

# Pulled from the Fire

Gary Shepard

Jude 20-23

Preached 2/25/1990

Let's go to Jude, verse 20. It begins with "but", that is in light of the course of all that is being said here by the writer of scripture as to the falling away, the apostasy, the error, the false profession, the false prophets, the false religion that he says characterizes the last age, the last days and, he says, in light of all of the murmurers and complainers (those who speak great words to their own advantage), and mockers and scoffers and all of these things. He says, "But ye beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep in yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, unto eternal life. And, of some have compassion, making a difference, and others saved with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh" [Jude 20-23]. Now, according to the apostle here in this book, he admonishes believers in this time and every time, which is characterized by apostasy. Now, apostasy simply means a falling away from the truth -- a falling away from the truth: that is what this book is primarily all about. [It is] a warning for true believers as to their stay and their profession -- and exhorting and encouraging true believers in a time when men fall away, and shun, and deny the truth as it is in the Lord Jesus Christ. And believers are admonished in these verses that we just read, to at least five things, in these verses.

The first one is here in verse 20. He says, "But ye beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith." That is this faith that he spoke of in the beginning. That faith was delivered to the saints. He says that we are to be built up on that faith, that most holy faith. Not on some kind of faith that you have naturally and you're to stir up -- that's not what he's talking about. He's talking about our being built up, that is, adding to faith virtue and temperance and meekness, [and] to all of these other things, knowledge. He's talking about growing in knowledge and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, being built up on this most holy faith. He says to keep always building on this faith, the one foundation of which is the Lord Jesus Christ.

And, then the second thing he says is, "Praying in the Holy Ghost." Is that some kind of special or elective kind of praying that a person, after they've been a believer, or Christian for so long, does? Well, all of the believers prayers are prayers in the Holy Spirit. That is, we know not how to pray, the apostle says, but the spirit of God takes the things that we say and presents them to God, according to the will of God, with utterances, the Scripture says, that we are not able to know, to bear, or to utter ourselves. The spirit of God takes our prayers, by the merits and the blood of the Lord

Jesus Christ, and bears them before God. We know not the mind of God at all except by the spirit of God. We're led by the spirit and we walk by the spirit. He says, "Praying in the Holy Spirit."

The third thing he says is, "Keep yourselves in the love of God. Does that mean that we're to keep trying to love God? Is that what it's all about? If we fall out of love with God then God will fall out of love with us? NO, that's not what he is talking about. He's talking about us keeping ourselves in the love of God -- the fact that God loved us before we ever loved Him. If we do love Him, He says the reason is because He first loved us. Keeping ourselves in the love of God, the favor of God, which is in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The fourth thing he says is, "Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." Looking always to God for mercy in every situation, but, primarily, I believe it is looking for the mercy that is revealed at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ -- looking for that grace and that glory, and that salvation, which is demonstrated at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ when the full demonstration of eternal life is exhibited.

A fifth thing he says here in these verses is in verse 22 and 23, especially concerning all these that are around, "Of some have compassion, making a difference: and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." That is, by this method he speaks of here, of some having compassion. Distinguishing or making a difference and some with reproofs or rebukes or fear, or whatever it is, he says that we are to be involved in this business of "pulling them out of the fire." Save with fear, pulling them out of the fire."

Now we know, according to the word of God, that God alone is the savior. We know that he is a just God and a savior -- that salvation is of the Lord. We know that salvation is by His grace. We know that salvation is in the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what the Bible teaches us. But, the Bible also teaches us at the same time that, as the Savior, as the Deliverer, as the Redeemer, God uses an instrumentality. And, the danger always is that we will either deny God as savior alone, or on the other hand, we will deny the instrumentality that God uses. And because of this, because He will get glory in the use of the instrument, because He will get glory in actually saving men and women in time, as well as in eternity; because God will be glorified in the means as well as in the end, he uses the instrument. A believer, a child of God, in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ in this age, is to be involved in what the apostle speaks of here as, "pulling them from the fire." Listen to what Paul writes to Timothy. He instructs him as a preacher of the gospel. He says, "Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine." That is, the conduct and the character of a messenger of God and the doctrine of the Gospel of the grace of God are to be in harmony, one with the other. And, he said, "Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine, continue in them." Continue in that gospel and continue in that conduct that adorns the Gospel of grace. "Continue in them for in doing this thou shall both save

thyself and them that hear you." And then he says by James, not only to preachers, but to each and every believer, listen to what he says: "Let him know (anybody who is born of God), that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death and shall hide a multitude of sins" [James 5:20].

So, that we are born again of the spirit of God and we are under this charge of God, this commission of God to go and to teach and to preach and bear witness to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Bear witness to the testimony of who God is, bear witness to the testimony of what God says that men are, and bear witness to the testimony of that salvation that is in and through and by the grace of God in Jesus Christ. He likens this here in this text of scripture as "pulling them from the fire." Everybody who is saved by the grace of God, everybody who is saved and born into the presence of God eternally, shall be as those who are pulled from the fire. What would you think of me if I drove by your house one night. Suppose I'm coming in from a late meeting, off preaching somewhere, and I drive by your house and I notice out of the eve of your roof smoke coming out and flames leaping out of that house and I pass by and see this, and I don't stop and warn you about it. If I come by and I see that and I don't make any effort, if you're asleep, to awaken you out of that sleep, or if smoke has already brought you to a state of unconsciousness and I don't do whatever is necessary to enter in and seek, by whatever means I can, to arouse you and awaken you out of that state, then what will be said of me? Can it be said that I have concern for you? Can it be said that I have a desire to see you be rescued? Can it be said that I truly love you? Can it be said that I am truly concerned about you if I just drive by and honk my horn or something or just drive by and say, "Well, I hope they make it out okay?" Is that all right? Well, he says here that this business of preaching the gospel and bearing witness and praying for men and women and seeking to get them under the sound gospel, he says it is likened to "pulling them out of the fire." This not only tells one thing but it tells another thing. It tells us as to what the ministry of the preachers of the gospel and believers of the gospel is all about -- this business of "pulling them out of the fire." But, at the same time, it tells us about the condition and the state and situation of those who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ. What kind of state are they in? They're in the fire.

Here is a ministry, here is a witness of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, the business of God's people, which is God using them in -- this rescue of pulling sinners out of the fire and at the same time, here are those that do not know Christ; they are still in the fire. Here is the ministry of God's people and here is the condition of the sinner without the Lord Jesus Christ. You see here the nature and consequences of sin is likened to fire. I read in James, this is what I call a principle in a text of scripture. When James talks about this he is actually talking about the tongue. The danger of the tongue. An unruly tongue, a chattering, rattling, gossiping, babbling kind of tongue. He's warning men and women about their tongue. Holding their tongue -- guiding and putting a bit on their tongue. But, in the midst of this, he states a principle. He says that the tongue is set on fire of Hell. And he says after that, "Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth" [James 3:5]. How great a matter, how great a thing, how great an area, he says, "a little fire kindleth." In other words he's saying something like this: "How big a building will

one match burn down?" How big a forest, how many acres of forest will one burning match or spark out of an exhaust -- just a spark, just a match -- how little a fire can kindle such a great matter. That's the principle that he's speaking about and this is what is likened to sin.

When you look first of all at that one act of the garden, one act or one spark, you might say wherein, in disobedience to the command of the thrice holy God, Adam and Eve partook of that fruit of that tree that God forbade them to partake of -- that one spark (if you want to call it that). Look at the sin and all that was ignited in the race, so that in that one act, in that one match, if you will, here by one match, the Bible says, that sin entered in. Entered in where? Entered into the world. But not only that, it says, [but] by that one act of disobedience of Adam, sin entered into the race and death passed upon all men and all men were constituted sinners. Why? By that one spark. That's what he said sin is like. Then we see that the same is true in nature -- just one evil heart, just one evil nature. That's the way we are -- that one evil heart, that one evil nature, it permeates all; it's like a fire spreading through a forest or a house. That one evil heart of unbelief, that one evil nature of sin, it just permeates and spreads like a fire throughout our whole being so that we stand before God absolutely and totally depraved. None good, none whatsoever [Ps. 14:3; Ps. 53:3; Rom. 3:10-12]. Men claim that there is some spark of divinity in each and every one. So that all that the preacher, all that men and women need to do is kind of fan the spark of divinity. The Bible doesn't say anything about a spark of divinity, but it does speak about a raging fire of iniquity in our evil hearts. Just one evil nature, that's what we are. That's the only nature we've got and it's spread through all of our being so that sin is what we're all about.

What is one act of sin? There's nobody here that's guilty of just one act of sin. Our problem is we're guilty of many acts of sin, and many thoughts of sin, and many words of sin, and motives of sin, and of just being sin in and of ourselves. But just one act of sin, just one, according to the Law of God Almighty, he says [is all it takes since] if we offend him one point then we're guilty of them all [James 2:10]. So that all of the Law of God is set aflame with wrath and judgment and justice against us just by one act of sin. Why? Because it's a holy law and sin is pictured here like fire, so that it consumes me, it conquers me, it destroys me. Listen to what the prophet Isaiah had to say in Isaiah 9: "For wickedness burneth as the fire." Here's the fire -- the wickedness of men. "For wickedness burneth as the fire: it shall devour the briers and thorns, and shall kindle in the thickets of the forest, and they shall mount up like the lifting of smoke." He's talking about sin, wickedness. He's talking about that which is displeasing and unfavorable in the sight of God.

[We read in] Isaiah 50:11: "Behold, all ye that kindle a fire." What we imagine to be that which is good in the sight of God -- all our works, all our deeds, all our imagined righteousness, all our attempts to have life in and of ourselves -- are just the little sparks or fire that you kindle. The only fire we can kindle is the fire of sin. Isaiah 50:11 [says], "Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the

light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow." Here is sin likened to fire -- fire of nature, fire that consumes, and conquers, and permeates, and destroys every single, solitary son of Adam: fire, like a raging blaze of iniquity, burning in our hearts and spreading in every aspect of our lives.

Then we find here the sinner's imminent and eternal danger. They are so in danger because they must be "pulled out." If they can walk or fly out, there is no danger. If they have a will to come out, there's no problem. But they're unwilling, unwanting, and in a state in which they are in imminent and eternal danger, and are in need of having to be pulled out. Do you remember in scripture when God is speaking in Christ and a man comes to Lord Jesus and is talking to him about his son? In Matthew 17 the man says, "Lord, have mercy on my son" [Matt. 17:15]. Why was this man wanting the Lord to have mercy on his son? "For he is a lunatic and sore vexed for often times he falleth in the fire." His condition put him in such a state that he was flinging himself in the fire. Thomas Manton had this to say about sinners: "A poor, guilty, secure sinner (that's what we are by nature), is like a drunken man that has fallen into the fire."

Have you ever seen a drunk stumble and fall in a fire? It happens all the time. You read about places burning down and someone has burnt up inside. I've investigated enough of those to find out that a large portion of them are people that are either stoned out of their head on drugs or completely in a drunken stupor and unable to get out. I had a funeral for a man and his wife that died, evidently, in that case. Why? Because in that state they have a false sense of security. Man must be pulled out because he has a false sense of security; he's not sensible to this business of sin. Not sensible to the penalty of sin. Not sensitive to God's view of sin. Not sensitive in any way to sin. He floats and flies around sin -- and around the wrath and judgment of God -- like a moth does around a candle. The moth is attracted to the flame and the flicker of that candle, flying closer and closer until all of a sudden the moth is in the fire. That's the way men and women are in this business of sin. Paul describes them in Ephesians 4 [vs. 19] as "past feeling." That is, [they are] numb and unconscious and paralyzed in this business of sin [and] in a state of unwillingness and blindness and deafness. [They are] spiritually dead so that they have to be "pulled out."

What kind of danger is it? Danger of death. Danger of the death brought about by sin. Danger of the death, which is spiritual death -- the death which is the result of sin (which is physical death), and the death which is the result of sin (which is eternal death). They have no sense of the danger of this business of sin. They have to be "pulled out of the fire." They have no ability except someone rescues him or [else] he perishes in the fire. When the drunk falls in his stupor into the fire, he is just there until somebody rescues him.

The sinner is pleased with his condition if he not soundly roused up and awakened. Manton says, "They lie, they die and they fry." They must be pulled out. And the call to rescue is the charge of God's people. The messengers of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ are part of the means and they take with them the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and the message of Christ and Him crucified. The Spirit of God takes that message and by that means "rescues" the people of God from the fire.

None are ever rescued apart from these means that God uses. But there is a real situation here. I don't think it is ever more clearly demonstrated, or illustrated, or pictured anymore than it is in a story that I read. That is, supposedly, in about 1903, there was a fire in England in an insane asylum. Now, you imagine this. There are places like this all over the country right now. There was a fire in an insane asylum. As a result of this fire in this insane asylum, where there were 300 people in this asylum, fifty of those died in the fire. That was bad in itself. Not only was it bad that fifty died, but the other 250 had to be literally pulled out of that insane asylum that was on fire. You ask, why do you tell that story? Here's the reason why. Because the account of that story, about as vividly as could be, pictures sinners, who are in and of themselves insane. You say, "Preacher, are you telling me I am insane?" I am telling you that if you have not bowed to Jesus Christ then you are the most insane person in this world. I am telling you that a person who will fly in the face of a sovereign God is insane.

One day, when I lived in North Carolina, I looked out there by a busy road and right in the middle of the road on a rainy day, drizzling rain, was the neighborhood drunk just standing around, falling down, in the midst of that highway. I watched for a while and hollered at him to get out of the road but he just stood there and stumbled down and fell around. The only way to get him out of the middle of that highway was to go out there in the rain myself, lay hands on him and actually pull him off of that road and take him to a shelter. What kind of man will stand out there in a busy highway with eighteen-wheelers and cars flying by him? A man that is insane -- either by drunkenness, drugs, a mental condition. Some kind of insanity makes a man do that. I will tell you that a person that will stand in the face of a God that the Bible says holds his very breath and eternal destiny in His hand, that [such] man or woman has to be insane who will not bow when He says bow, who will not believe when He says believe, who will not forsake what he says forsake. Whatever it is, is just absolute insanity. To stand before a Holy God and enter into that God with justice based on what you are and what you do, even what you know of yourself, is insanity. I will tell you this story is a picture of how sinners, who are insane before God, having not bowed and believed on Christ, react when their salvation is earnestly sought out by others, whom themselves, had to be awakened and rescued.

Now, listen to what this story says. The story records, first of all, that some of these 250 that had to be dragged, literally pulled out of the fire, it says, "some laughed at the fire." They saw the fire, and the walls ablaze, and the roof falling in, and the light, and the flicker, and the story records that some of them just laughed at the fire. That wouldn't be too hard to believe that a person, who is not in good sound mind, not knowing the

danger, would laugh at the fire. Some laughed at the fire. You know, a child is like that. A child doesn't see any danger in fire. Children like to play with matches. They like to see candles burn. Every child has a fascination with fire. They have no sense of danger.

The Bible says, "fools make a mock of sin." When a man stands in a pulpit and he talks about sin and he tries to define what sin is in the sight of God. Sin is against the Holy God. We talk about sin being an abomination and iniquity being an abomination in the sight of God. Everything we do and are, men look at that, and they laugh at it. Why? Because they have the insanity of the sinner. So that when the rescue begins, and the message is preached, and the gospel of Christ and Him crucified is declared, men and women and young people are just like those who are dead in this insane asylum. They had to be pulled out because they laughed at the fire. They laughed. I will tell you what -- the word from the doctor will turn them around. The face of a gun barrel, the lights of an oncoming car, the face of the angel of death, has wiped that smile off of many a sinners face. The face of an awful eternity. Because, fools make a mock of sin. Some laughed at fire. Then the story says some didn't want to leave their beds and go out in the night air. They didn't want discomfort. When the rescuers came in to take them out of the burning building they said, "We don't want to go out tonight." Sinners by nature, to every gospel witness, to every gospel sermon, to every work of God, they put out a sign that says, "Do Not Disturb." Do not disturb my present life. Do not disturb me while I have my fling in this world. Do not disturb me in my pleasure. Do not disturb me in my course of life, my plans, my money making, my having fun. Do not disturb me in my religion. DO NOT DISTURB ME. I don't want to go out in the night air and leave my bed of ease. The bed he said was too narrow and the cover, he said, was too short for a man to stretch out on.

Then we find some people were found hiding under the bed during the fire. The rescuers found some people hiding from the fire under the bed. That is like hiding from a fire in a wood pile -- like kindling. Especially in 1903, here is a mattress that will go up in a blaze in a minute and these people were hiding under the bed. It's like this -- sin breeds a false sense of security. [With] religion, heaped upon man's natural self-righteousness, all of his feelings, all of his ideas, man imagines somehow he is going to be saved. He can join a church and be saved or she can dipped in water or go to church once in a while and be saved. She can be a friend of a believer and be saved. She can hear a gospel preacher and be saved. That's no the way it is. Isaiah and Jeremiah both record the false prophets have gone out in the land and spread the false message of peace, peace when there is no peace. He said when you think you have the safest place and the snuggest place and the place free from the wrath and justice and judgment of God, that you have claimed for your own, he said, "I'll come in like a sweeping tide." Some were found hiding under a bed. My friend, in your works, your baptism, your works, your religion, your profession, that is no place to hide from the fire of God's justice and judgment. How is a fire quenched? This fire is only quenched by the blood of Christ. This fire, the fire of sin, can only be quenched by a greater fire. Our God is a consuming fire. He'll either consume the sinner in his wrath and judgment, or he'll consume the sinner's sin in wrath and judgment in the Lord Jesus Christ.

There was a big game refuge in sight of my house in North Carolina and it had houses all around it and a forest fire broke out in that refuge and was headed for a lot of houses. They tried water, and planes and everything, but could not stop that fire. Do you know how they stopped it? They went to the other side to where the houses were, and started a fire between the existing fire and the houses. That fire began to burn back toward the other fire. It became bigger than the other fire, and one Sunday morn, about a quarter to ten, the two fires collided with one another. It went up like an atomic cloud and those around it said it thundered, hailed and lightnined in the midst of that fire. You know what? When that fire came together with that other fire it put it out. It consumed it. When the Lord Jesus Christ took our sins upon him, hung on that cross and the fire of Almighty God fell on Him, it consumed all that sin, consumed all that we were, every believer, in His death -- put it away, made an end to sin. Now, that cloud that went up the witness said, "The fire's out." I didn't know it then. I thought it got worse than ever, everything over there is burning down. But that big mushroom-like cloud that bloomed up on that bright, sunny morning gave witness that the fire was out. That's what the Gospel is about. When we try to tell men and women the fire is out, they go to hiding under the bed. They'll face it on their own.

Not only that, some seem to think that the rescuers themselves had made the fire. When they came to rescue those people they said, "Why are you trying to, burn us up?" They blamed the rescuers for trying to burn them up. They counted the rescuers as disturbers. "Why are you disturbing us?" That is exactly the way it is with everybody when they receive the message and are confronted with the message of truth of the gospel. Most of them in our day are sitting somewhere in a nice, comfortable, convenient place of religion. When they were little boys and girls they joined the church and got baptized and tried to live moral lives and here they are. You don't tell them they don't know God. When you tell them about the God of the Bible, they don't want to know anything about it. When you declare who He is, and what He's done, and who He's done it for, they hate Him. They say, "What did you come to disturb for?" Do you know what Ahab said of Elijah? Elijah, the prophet of God, the biggest man in town here. Do you know what this big man, the king, Ahab said and called Elijah? He called him the man that troubles Israel. [1 Kings 18:17] The high priest at Bethel said of Amos, the prophet of God, "why don't you go eat your bread, and drink your water and preach your sermon somewhere else. Don't disturb us, we are doing just fine." [Amos 7] That's the same way it's been with Moses when he confronted the Israelites, who were in bondage in Egypt. That's the same way it is with Amos, Jeremiah, John the Baptist and that's the way it was with Christ. That's the way it was with Paul and all of the Apostles. Paul said to one group, "Have I become your enemy because I tell you the truth." [Gal. 4:16] -- as if it was the messenger of God did invent sin? Did I invent the God of the Bible. Did I invent the justice of God? Did I invent the wrath of God? Did I get in some room somewhere, or did some medieval scholar dream up this kind of God? When the doctor tells you that you have a disease, does that mean the doctor invented the disease? Some seem to think that the rescuers made the fire. I didn't make the fire. I did for myself but I didn't for you. Many of them fought against their rescuers, biting and tearing their hair out. What do

you think those rescuers wanted to do? They probably wanted to say if this is the way you feel about it, if all you can do is tear my hair out, if all you can do is bite and claw on me while I am trying to drag you out of the fire, then just burn up if you want to. They fought against those who fought discomfort and danger to themselves in an effort to rescue them. My friend, as long as those who truly believe the Gospel, as long as they seek to preach and continue to witness the gospel to their family, and their friends, and the people in their community, and the people in their country, they're going to meet the same kind [of people].

Jesus said the world hates you; if they hate Me, they'll hate you. There's nothing I dislike anymore than not having the favor of people. I like to be liked. I really do. But I don't like to be liked at the price of disobeying God. I don't like to be liked at the price of costing the souls of men and women. I don't like it that good. Some were heard knocking on closed doors when it was too late to rescue. There were those who knocked on the door of the ark after God had already shut the door. In Matthew, we read about five of the ten virgins, who are on the outside, knocking on the door after the other five and bridegroom have already gone in, and the door is shut and it's not opening. My friend, just as sure as Christ says He is the door, just as sure as he says every sheep by Him will enter in. Just as sure as He says that, He says also there will come a day when that door is closed. How shall ye escape if you neglect so great a salvation [Heb. 2:3].

The story says also that every sane man and woman went to the rescue. Why? Because only regenerated believers go, only sane people are rescued. Only those who know God and know that what He says is true and that the time is short and [that] now is the accepted time. Today is the day of salvation. Only spiritually sane people know that sin brings forth death, eternally and everything else. Only the spiritually sane know that judgment is sure. It is appointed unto man whence to die and after this, the judgment. Only those who know the terror, the justice, the character of God persuade Him. That's what Paul says. "Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade Him" [2 Cor. 5:11]. But, most of all, they do it because God commands it and He gets glory. He will be glorified in this business of rescuing and pulling from the fire His people. He says, "Hating even the garment spotted by the flesh."

Oh, it's some business, this business of trying to preach and bear witness to the Gospel. It's some business when you're dealing with men and women. You get hurt. You get burned, they say. Don't stop the rescue. You get disappointed but don't stop the rescue. He said, "pulling them from the fire." Not everybody's going to be saved. No, no no. God's not even trying to save everybody. But He is going to save His people. He's going to do so by the means of preaching finished, full, and completed salvation and redemption that is in the Lord Jesus Christ and Him alone. It is totally by His blood that satisfies all the claims against the sinner. It is totally by His righteousness that makes us acceptable to God in the blood. That's it.

Some laughed at the fire. Some didn't want to get out. This is a real picture of how a men and a women respond to the truth of the Gospel. Because this business of sin makes them to be spiritually insane. God, by His might, by His power, and by His spirit, He'll bring. He'll deliver His people. Because Christ has already paid the debt of their sins. That fire is already out. They must be rescued in time. May God help us in this work. May God help you feed the message of the Gospel, to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.