

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## How Many Times Delivered?

*Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. (Jude 3, KJV 1900)*

Not at all unlike myself or most ministers, Jude's first love in terms of the things that he taught had to do with "...the common salvation," all about Jesus and what He did for us. However, also like those who believe the Scriptures and take their position seriously, Jude realized that, living in a broken world full of broken people, including believing people who fail at times to rise above their brokenness, he must also teach people about the need to contend earnestly for the faith against those who err and their influence on the naïve and the unthinking. We'd rather teach hungry sheep about Jesus and salvation all of grace than eat when we are hungry, but most sermons deal with any variety of other topics for the same reason. We need to be taught about the faith-walk, the Christian life at work where we live, not just about how glorious heaven will be. We need both, and Jude followed the Holy Spirit's direction in writing what He directed, not just what Jude first intended.

Several years ago, I was talking with a man who had made church history, particularly the history of sound doctrine and the many departures from it, his focus. Somewhere in the discussion the question of American Christianity in the nineteenth century came up in the conversation. The man paused and quipped, "For some reason, Satan was especially active during that era." He then named a few of the many major ideological departures from historical Christian faith that all occurred in our country during the nineteenth century. His point was sadly convincing. A study of the proponents of errant doctrine serves as a wise, albeit negative, instructor for sound Biblical doctrine. If you study the major movements in our country that started in the nineteenth century, despite incredible (Literally so) variation in beliefs, you will discover one common factor that appears in all of them. Without exception, the founders of each movement started by a major deviation from the historical denomination with which they were identified, and, without exception, each of them introduced their new ideas with one voice, "The church has departed from the historical faith, and God revealed that historical faith to me, and has called me to lead the church back." I have observed in my personal sixty years in the faith that this mindset fairly consistently appears with any departure. The man who has changed his beliefs and wishes to go in a

different theological direction must glorify his motives by the claim, egotistical and pretentious as it truly is, "God has revealed to me." "God has called me to lead..."

Scripture strongly refutes the "God has revealed" claims by individual men. 1 Timothy 3:15b utterly refutes the personal claims of any man that God has vested—or reinvested—His truth in this man, magnifying this man to impose his new ideas onto a whole body of people. Read the passage. From God's perspective as revealed in this verse, where does God vest His truth? Paul answers by the direction of the Holy Spirit. The church is the Lord's "...pillar and ground of the truth," not a man who has changed his beliefs and seeks to sterilize his carnal change by the "God has revealed..." pretense. By the reference to "ground," Paul associates the church with the foundation of truth. And by the reference to "pillar," he associates the church with those—many still standing after centuries—stately Greek pillars that held up the highest components of once complete and beautiful Greek buildings. Pillar and ground are quite different in appearance and in function, but Paul teaches here that God's design vests both functions in His church, not in individuals or their inflated and false claims.

Jude echoes the same truth in our study passage. Jude's exhortation is not for his readers to rediscover old hidden or lost and restored "Truth," but to earnestly contend for "...the faith," not one of many versions of it. And Jude gently takes us by the hand and leads us to the origin of that truth, "...which was **once** delivered unto the saints." How many times was it delivered? Once; only once. If the many aberrant movements of history, sadly common movements in our culture during the nineteenth century, were truthful in their claims, this passage must be revised—indeed, reversed—in its meaning. If the "God has revealed" claims are true, Jude must acknowledge that the faith has been delivered to the saints many times, lost, restored, and again delivered to them repeatedly through the centuries.

In this point, I do not in any way advocate church infallibility. Nor do I suggest that a church never errs and departs from the faith. Sadly, history proves this fact all too clearly. Scripture makes the point as well. How many of the seven

churches to whom John wrote (Revelation 2-3) were free of grave warnings that, short of their repentance from grievous error, the Lord would remove the candlestick, His giving of His light and grace to them, thus erasing them as a church? What is my point then? It is simple. When a man, any man, begins to advocate departure from established beliefs in a church or in a fellowship of many churches, and claims that “God has revealed” that new path to him, godly, Bible studying and Bible believing Christians should run, not walk, as far away from the man as possible. We are far safer and far more likely to stand faithfully with the Lord and with His truth by holding to established beliefs of our church than by chasing the siren enticements of “God has revealed” egos.

The logic of both passages, Paul’s and Jude’s, shines clearly. If the church is the Lord’s “...pillar and ground of the truth,” and if “...the faith” was “...**once** delivered unto the saints,” we are far more likely to find Biblical truth with a body of people than with an individual, especially the individual who makes the revelation claim.

In my youth, I heard a powerful sermon by a wise preacher, Elder James Bibler, “The Open Book.” In this sermon, the preacher made many of the points that I here make regarding the unique assignment that Scripture affirms that the Lord has given to His church. After establishing the Biblical foundation for this truth, he then turned to Scripture and to history. From Scripture, he affirmed that God has invested His personal guarantee that He shall preserve the “words” that He has guided men to write in the writings that we know as Scripture. (Psalm 12:6-7; Galatians 3; Paul’s full argument in this chapter is grounded on one small Hebrew word in Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament, “seed” not “seeds”) Scholars of the ancient Hebrew language tell us that the difference between the singular and plural form of this word is a tiny mark, similar to our apostrophe. Paul appealed to a Scripture that Moses wrote some fifteen hundred years earlier, a writing that had been copied countless times during those long years, but a writing that God in Psalm 12:6-7 promised to preserve. Ancient Jews imposed amazing rules onto their scribes who copied their holy writings, the Scriptures of the Old Testament, to ensure that even the smallest of marks was preserved in each new copy. Paul didn’t base his chapter (If not full book long) argument on one word in Genesis because he trusted the copyists. He based his argument on the singular form of the word because he trusted God to fulfill His promise to preserve “...the words of the Lord” to all generations.

Elder Bibler made these points regarding God’s personal care and preservation of Scripture convincingly and from Scripture itself. He then moved to the next point, validation in history. He touched on many of the individuals whom the Lord raised at critical times and places throughout Christian history to preserve the Scriptures in the

common language of believers at that time. And from this base, the man made the final and convincing Biblical point. Any church that has any basis to claim that she is a church of the Lord historically has held tightly to—and refused to depart from—the words of Scripture. The power of the truth that Paul teaches in 1 Timothy 3:15b, that the church is the “...pillar and ground of the truth,” stands inseparably linked to the truth that that church holds to the Scriptures that the Lord gave to her and charged her with believing, practicing, teaching, and protecting—ground to pillar.

A dear friend and believer many years ago had a disappointing experience that he described in vivid details to me. He was working with a man who had been a leading minister in a well-known traditional Reformed denomination. The old documents and confessions of this denomination clearly set forth many of the truths of Scripture. Thinking that this denomination had remained faithful to their roots, on a particular day, my friend raised Ephesians 1:4-5 to the man, expecting to open an edifying discussion on the Bible doctrine of election. He was surprised and disappointed when his friend responded, “I know that the passage you’ve cited teaches the doctrine of election and predestination, but many years ago our denomination decided that these doctrines are not effective in convincing people to become Christians, so we chose to avoid teaching them anymore.” How can a body of people knowingly and consciously choose to cease teaching and believing any part of the Bible, the very textbook that God gave to His church for her instruction and faith? How can you not only depart from, but consciously avoid your foundation and yet pretend to build the building that was designed to be built precisely on that foundation? (Psalm 11:3) Indeed, what can the righteous do?

However many failures that churches make—and, Lord forgive, they are many—Scripture affirms this bedrock truth. God has chosen to make His church, not any individual man or that man’s “God has revealed” claims, the “pillar and ground” of His truth. The godly and faithful preacher will learn and respect that God has set him **in, not over** the Lord’s church that he serves—and serves at the Lord’s discretion. (1 Corinthians 12:28; notice that even the apostles, along with all other spiritual gifts, are set “in,” not over the church) Paul repeatedly affirms his position and self-perspective in his writings. He is the Lord’s servant in the Lord’s church, not a self-appointed czar over that church. (2 Corinthians 4:5; notice the emphatic “...Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves **your servants for Jesus’ sake**”) May we ever follow Paul’s and Jude’s godly example.

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Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor