

Keep Yourselves In God's Love

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Preacher: J.D. Edwards

[0 : 00] It begins at verse 20. With fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless, faultless before the presence of his glory with great joy.

To the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority before all time and now and forevermore. Amen.

Please be seated. Thus far the reading of God's powerful, inerrant, inspired word. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of the Lord stands forever, and no word from God shall be void of power.

Let's pray. Oh Lord, you alone are able to keep your people, and you promise that you do keep your people.

[1 : 35] And the stern warning that there is fire. There is deep gloom and darkness awaiting those who refuse you and who do not run to Christ.

We pray, Lord, that you will snatch us and pull us back to Jesus Christ. Lord, the words in these verses are words of life and death.

And we pray that whoever has an ear to hear will receive your promise, that it's for them. It's for each one of us who will come to Jesus Christ by faith alone, not by anything we do.

We pray that this will be clear, Lord. We pray that your people will receive it. We pray that you'll soften hearts who need this glorious salvation that you have accomplished through your Son.

That you will be glorified. We ask all of this for his name. Amen. Here's a question that every soul has wrestled with at some point.

[2 : 44] Even the most mature Christians that have suffered and been sanctified the most. In the words of John Owen, here's the question. Have you ever wondered whether the spark of faith that is within us will be kept in the midst of the sea that is around us?

What a visual. The faith inside a true believer like you and me. It's like a spark. You might have done a bonfire this summer and you see that tiny little ember just, you know, flutter away.

And then quickly turn to gray ash and dust. Sometimes it feels like that's my faith. And what it's surrounded with is an ocean. It's a sea. We read John 17 that in this world you will have trouble.

What's going to keep that little spark alive? What will keep your faith in mine? What will secure our faith in Christ? So that we can know it will not be pushed out.

If it's like over a sea or an ocean, I mean, the tiniest little gust of wind and water, a little vapor would put out that flame. Will your spark of faith make it to the end?

[4 : 03] We do have an exhortation here in verse 21. Would you look at that? He tells the local church, keep yourselves in the love of God.

This is a command to a real church in history, most likely than also shared among other real churches. And it's a command that they do together in the plural. Keep yourselves.

How do you do that? Keep yourselves in the love of God. How do we know God's love? Look at Jesus Christ and his work. That's what the church does together. So I want to open up that theme, that command with four movements today.

The first one is this. We are to keep one another in the love of God. Jude had warned the church that there are these waves coming up like straight from hell and destruction and death like the flood. And they're spewing up the foam of their own shame was his language. And it's an image of chaos and gloom and eternal darkness. And it's tumultuous.

[5 : 06] There's no order. It's like the waters of the deep and the Lord called out order in his creation. And he does that within the church. Whereas with these threats on the church, there's chaos, division, attacks.

And it's the tone of Psalm 12 verses 3 and 4. We saw this one how David prays, May the Lord cut off all their flattering lips of those who do this within the body.

The tongue that makes great boast. Those who say with our tongue, we will prevail. Our lips are with us who is master over us. See, these are intruders who had grabbed God's glory for themselves.

And as they got followers, they believed themselves to be majestic, even to the point of denying that this God has a wrath against sin and rebellion.

They committed the same error of those angels who forgot their place, even in heaven before the full manifestation of the glory of God. These were intruders who were claiming dominion over God's people, undermining Christ as the all-powerful deliverer and high priest of God's people.

[6 : 23] And then in verse 20, the church is addressed again, But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith.

A church is built up on the common faith that it shares. It's the faith that this church professes together. We will study this faith. We will understand it as best we can by faith together.

We will encourage one another in the faith in Jesus Christ. Build yourselves up, church, in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

Praying in the Holy Spirit as one body. Pray in the Holy Spirit. Wait on the Lord together. The tone remains urgent.

But the exhortations are pointing us right back to Jesus Christ. To depending on his Holy Spirit. Trusting in him. Waiting upon the Lord. Together. Romans 8.13 says, If you live according to the flesh, you will die.

[7 : 29] But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. I think this one illuminates the other here. Keep yourselves in the love of God.

Pray together in the Holy Spirit. Depend on the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. How long? Until eternal life. Keep doing that continuously.

That's what it means together for a body to live by the Holy Spirit. How is it that God sanctifies his people and preserves them corporately together?

John Owen wrote this. God's Spirit works within the local body. Within our lives. And he works in us. And with us.

That means it's an internal work. Powerful. By the Holy Spirit. Inside the believer. And he also works with us. Our will, apart from Christ, hates to be sanctified.

[8 : 31] Our flesh rebels against it. But he works with us. In other words, he transforms our will. Makes us desire what he's doing. In our lives. He works in us and with us.

Not against us. And not without us. He will draw us, body and soul, to desire more and more of Christ.

In the fight against sin, the Holy Spirit brings into his use. He employs all of our human faculties. It's the whole person walking as a disciple of Jesus Christ within his local church.

What a great promise we have. This is what this verse teaches us. To keep one another in the love of God. Encourage one another on this walk. In verse 22.

This is the one that consumed most of my meditation this week in preparation for today. It's a different message. He says in verse 22. Pull one another out of the fire.

[9 : 36] Back to the love of God. Look at verse 22. On some have compassion, making a distinction. But others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire.

Hating even the garment defiled by the flesh. It seems like this congregation to which he wrote tended to show compassion on all indiscriminately to the point that they are excusing some of sins that are offensive to God.

And unacceptable within the body of God in the local church. Excusing some people on their way to hell, at least so to speak. Hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.

He says instead, pull them out of the fire. Save others with fear. I don't fully know what this means or what the wise application of it is.

But I know that it's unloving to let a person go on in a way that leads to perdition and destruction and death and the judgment of a holy God. And so Jude commands that his church, the local body, have compassion.

[10 : 57] And he also qualifies how we are to have compassion. He says on some. Then he quickly adds, make distinction. The church is to hate ongoing sin within members of the body of Christ.

In the first part of this, he's warning the church against those who do not belong to Christ. But now it seems like there's also two voices even for those who do belong to Christ.

These are ones who will be saved from the fires of hell. But they need a voice that, in the New King James at least, it's with fear. Again, I don't know the wise application.

I won't pretend that I will be able to get this right ever. But it's there and we can't skip over whatever this does mean for the church. I was helped with 2 Timothy 4.2, as I mentioned a moment ago, and even to shed some light on how this might need to sound and what is such a tone.

I'll read that verse for us once more. Preach the word. Be prepared in season and out of season. Correct. Rebuke.

[12 : 12] And encourage. With great patience and careful instruction. Well, men march in where angels fear to tread, right?

Who can do this? No one without God's help and even then stumbling and needing his grace always. It's so easy to err on either side. But it's the New Testament that gives us the strongest language against both of those errors.

For those who do not correct or rebuke or even warn of, you know, using fear. Those are called flatterers. Those are called flatterers. And the New Testament holds no punch against flatterers or ear ticklers.

We know that's wrong. On the other hand, exercise great patience. No one is more patient and compassionate than Jesus Christ.

And as we minister his word to one another. We need to have the patience and the compassion of Jesus Christ one with another. Lord, I don't model this well.

[13 : 21] Certainly not perfectly. But I want you to hear my desire to not compromise on either front. And that we can, Lord willing, build one another up in the faith with his help in this way.

I do see also the timing here on how a congregation has a role to do this. How is it that we pull one another out? We show compassion, but we also warn and don't just promise like a easy believism or a false assurance indiscriminately.

I think the two ways a local church officially does this. One is up front. Be clear up front on who is part of a local church. How you do that, there's different varieties, but that has to happen.

One way to do it is through a public profession of your shared faith in Christ. Evaluated by members, affirmed, and publicly celebrated. Praise the Lord. We share a common faith.

Praise the Lord. You're not ashamed of God now. You've publicly professed you belong to him. The orderly way that this congregation does that is through the membership process.

[14 : 33] That's up front. But then there's also an ongoing way of building one another and warning one another and saving one another out of the fire with warning. And that's to continually bring each other back to Christ.

This is what true compassion is. And you are good at this. If a brother or sister has not been able to join us for a variety of different reasons, you're really good at reaching out to one another.

Leave a voice message. Try to meet up. See how they're doing. Check in on one another. Pray for one another. We keep bringing each other back to Christ. We show true compassion not by saying, it doesn't matter.

You just drift away for three weeks. It's okay. No, you care. You truly care. And we keep pursuing one another in Christ. Pulling them back to Christ in his love.

We pull each other to the presence of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The glowing, shining, bright face of Jesus.

[15 : 34] Warning one another. Be in Christ. Because when you're in Christ, all those dark, shadowy lusts of the flesh have no place to hide. This is the most compassionate place to be is with Jesus Christ.

And it takes care of holiness and remaining sin in his own way and in his own time with each of us. So we pull one another out of the fire back to the love of God.

The third observation from this passage is this. Remind one another of why God is able to keep you and me. Remind one another of all the ways you can think of and keep studying them and piling them on and see what else the church has said.

And study this. Why is God able to keep you and me? And this is where this glorious doxology begins in verse 24. Now to him who is able to keep you.

He is able to keep you and me. Even from stumbling. It doesn't excuse our sin. It's reminding us the power against sin is in God who is able to keep us from stumbling.

[16:48] Now think of the other side of that. Did God keep you this week from stumbling? Well, I'm sure he kept every one of us from stumbling in so many more ways that we could have. We should consider that realistically for a brief moment.

If the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn from us. How many? I would have been one that I'm sure would have probably been behind bars in prison. Who knows what the remaining sin is capable of? It's the Lord who keeps us from stumbling. And so to the extent that you see that in one another and in your own life, give him glory and praise. He keeps us from stumbling because he's powerful. And this is where the church can help us. The church has meditated and built itself up over the centuries on all the different ways God is able to keep his people to the end. What's a concise way to just read in one paragraph what the church has seen?

Well, you can turn, if you like, to the Second London Confession of Faith, which is the expression in the second generation after the Reformation that this church teaches.

[17:55] It's in that confession, chapter 17, paragraph 2. And I've broken this down into, I think, six observations from our confession.

Your perseverance in this life does not depend on you for six reasons. Why does it not depend on you? Because it is God who mercifully saved you in Christ.

Why did God do this? He did this for his own glory. God is the one who is able to keep you because your perseverance in Christ also does not depend on you.

Your perseverance flows from the free and unchangeable love of God. God makes your salvation certain and secure.

Six proofs for this. Ready? Number one, because saving you is God's pleasure. That's why your salvation is certain and secure. That's why God will preserve you to the very end.

[18:55] Romans 9, 15 and 16 say, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion. So then it is not of him who wills nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

Romans 9, 11 says that the purposes of God, according to election, might stand, not of works, but of him who calls. God saved you and God will preserve you for his own good pleasure.

Second reason why your preservation in Christ is certain and secure. It's because God's eternal pleasure is expressed to us in his word by way of covenant.

The covenants of God throughout the scriptures are the way that God has expressed, communicated to people like you and me. That we are secure in him by his work alone.

Hebrews 6, 17 and 18 says, God, determining to show, to express the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath so that by two immutable things.

[20:08] Remember, this is a letter to the Hebrews. They need two witnesses. What are the two witnesses? God himself, who is immutable, and his oath because God cannot lie. We might have strong consolation then who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us in Christ Jesus.

He expressed his will to save sinners like you and me by way of covenant for our strong consolation. That's what Hebrews 6 says.

I love that hymn that expresses this love of God. The love of God is greater far than tongue or pen can ever tell.

It goes beyond the highest star and reaches to the lowest hell. The guilty pair bowed down with care. God gave his son to win.

His erring child he reconciled and pardoned him from his sin. Remind one another of why God is able to keep you.

[21:15] Those are two of the six reasons from our confession of faith. Here's the remaining ones. Your preservation in Christ is certain and secure because of the nature of the covenant of grace.

Jeremiah 32, 40 says, and this is God speaking, I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from doing them good, but I will put my fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from me.

God binds his people to himself in the covenant of grace, and it's the Holy Spirit inside his people that cause you and me to not turn away from God. What a blessing.

Here's the fourth reason. Your preservation in Christ is certain because of the efficacy and the merit of the intercession of Jesus Christ. Why is our salvation certain and secure?

It's because Jesus is meritorious. His work fully satisfied the requirement of God himself, and his prayer, therefore, is the prayer of the only fully righteous man by his own standing, and the prayer of Christ will not fail.

[22 : 28] It works powerfully as it is working. The fifth reason that your preservation in Christ is certain and secure is because of your union with him.

Romans 5, 9 and 10 says, Having now been justified by his blood, we shall be saved from the wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

In Romans 5, Paul is explaining, there are two federal heads. All have sinned under Adam, the first one. But if Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior, you are united to him in his death, how much more are you united to him in his resurrection?

You are his. You belong to him. Your soul is already united to him, though he's in heaven and you're here. By the Spirit, you are his. And your union to Christ cannot be broken.

It's a bond that cannot be severed. And here's the sixth reason. Your preservation in Christ is certain and secure because of the abiding of his Holy Spirit in you.

[23 : 43] John 14, 17 and 18. The words of Jesus Christ himself. I will not leave you orphans. I will come to you in the Holy Spirit that he may abide with you forever.

And so the seed of truth, I'm sorry, the Spirit of truth, Jesus said, you know him for he dwells with you and he will be in you.

In 1 John 3, 9, whoever has been born of God, God's seed remains in him. It will never leave you. It's certain and secure that you are Christ because his Holy Spirit abides in you now and forevermore.

I ask you that question that John Owen wrote about 400 years ago. Have you ever wondered whether the spark of faith that is within us will be kept in the midst of the sea that is around us?

Here's the conclusion that John Owen came to after wrestling with this for much of his life and pouring over the scripture and these promises of God that we just now rehearsed.

[24 : 59] John Owen wrote, What that means is if you grasp Christ, even a little with a weak faith, you have Christ fully.

You depend on him alone for your salvation and therefore you are completely right with God. He went on to write, Others may be holier than you, but no one is more righteous than you.

You who have but a weak faith must know that your faith is in a strong Christ, so that if all the world should set itself against your little faith, it will not prevail.

Sin cannot do it. Satan cannot do it. Hell itself cannot take away your faith. Though by faith you take but weak and faint hold of Christ, He, by covenant, takes strong and sure and incomparable hold on you.

Jesus Christ takes special care of you that are weak of faith. So the last encouragement for us as a church is keep reminding ourselves of the end for which you are kept.

[26 : 34] Verses 24 and 25 tell us how long and for what end God keeps us. He is able to keep you until he presents you faultless before the presence of his glory.

Verse 25 elevates our faith to Christ's throne in heaven. Verse 25 he describes God our Savior who alone is wise.

The more that we keep giving one another God's word and Jesus Christ in his word, the more we see the wisdom of God in Christ and in his word.

Amen. Isn't that the great delight of growing and building each other up in the faith? It's seeing Christ in all of his word more and more and more. To God our Savior who alone is wise.

The Greek word there, it's mono, is the prefix mono, like monolithic. It's an adverb describing something done in a single, unified, in an often massive way, in a manner characterized by total uniformity.

[27 : 53] God alone is wise. He is uniquely wise in a holy way. His wisdom is assay.

And that means it depends on none other. The wisdom of God is holy wisdom. It's otherworldly wisdom. God has a creatorly wisdom that creatures can never fully grasp, though we do truly apprehend it.

We truly hold on, though we can't wrap our minds all the way around it. Because he alone is wise. And his wisdom is one at which we must marvel.

And our minds even spin in the best way. And our hearts are stirred to even greater worship. To esteem this monolithically wise God.

He says, To this God, our Savior, be glory and majesty. Literally be esteem and mega togetherness.

[28 : 57] See, the glory and majesty of God are not to be given to any man or person or institution, but to God alone.

There's no other relationship that can bear the glory that God alone can bear. To do so is to make that thing an idol, to set it up for disappointment.

The word of majesty. It's a throng of people. A massive, vast congregation gathered in great unity to do one thing.

To esteem the God of our salvation. To God, our Savior, be all dominion. His rule over his people's life is real.

His rule over his church is real. To God, our Savior, be all power. He is truly, powerfully at work.

[30 : 03] He is powerfully able to keep you and me from stumbling. To him be all the glory, both now and forevermore.

See, as we put our eyes on God, as we sing the doxology together, this one, and all those that we've received as his people from his church, the end of this is what he promises at the end of verse 24.

Would you look there one last time? God will present you and me, who Christ purchased, faultless, before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.

The throne of heaven, those that God has kept to the very end, presented back to himself with great joy.

We can only experience joy through our vessels that are broken and limited as bodies. But we know joy is a real thing.

[31 : 19] This is the joy of God being described, who is limitless. There are no bounds for his joy. And what is it that causes this exceeding joy, at least in the language that we're given, to express the essence of God's holiness and purity, receiving us for his glory.

And the church from all the centuries is esteeming him highly as our holy, wise God, who alone deserves all the praise. John Flavel.

Ask this question for you and me, who wrestle with assurance of our salvation. Do you want full evidence that Christ will finish his work to sanctify us?

Simply see how he finished his work to redeem us. His finished work to justify us would be in vain should he not also finish his work to sanctify us.

First, he offered up himself as the perfect sacrifice to finish our redemption. Next, he must offer up everyone perfect and complete whom he redeemed.

[32 : 37] He will do this because he will not lose the end of all his sufferings. To what purpose would his meritorious work be without complete and full application?

He will present you and me faultless before his own throne for the glory of God with exceeding joy. And the end of this doxology says, this is true of God and this is true of God's people now and forevermore.

This is already your justified status. This is already the reality that you and I share in Christ, our union to him. And it is true now. It will be true forevermore in this life, in the life to come, and for all eternity.

So brothers and sisters, trust this promise that God will keep you in his love through his church.

This is the love he has shown to you and me through Jesus Christ.

[33 : 45] And he will present you faultless before his presence as he does now. He will keep you in Christ forevermore. Let's thank our great Lord for this awesome salvation.

Father, thank you for the promises you've given to us, your people, through your word. Thank you for who you are and that you draw people like us, sinners, that you have saved and washed, that you adopt, that you love so lavishly, generously in Christ.

You reassure us of your promise by the Holy Spirit. We pray, Lord, that by your work we will receive this promise. We pray for those who don't know you but need the gospel truth in their lives that they will come to you, Father.

We pray that you will prepare us, prepare us for that wonderful day where you will present us faultless because you have kept us in Christ all the way.
In his name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.