

Introduction:

- A. *CT/Weekly*, the email digest I get each Friday from *Christianity Today*, had five articles this week related to the Texas shooting at the Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs. Things like the role of domestic abuse, how to protect your congregation, “the Christian history of America’s guns,” and one titled, “The small rural church is hard to kill.” **Church security is on a lot of minds.**
- B. If you were here last week, you heard me teasing a bit about my friend Doug, our very own bona fide security expert, and how much more seriously he takes *personal* security than I do. My timing, given the events of that afternoon, was pretty bad. But I was making the point last Sunday that I want to make again: **the greatest danger churches face is not violence but false teachers.** False teaching has doomed countless people to a fate worse than death, and the threat continues. That is the danger we most need to guard against.
- C. We’ve spent the fall studying 2 Peter which ended by telling us to *“be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. But grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”* Today we turn to **Jude**, a little one-chapter book of 25 verses that mirrors the concerns and even the language of 2 Peter. Listen to **vv.3-4, 17-19...** Since the first 19 vv. of Jude are so similar to 2 Peter, we’re going to just look this week and next at the last verses. Today, **Jude 20-23.**
- D. When in danger of those who scoff at sound doctrine, who entice believers toward “ungodly desires” and who “divide” churches, **what’s our best defense?**

Stay inside! Stay inside God's love. It's right there in v.21, "*keep yourselves in God's love as you wait.*"

I. KEEP YOURSELVES IN GOD'S LOVE

- A. Vv.20-21 has four main clauses: (1) *by building yourselves up in your most holy faith* (2) *and praying in the Holy Spirit*, (3) *keep yourselves in God's love* (4) *as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life*. The main statement is #3: *keep yourselves in God's love*. The first two clauses tell us **how** to do that and the last tells us **why**.
- B. While both Peter and Jude tell us to be on guard against and to vigorously oppose these dangerous teachers, here our defense is to stay inside God's love. Jesus said the same thing when he likened us to branches in him as the Vine in **Jn 15:9-10**, "*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. **If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.***" So what do we do?
- C. Jude tells us here that there are two things that will "*keep us in God's love.*" The first is "*by building yourselves up in your most holy faith.*" **We build ourselves up in our faith by entering whole-heartedly into basic Christian practices**—reading Scripture, prayer that searches our hearts and responds to the Bible, worship, and fellowship. No one builds themselves up in the faith without doing those things. **Beyond that, we meet life with our faith. In suffering**, we share Jesus' example of trust and obedience. In **good times**, we rejoice to see God's hand in them. In **conflicts** or **moral tests**, we always do what is right, drawing of the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit.

As we build ourselves up in our faith this passage promises that we are ensconced more securely in God's love. We cannot build ourselves up in our faith without drawing closer to Christ. You don't really have to *try* to love Jesus more. If you're earnest about spiritual growth you *will* love him more and more. Jesus will see to it.

- D. The second thing Jude highlights here as a key way to “*keep yourselves in God's love*” is “***praying in the Holy Spirit.***” We all face the danger of praying on autopilot, of going through the motions. Pastors are especially vulnerable to that because we pray “professionally.”

Illus.: I've told you before the story written by H. G. Wells about an unctuous Episcopalian bishop. He had cultivated a religious tone of voice and stock religious answers when people came to him with their troubles. “Have you prayed about it?” he'd ask in just the right way.

He didn't pray much himself; too sophisticated. He was a professional, after all. But one day life went south for him and he found himself overwhelmed, so he decided to try his own advice. It was Saturday afternoon when he went to the front of the cathedral and knelt on the crimson rug. Then he folded his hands in prayer, thinking how childish he looked. “O God,” he prayed. And suddenly there was a crisp, businesslike voice: “Well, what is it?”

The next day when worshippers came to the Sunday services, they found the bishop sprawled face down on the crimson carpet and when they turned him over, they discovered he was dead, lines of horror etched upon his face. [#2547; PT.com, Haddon Robinson]

What do you think it means to pray in the Spirit? Paul used the same expression in Eph. 6:18, “*And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayer and requests.*” Both Jude and Paul expect us to pray often, in

many ways, for all kinds of things. But however we pray, it is crucial that we pray in the Holy Spirit. I've puzzled over this phrase for a long time, so I decided to give it more thought this week.

For one thing, it is obviously possible to pray *not* in the Spirit. Like the bishop in the story. For another thing, it's important. It's on Jude's short list here as a means to keeping ourselves safe in God's love. Those who don't pray, and pray in the Spirit, are in jeopardy.

The Holy Spirit isn't the one we pray *to*. He is the one we pray *with*. Actually, *in*. ***"Prompted and guided by him," says John Stott.*** That means, first of all, that we don't pray on our own. Our prayers are a kind of **duet**. We don't start till the Spirit is ready; till we're ready to harmonize. You've seen that moment between two musicians where one looks at the other till there's a nod to begin. Pray in the Spirit like that.

It also means that we listen inwardly. We quiet our hearts and minds. There are things we want to pray about so in the quiet we think, *Where do I start?* This probably won't be a mystical experience. **We simply begin with a moment of spiritual calibration with what we know of God, of Scripture, of trust and obedience.** What comes to your mind? Then, as we pray, we may need to pause and listen again. I try to be sensitive to what I call *impulses*, a little nudge in one direction or another from the Spirit.

I think there is something more to praying in the Spirit. Do you remember how Genesis says that when God created man he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life? That's something like when we pray in the Spirit, so that God's own Breath brings our prayers to life.

One more thing. To pray in the Spirit is to give him editorial control. **Rom 8:26-27** says, *“the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.”* So we come in prayer to God about some weakness, some sin or inadequacy or fear, and we can do our best to put those thoughts into words, but we trust the Holy Spirit to put them in words better than our own, words which go deeper than we are thinking, words that are nuanced and empowered, words that are set on fire. After all, the image of prayer in Scripture is burning incense on God’s altar. Fire and fragrance put before God.

- We rush into prayer too often, I think. One of the best pray-ers I’ve known sits quietly a long time before she speaks in prayer. I believe that the Spirit works even in our hurried, flimsy, melt-away, clichéd prayers but when we sit quietly to harmonize with him, to invite his words, his breath, his fire—well, then I think we lift faith-filled, breathing prayers to the Lord that he inhales like perfume; prayers that he ignites with holy fire to hurl back to earth.
- E. Those are Jude’s keys to *“keep yourselves in God’s love.”* And why do we keep ourselves in God’s love? Because it’s the best place to be while we’re waiting: *“As you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.”* Maturing in God’s love pries our fingers off this world and makes us homesick for heaven. And what better place to be “in this fearful, fallen place,” than safe and warm within God’s love. What a mighty fortress!
Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High

*will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
 I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress,
 my God, in whom I trust." ...
 "Because he loves me," says the Lord, "I will rescue him;
 I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.
 He will call on me, and I will answer him;
 I will be with him in trouble,
 I will deliver him and honor him.
 With long life I will satisfy him
 and show him my salvation." [Ps. 91]*

Vss 20-21 centered on that phrase, *"keep yourselves in God's love as you wait."* The next two verses basically say, *keep one another in God's love as you wait. Vv.22-23...*

II. KEEP ONE ANOTHER IN GOD'S LOVE AS YOU WAIT

- A. The false teachers do a lot of damage. In a church, we notice that someone is drifting away. We hear that someone we know has gotten tangled in sin and are even defending themselves as Christians despite their behavior or heretical beliefs. What do you we do?
- B. *"Be merciful to those who doubt"* as a result of false teaching or sinful desires. Why wouldn't we? Because we want to set them straight. We want to ask them, *"What in the world are you thinking."* Illus.: Someone talked to me recently who said, with tears in their eyes, *"I'm having trouble believing God is good."* I thought of this verse. Be merciful. Give them some room. Lay off the criticism and argument. But hang on to them.
- C. *"Save others by snatching them from the fire."* Their doubts have led them into sin. They've played with fire and now are getting burned. The metaphor leads to an obvious danger: what if I get burned? I've had pastor friends who

got into deep trouble and I'll tell you, I did *not* want to call them. In fact, I *didn't* call them, at least not for a long time. I wasn't mad at them. **I was afraid.** I didn't want to get into their mess. I thought they might tell me to shove off. *Illus.:* With one friend, I remembered my past failures and I did call. He wanted to get together. Years later he let me interview him and about this for an article.

He remembers now, "I felt like I was drowning. Almost everything linked to my identity was gone. I was looking for some air to breathe. I knew I was totally responsible. I was very aware of my need to be forthright."

Of that first meeting, he said, "You were one of the first people I told my story to. I sensed you wouldn't throw your hands up in horror. When we talked, you didn't interrupt. You asked questions about how I was doing as a person and about our family."

When I first heard about Bill, I asked God to help me make some sense of what had happened. One thing that stood out to me was that God had arrested Bill before he passed a point of no return. Some people walk so far from God in their sin that they never come back. By the mercies of God, Bill was not among them.

- D. *"To others, show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh."* Here he seems to be talking about people whose heresies have taken them so deep into heresy and sinful behavior that there's a serious risk of being spiritually contaminated if we get close. They're toxic. But even then, God tells us to approach them in mercy, careful not to get caught up in their treachery and stain.

Illus.: Recently I read this account in *Christianity Today*. "Almost 15 years ago, on a shoreline outside of

Athens, Greece, I stood confident in my relationship with the Lord and my ministry trajectory. I was traveling the world on a private Gulfstream jet doing “gospel” ministry and enjoying every luxury money could buy.”

The writer of this story is **Costi Hinn**, the nephew of Benny Hinn, a famous and dangerous prosperity gospel preacher. He continues:

Growing up in the Hinn family empire was like belonging to some hybrid of the royal family and the mafia. Our lifestyle was lavish, our loyalty was enforced, and our version of the gospel was big business. Though Jesus Christ was still a part of our gospel, he was more of a magic genie than the King of Kings. Rubbing him the right way—by giving money and having enough faith—would unlock your spiritual inheritance. God’s goal was not his glory but our gain. His grace was not to set us free from sin but to make us rich. The abundant life he offered wasn’t eternal, it was now. We lived the prosperity gospel.

After college, Costi met the girl he was to marry. He writes, “I had no idea that God would use her in bringing about my salvation. In fact, my family and I were nervous because she didn’t speak in tongues. We set out to fix that problem by having her attend one of Benny’s crusades, but nothing happened

Then one day she pointed to a verse I had never seen: I Corinthians 12:30 (“Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?”). I was shaken to the core. There it was plain as day—not everybody has to speak in tongues. Soon, the domino effect began. Other longstanding beliefs were failing the biblical test. No longer did I believe that God’s purpose was to make me

happy, healthy, and wealthy. Instead, I saw that he wanted me to live for him regardless of what I could get from him.

It isn't enough for us to hunker down and stay away from those who've been deceived or those who have been entangled in sin. James wrote something very similar at the very end of his epistle: "*My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.*" [James 5:19-20] Do you know anyone like this? Would you have the love, courage and **mercy** to pursue them?

At the end of the article, Costi Hinn writes that a pastor friend "*loved me enough to disciple me out of prosperity gospel confusion.*" He concludes, "When God's people are willing to take a step of faith and speak the truth in love, lives are transformed and God is glorified. You never know who he might save through your faithfulness." ["Benny Hinn Is My Uncle, but Prosperity Preaching Isn't for Me," *Christianity Today*, 9/20/17]