and await the mercy of our Lord.

Jude is not saying that we do not yet have eternal life. Neither is he saying that if we keep praying in the Holy Spirit and remain in the love of God, awaiting the mercy of the Lord we shall eventually have eternal life. Rather, Jude is saying that praying in the Holy Spirit, keeping ourselves in the love of the Father, and waiting for the mercy of the Lord issue in the present enjoyment of eternal life. We already have eternal life in us. However, if we do not pray in the Holy Spirit, keep ourselves in the love of the Father, and wait for the mercy of the Lord, we shall not enjoy this eternal life. But when we do all these things, the eternal life within us becomes our enjoyment.

Furthermore, although we have eternal life, our measure of this life may be somewhat limited. But if we pray in the Spirit, keep ourselves in the Father's love, and wait for the Son's mercy, the eternal life in us will grow in measure. Therefore, "unto eternal life" means not only unto the enjoyment of eternal life, but also unto the growth, the increase of the measure, of eternal life. To experience this is to live in the Triune God.

CARING FOR OTHERS WITH MERCY AND FEAR

In verses 22 and 23 Jude goes on to point out that as we live in the Triune God we need to care for others with

mercy and fear. Verse 22 says, "And have mercy on some who are wavering." The Greek here may be rendered "convict some who are disputing." The word for wavering also means doubting. When we live in the Triune God, we shall have a genuine concern for others. We shall care for those who are younger and weaker and for those who are wavering. But if we do not live in the Triune God, we shall not have this care for weaker ones.

In verse 23 Jude continues, "Save them, snatching them out of the fire; on others have mercy in fear, hating even the garment spotted from the flesh." Jude's word concerning snatching them out of the fire is probably adopted from Zechariah 3:2. The fire here is the fire of God's holiness for His judgment (Matt. 3:10,12; 5:22). According to this word, we should seek to save others and snatch them out of the fire.

In this verse Jude charges us to have mercy in fear, hating the garments spotted from the flesh. While we are having mercy on others, we should be in fear of the awful contagion of sin, hating even the things spotted by the lust of the flesh.

As we exercise mercy on others, we need to be in fear lest we be influenced by them. Sinfulness is contagious. If we are not in fear as we show mercy to others, we may become contaminated with their "germs." For example, suppose you want to help someone who is involved in an unclean or worldly practice. If you are not careful, instead of helping that one, you may become contaminated and eventually join him in that very practice. Therefore, in order not to be contaminated, we need to have mercy on others in fear.

As we show mercy on others in fear, we need to hate the garment spotted from the flesh. Now we see that in showing mercy upon weak ones we need to fear and we need to hate. These weak ones may be in a pitiful state, and we surely need to show mercy to them. But at the same time we need a holy fear and a holy hatred, a holy fear of being contaminated by sinful things and a holy hatred of these things.

CONCLUSION

In verses 24 and 25 we have the conclusion of this Epistle. Verse 24 says, "But to Him who is able to guard you from stumbling, and to set you before His glory without blemish in exultation." In this concluding phrase, the writer indicates clearly that although he has charged the believers to endeavor in the things mentioned in verses 20 through 23, yet only God our Savior is able to guard them from stumbling and to set them before His glory without blemish in exultation. Glory here is the glory of the great God and our Savior, Christ Jesus, which will be manifested at His appearing (Titus 2:13; 1 Pet. 4:13) and in which He will come (Luke 9:26). The preposition "in" here means in the element of, and "exultation" signifies the exuberance of triumphant joy (Alford).

In verse 25 Jude concludes, "To the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, might, and authority before all time, and now, and unto all eternity. Amen." The only *God* is our Savior, and the *Man* Jesus Christ is our Lord. To such a Savior, through such a Lord, be glory, majesty, might, and authority throughout all ages. Glory is the expression in splendor; majesty, the greatness in honor; might, the strength in power; and authority, the power in ruling. Therefore, to the only God and our Savior be expression in splendor, greatness in honor, strength in power, and power in ruling. In Jude's words this is "before all time, and now, and unto all eternity." Before all time refers to eternity past; now, to the present age; and unto all eternity, to eternity future. Therefore, it is from eternity past, through time, unto eternity future.

LIFE-STUDY OF JUDE

MESSAGE FOUR

THE BASIC STRUCTURE OF THE EPISTLES OF PETER AND JUDE

(1)

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 1:2-3, 11; 2:1-3, 9; 3:4; 4:14;
5:10; 2 Pet. 1:14; 3:18; Jude 3, 20-21

In this message I would like to give a further word concerning the central thought of the Epistles of Peter and Jude.

It is very surprising, even astounding, that an uneducated fisherman from Galilee such as Peter could write the two Epistles of 1 and 2 Peter. In his writings Peter embraces all the matters of God's eternal economy, the same matters that Paul covers in his Epistles. Paul, of course, was highly educated. He had been trained in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and he also had been educated in Greek and Roman culture. Peter, however, did not have this learning. Nevertheless, he wrote his two Epistles in a marvelous way.

Peter even used certain terms and expressions that Paul did not use. For example, Peter speaks about being partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). This profound expression cannot be found in the writings of Paul. Not only does Peter use deep and profound expressions, but in his Epistles he also covers a number of significant details. In quantity Peter wrote much less than Paul wrote, but in certain points he may be richer than Paul. Therefore, we need to spend adequate time to study the two Epistles of Peter to see the crucial points and the details.

THE TRIUNE GOD AS OUR PORTION

The first basic matter covered by Peter in his writings

is the Triune God. Peter indicates that the God in whom we believe is the Triune God. In the opening words of Peter's first Epistle we can see the Triune God: "According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (v. 2). Here we have the foreknowledge of God the Father, the sanctification of the Spirit, and the obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. God the Father has regenerated us (1 Pet. 1:3), Christ has accomplished redemption with His precious blood, and the Spirit applies God's full salvation to His chosen people. Here we see the Triune God in the accomplishment of full salvation.

Peter also unveils to us the fact that this Triune God is our portion. This fact is indicated by the word "partakers" in 2 Peter 1:4. According to this verse, we have become partakers of the divine nature. This indicates that the Triune God is now our portion. If God were not our portion, we could not partake of His nature.

THE MEANS FOR US TO PARTAKE OF GOD

In his writings Peter also reveals the way for us to partake of the Triune God as our portion. The way involves the hidden man of the heart, and this hidden man is our spirit (1 Pet. 3:4). In his Epistles Paul has much to say concerning our spirit, but he does not use the expression "the hidden man of the heart." This hidden man, our human spirit, is the means by which we enjoy the Triune God as our portion.

Although Peter speaks of God's Spirit only a few times, his terminology is marvelous. In 1 Peter 4:14 he says, "If you are reproached in the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." Literally, the Greek here means "the Spirit of glory and that of God." The Spirit of glory is the Spirit of God. Peter also speaks concerning the Spirit of Christ (1 Pet. 1:11). Our human spirit as the hidden man of the heart and God's Spirit as the Spirit of glory and as the Spirit of Christ are the means for us to partake of God as our portion.

THE TRIUNE GOD PROCESSED TO BECOME OUR ENJOYMENT

We have pointed out that the Epistles of Peter are on the subject of God's government, in particular on God's governmental dealings through judgment. This is the central subject of these two books. Nevertheless, the structure of 1 and 2 Peter is the Triune God, who has been processed to become our portion so that we may participate in Him, partake of Him, and enjoy Him through His Spirit, who is the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of glory, and by the exercise of our spirit.

I encourage you to study all the details in the Epistles of Peter. However, as you study these details, do not be distracted from the central thought and the basic structure of God's holy writings in general and the Epistles of Peter in particular. The basic structure is the Triune God who has been processed to become our all-inclusive portion. We enjoy Him by exercising our spirit to cooperate with and respond to the divine Spirit. We should never forget this basic structure or be distracted from it. If we hold firmly to the basic thought and the basic structure as we study all the other points in the writings of Peter, we shall be enriched and we shall experience the Triune God in a very rich, absolute, and detailed way.

The three Epistles of 1 and 2 Peter and Jude cover many points. But the basic structure of these Epistles is the Triune God operating on His elect that they may be brought into the full enjoyment of the Triune God. Both Peter and Jude indicate strongly that the Triune God has passed through a process in order to do many things for us and to become everything to us that we may partake of Him for our enjoyment.

THE TRIUNE GOD BECOMING OUR GRACE

Peter begins his first Epistle with a word concerning the threefold operation of the Triune God upon His chosen people to bring them into the participation and enjoyment of Himself. At the beginning of his second Epistle Peter

speaks concerning the divine provision. He tells us that the divine power has granted us and even imparted to us all things related to life and godliness in order that we may partake of the divine nature. Furthermore, according to chapter one of 2 Peter, the divine provision gives us not only the divine life but also the divine light (v. 19).

At the end of his first Epistle Peter says, "But the God of all grace, who called you into His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself perfect, establish, strengthen, and ground you" (5:10). Here Peter indicates that we shall be grounded in God Himself. Then at the end of his second Epistle Peter says, "But grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (3:18). Here the knowledge of our Lord is equal to the truth, the reality of all that He is. Therefore, in this verse Peter charges us to grow in grace and in truth, reality. Although Peter covers many matters in his Epistles, the basic structure of his writings is the Triune God becoming our grace that we may enjoy Him, grow in life, and through the growth in life be perfected, established, strengthened, and grounded in the Triune God.

As we study the details of the Epistles of Peter and Jude, we need to remember that all the detailed points help us to solve our problems so that we may be brought back to the enjoyment of the Triune God. Therefore, we should not consider the details in a detached way. Every point is a help in solving our problems so that we would not be distracted further from the enjoyment of the Triune God, but instead be brought back to this enjoyment.

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH AND LIVING IN THE TRIUNE GOD

Toward the beginning of his Epistle Jude charges us to contend for the faith: "Beloved, using all diligence to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you, entreating you to contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints" (v. 3). We have seen that the faith is the New Testament inheritance substantiated to us and realized by us. We pointed out in

the Life-study of 2 Peter that this inheritance is actually the Triune God processed to be our portion.

Toward the end of his Epistle Jude says, "But you, beloved, building up yourselves in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (vv. 20-21). Jude's word concerning building up ourselves in our most holy faith is equal to Peter's word about being built up a spiritual house, into a holy priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5). Then Jude goes on to speak of living in the Triune God. This is indicated by Jude's word concerning praying in the Holy Spirit, keeping ourselves in the love of God, and awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

UNTO ETERNAL LIFE

Jude ends verse 21 with the words "unto eternal life." Here "unto" means issuing in or resulting in. This phrase indicates the enjoyment of the Triune God. Eternal life is the Triune God, and "unto eternal life" indicates the full enjoyment of what the Triune God is.

A WORD OF REMINDER

We need to be impressed with the fact that these three Epistles were written with a basic structure, and this structure is the Triune God processed to become the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit for our enjoyment. This structure is according to God's economy, and it corresponds fully to what is unveiled in Paul's writings. I hope that this word will serve as a reminder to you. When you consider the matters of God's government and the historic examples of His dealing in His judgment, you should not be distracted by these matters. Instead, these things should bring you back to the basic structure of these Epistles--the Triune God as our full enjoyment. Furthermore, you need to take care of your spirit as the hidden man of the heart and realize that the divine Spirit, the Spirit of glory and the Spirit of Christ, is within you. Then you will enjoy the

Triune God and express Him as godliness, which will consummate in glory.

CHOSEN FOR GOD'S PURPOSE

In the first one and a half chapters of 1 Peter we have a clear picture of how God in eternity past selected us according to His foreknowledge to be His chosen people. Praise Him that out of the billions of human beings He has selected us! God selected us for a purpose, and this purpose is that God would put Himself into us as our life so that we may grow with Him into a building, His dwelling place. This building is God's house, the place where He houses Himself. Furthermore, this building becomes God's expression to "tell out the virtues of Him" as the One who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9). To tell out God's virtues is to express what He is. This is God's purpose. This is also God's goal.

If God would fulfill His purpose and reach His goal, He needs to apply to us what He decided in eternity past. In order to do this, it is necessary for God to be the Spirit. It is the Spirit who applies to us what God has decided. Moreover, because His chosen people had become fallen, it became necessary for God to accomplish redemption. Hence, God came in the Person of the Son to accomplish redemption. The Lord Jesus shed His blood so that we may be sprinkled and redeemed to God.

In 1 Peter we see that the Spirit applies God's decision to us, the Son redeems us, and the Father regenerates us. For this reason, Peter says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has regenerated us unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from among the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3). This means that God entered into us as the divine life containing the divine "genes" to regenerate us. Now that we have been regenerated, we may taste that the Lord is good (1 Pet. 2:3).

THE RESULT OF TASTING THE LORD

As a result of tasting the Lord, we have the desire to

put away our natural being. Therefore, in 1 Peter 2:1 Peter speaks of "putting away all malice and all guile and hypocrisies and envyings and all evil speakings." Here Peter mentions five matters: malice, guile, hypocrisies, envyings, and evil speakings. Malice issues in guile, guile is related to hypocrisy and envy, and the result is evil speaking. Those who have malice will also have guile. This guile will cause them to pretend and to become envious of others. As a result of this envy, they will speak evil concerning others.

In Romans 1 Paul lists more than thirty items related to sinful mankind. But here Peter uses five items to express the total situation of fallen man. No doubt, Peter's word in 2:1 was written according to his experience in the church life.

After we have been regenerated and have tasted that the Lord is good, we shall certainly want to put away these five negative things. We shall want to put away all malice, for we shall not agree with malice in any way. Simultaneously, we shall have a love for the Word of God and an appetite to take in the Word as our nourishment. Peter speaks of this in 2:2: "As newborn babes, long for the guileless milk of the word, that by it you may grow unto salvation." Having been born through regeneration (1:3, 23), the believers become babes who can grow in life by being nourished with the spiritual milk, the guileless milk, of the Word. This growth is for God's building. To grow is a matter of life and in life. We receive the divine life through regeneration, and now we need to grow in this life and with this life by being nourished with the milk conveyed in the Word of God.

I can testify that after I was saved I had a deep longing for the Word of God and a desire to be nourished through the Word. However, I was led astray by the desire to know the Bible. Instead of being guided to the central focus of the divine revelation, I was distracted by others to the pursuit of biblical knowledge. For a number of years, I met with a group of believers who were famous for their knowledge of the Bible. These believers often spoke about

God's foreknowledge and selection and about Christ as the precious stone rejected by man but chosen by God. They also warned us concerning God's judgment beginning from His own household, and they taught concerning the mighty hand of God. We were exhorted to subject ourselves under the mighty hand of God. Although this teaching was good, it did not help me to see God's purpose. I heard a number of teachings based upon the Epistles of Peter, but I did not see God's goal, and I did not know what God is seeking. I was distracted from the central focus of the divine revelation by good Bible knowledge.

Eventually in His mercy the Lord caused me to see the basic structure of the Epistles of Peter and Jude. In particular, I began to see the matters of growth, transformation, and building. Growth in life is unto transformation, and transformation is for the building.

In the Epistles of Peter and Jude we can see God's economy. In these Epistles we also see God's purpose and goal. God's purpose was formed in eternity past, and God's goal will be attained in full in eternity future. God's goal is to have His building as His expression, and He is reaching this goal through our growth in the divine life.

LIFE-STUDY OF JUDE

MESSAGE FIVE

THE BASIC STRUCTURE OF THE EPISTLES OF PETER AND JUDE

(2)

Scripture Reading: 1 Pet. 1:2-4, 11, 18-19, 22-23; 2:2, 5:10; 2 Pet. 3:15-16, 18; Jude 20-21

In this message I would like to give a further word concerning the basic structure of the Epistles of Peter and Jude.

THE OPERATION OF THE TRIUNE GOD

In 1 Peter 1:2 and 3 we can see the operation of the Triune God: "According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has regenerated us unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from among the dead." In these verses we have the foreknowledge of God the Father, the sanctification of the Spirit, and the obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Here we have the Triune God--the Father, the Spirit, and Jesus Christ, the Son. In verse 3 Peter also tells us that the Father has regenerated us unto a living hope through Christ's resurrection. Here again we see the Father's operation. The Father not only chose us in eternity, but in time He also regenerated us. In verse 2 Peter says that the Spirit sanctifies us, applying to us what the Father decided concerning us in eternity past. Then in verse 11 Peter speaks concerning the witness of the Spirit of Christ in the prophets of the Old Testament. In verses 18 and 19 Peter says, "Knowing that you were redeemed not

with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, the blood of Christ." Now that we have been redeemed with Christ's precious blood, we need to have our souls purified by obedience to the truth unto unfeigned brotherly love (v. 22). This purification of the soul is based upon the Father's regeneration. We have been regenerated by the Father with an incorruptible seed, a seed that is the living and abiding word of God (v. 23).

As we consider chapter one of 1 Peter as a whole, we can see that this chapter reveals the operation of the Triune God. Here we have the Father's regeneration, the Spirit's sanctification, the blood of Christ, the incorruptible seed, the living hope, and also the inheritance kept for us in the heavens (v. 4). In this chapter we have not only the basic structure of the first Epistle of Peter, but we also have the basic structure of our Christian life. The Christian life is constructed of all the items related to the operation of the Triune God.

THE TWO TREES

The basic structure of the Christian life revealed in 1 Peter 1 is something far different from our natural concept. In our natural mind we do not have the kind of thought presented in 1 Peter 1. Our natural thought is to do good, to love others, to worship God, and to work for God. This concept is religious and traditional.

A person who is far from God may not care for God at all. But once such a person repents and begins to care for God, he will immediately have the desire to do good in order to glorify God. He will also have the desire to be more considerate of others. He may even decide to give a tenth of his income to the Lord. Although these things are good, they are religious, traditional, and natural.

You may have heard many messages telling you that the Triune God has been processed to become the life-giving Spirit in order to be everything to you. But in your daily life you may not care for the processed Triune God.

Instead, you may try to be a good husband or wife and a good parent. In your effort to improve yourself, you may not have the realization that you are not living the Triune God, that you are not one with the life-giving Spirit. Instead of putting into practice the word concerning being one spirit with the Lord in your daily living, your desire may be to be victorious or to improve yourself.

The reason we fail to put into practice what we have heard is related to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In our fallen being there is the tendency toward this tree. The thought of doing good belongs to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Before you repented and believed in the Lord, you may have had the knowledge of evil. But now that you are a believer, you may turn to the knowledge of good. However, the knowledge of both good and evil are of the same tree.

Throughout my years in the ministry, I have come to realize that although the saints may listen to messages on the Triune God as life, in their daily living they care for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But whenever we come back to the Triune God as the life-giving Spirit, we are immediately feeding on the tree of life.

TWO SOURCES

There are only two sources in this universe--God and Satan. After God created man, He placed him in front of two trees signifying these two sources. God is signified by the tree of life, and Satan is signified by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God is the source of life. If we contact Him, we contact life. Satan is the source of death. If we contact him, we contact death. Therefore, God clearly told Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for the result of eating that tree is death. God's intention was that man would contact Him in order to receive life. If we contact the tree of knowledge instead of the tree of life, we shall contact death. God's intention is that man would contact Him to receive life. But in the fall Adam turned to Satan, the other source.

Satan is not honest or straightforward. Rather, Satan

wears a cloak and pretends to be something he is not. For example, when he first appeared to Adam, he appeared in the form of a serpent. Satan lurks behind the knowledge of good and evil. The result of the knowledge of either good or evil is death.

Today unbelievers and many times believers as well are under death because they daily contact the good aspect of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In religion, people are taught to know what is good and what is evil, and to do good and stay away from evil. This kind of teaching is common among Christians today. However, this teaching is natural and religious, and according to our fallen nature.

In the Bible we have two sources, two lines, and two results. First we have the tree of life, the line of life, and the New Jerusalem. The tree of life will be found in the New Jerusalem. Without the tree of life, the New Jerusalem would not have any enjoyment. The unique enjoyment in the New Jerusalem will be the tree of life.

Then in the Bible we have the second source and the second line: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the line of death. The result of this source and line is the lake of fire.

We need to have our eyes opened to see the tree of life in the Bible. Many Christians read the Bible, but they cannot see the tree of life. Because this is mysterious, unless our eyes are opened we shall not be able to see it.

The crucial point in what we have been saying concerning the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is that the structure of the Christian life as revealed in chapter one of 1 Peter is very different from our natural concept, which is according to the knowledge of good and evil. I am very happy to see that, according to 1 Peter 1, the basic structure of this Epistle, and of the entire Christian life, is the Triune God.

THE ENJOYMENT AND INCREASE OF ETERNAL LIFE

In verses 20 and 21 Jude says, "But you, beloved, building up yourselves in your most holy faith, praying in

the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." In these verses we have the Triune God for our experience with a view to eternal life. First, Jude charges us to pray in the Holy Spirit. Then he tells us to keep ourselves in the love of God as we await the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is "unto eternal life," that is, unto the enjoyment and increase of eternal life.

When I was young, I could not understand what Jude meant by the words "unto eternal life." Someone might say that this means to go to heaven and enjoy everlasting blessing. However, this interpretation does not satisfy us. Apparently these words indicate that we do not yet have eternal life, that eternal life is something that we shall have in the future. But this is not the meaning. John 3:16 tells us that whoever believes in the Son of God has eternal life. When we believe in Christ, we receive eternal life. Since we already have eternal life, what does it mean to say that we are awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life? Yes, we already have eternal life within us, but we may not enjoy this life very much. Some Christians enjoy eternal life hardly at all. They do not even know that it is possible to have the enjoyment of eternal life. Furthermore, we may not have the increase of eternal life. God has given us eternal life with the intention that we would enjoy this life and that it would increase within us forever. Therefore, the words "unto eternal life" mean unto the enjoyment and increase of eternal life now and in eternity.

THE TRIUNE, GOD AS OUR PORTION, ENJOYMENT, AND EXPERIENCE

According to Jude 20 and 21, we need to pray in the Holy Spirit, keep ourselves in the love of God, and wait for the mercy of Jesus Christ so that we may have the enjoyment and increase of eternal life forever. This is a description of the experience of the Triune God.

Chapter one of 1 Peter and the Epistle of Jude both speak concerning the Triune God. Peter's word concerning

the Triune God is profound, and Jude's word is somewhat simple. We may say that Jude gives a word to "elementary students," and Peter gives a word to "graduate students." However, many Christians are not even able to understand Jude's elementary word concerning the experience of the Triune God. We thank the Lord that He has enlightened us to see the meaning both of Peter's word in chapter one of his first Epistle and Jude's word toward the end of his Epistle. In both I Peter and Jude we see that the Triune God is to be our portion, enjoyment, and experience.

THE CENTRAL FOCUS

In our study of the Epistles of 1 and 2 Peter and Jude we need to see the central focus of these books. Although the subject of 1 and 2 Peter is God's government, especially His government shown in His judgment, this is not the central focus of these books. Neither is the divine government the basic structure of the Epistles of Peter. What is the focus of these Epistles? What is their basic structure? In order not to be distracted by the many precious matters in 1 and 2 Peter, we need clear answers to these questions.

In 1 Peter actually only one and a half chapters are crucial in relation to life. These one and a half chapters include all of chapter one and the first eleven verses of chapter two. In addition, we need to regard Peter's word in 5:10 as crucial. In this verse Peter says, "But the God of all grace, who called you into His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself perfect, establish, strengthen, and ground you." We have a similar situation in the Epistle of 2 Peter. In this book the first half of the first chapter and the last verse of the last chapter are crucial in relation to life. In these vital portions of 1 and 2 Peter we have the central focus of these Epistles.

A Simple Sketch of 1 Peter 1

In chapter one of 1 Peter we see the operation of the Triune God for His full salvation. In verse 2 we see the

foreknowledge of God the Father, the sanctification of the

Spirit, and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. This verse reveals the Father's foreknowledge, the Son's redemption, and the Spirit's application. This is the operation of the Triune God to carry out God's full salvation. In verse 3 Peter says that the Father has regenerated us unto a living hope. The full salvation of God is composed of three elements: the Father's regeneration, the Son's redemption, and the Spirit's application. When we experience this salvation, we have a life that is characterized by holiness and love. We are holy in our manner of life, and we love the brothers. Therefore, holiness and love are the issue of God's full salvation. Furthermore, in this salvation there is a seed, the incorruptible seed, which is the living and abiding word of God. This is a simple sketch of chapter one of 1 Peter.

Growth, Transformation, and Building

Let us now go on to consider 1 Peter 2:1-11. Having been regenerated, we are now newborn babes longing for the guileless milk of the word so that by it we may grow unto salvation (v. 2). In chapter one we see that we have been regenerated and that the full salvation of God is our portion. Now we need to partake of and enjoy this salvation. For this, we need to feed on the milk of the word.

By feeding on the guileless milk of the word and by growing unto salvation, we shall be transformed into precious stones. Therefore, Peter refers to the believers as living stones (v. 5). These stones are for the building up of a spiritual house, and this house is a holy priesthood: "You yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, into a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (v. 5). On the one hand, this spiritual house is God's dwelling place; on the other hand, it is something that tells forth the virtues of God, that expresses what God is.

This spiritual house, of course, is a corporate matter. We are being built up together in a corporate way to afford God a dwelling place and to tell forth God's virtue, that is, to express Him.

Caring for the "Heart" of These Epistles

In these two portions of 1 Peter, including 5:10, we have the central focus of this book. We need to be fully captured by this focus. Then we shall not be in danger of being distracted from this focus as we pay attention to the other matters in this book.

We may compare the central focus of 1 Peter to the heart in the human body. We should not take care of the other members of the body at the cost of damaging our heart. We may lose a toe, an arm, or a leg and still live. But we cannot live without a heart. In a similar way, we need to care for the "heart," the central focus, of 1 Peter.

The heart of this book is the operation of the Triune God to carry out His threefold salvation, which includes regeneration, redemption, and application. We have become God's children through regeneration, and now we need to feed on His word in order to grow unto full salvation. Then we shall be transformed in order to be built together to provide God a dwelling place and to be His expression. For this purpose, the God of all grace will perfect, establish, strengthen, and ground us. Furthermore, according to 2 Peter 3:18, we need to grow in God's grace and in the knowledge of Him. This is the focus of 1 and 2 Peter and the focus of the book of Jude.

NOT DISTRACTED FROM THE BASIC STRUCTURE

This central focus is also the basic structure of these Epistles. In the books of 1 and 2 Peter and Jude there are many matters, but not all of these matters are part of the basic structure. We may use a physical building as an illustration. The basic structure of the meeting hall in Anaheim consists of steel beams and columns. Many things can be removed from this building without affecting its basic structure. However, the beams and columns cannot be taken out of the building without destroying the basic structure. Just as the meeting hall in Anaheim has a basic structure, so there is a basic structure to the Epistles of 1 and 2 Peter and Jude.

My concern is that the saints may be distracted from this basic structure by the various matters covered in these hooks. I am not saying that we should not pay attention to these matters. We need to pay attention to them and even emphasize them, but in doing so we must be certain that we have not been distracted from the basic structure of these writings. This basic structure is the Triune God operating to accomplish a threefold salvation so that we may be regenerated, that we may feed on His word, and that we may grow, be transformed, and be built up in order that He may have a dwelling place and that we may express Him.

This basic thought can also be seen in the Epistles of Paul. For this reason, Peter says, "Even as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them concerning these things" (2 Pet. 3:15-16). Paul also reveals that we may feed on the Lord and grow in order to be built up into a spiritual house so that God may have a corporate expression. Therefore, these two apostles ministered the same thing, but with somewhat different terminology. Both Peter and Paul had the same focus. I hope that none of us in the Lord's recovery will be distracted from the central focus and the basic structure of the apostles' ministry revealed in the New Testament.