

Different Strokes for Different Folks

The short New Testament letter of Jude is a sterling example of the old saying that big things come in small packages. Only 25 verses, but what a wealth of information dealing with steps to avoid apostasy. Too much is here to cover in this short venue, but near the close of the letter there is an interesting tidbit of knowledge.

Jude deals concisely, in his treatise on relationships with those that teach error and those that are taken by such teachers, with the mistakes that we sometimes make in reaching out to others. Rather than approaching all people in the same way, with the same arguments, and the same manner, Jude lists three separate ways to approach people. It appears that the difference is determined by the circumstances we find these people in.

Verse 22 says to *...have mercy on those that doubt*. Those whose faith may be young, untested, or immature are deserving of patience. Those with sincere hearts who are honestly trying to figure out God's direction in their life call for patience, tenderness, and a helping heart on our part, and the implication is from verse 23 that this will lead them to be saved.

Verse 23 goes on to say *...save others by snatching them out of the fire*. Much like knocking someone out of the path of an oncoming vehicle, Jude indicates that this group of people may require stronger measures. Patience is not enough here. The term "snatching" seems to say that more effort and stricter efforts may be called for. Strong teaching and perhaps even biblical discipline may be needed to save these souls.

The same verse goes on to list a third group, when he says, *...to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh*. These are ones which are treated with kindness, but at the same time, they are distanced (i.e. feared). They remain in their sins and so should not be coddled. The time for patience has passed and discipline has not brought about the desired result. Don't give up completely on these folks. Show them mercy. But don't cast your pearls before swine either. Continued fellowship with one who spurns repentance can only have a staining effect on us as well, over time.

What is the point? Only that we should proceed cautiously as we reach out to sincere folks with the love of God. All are NOT the same. Some are deserving of patience, others of discipline, while still others should be avoided. As Paul became "*all things to all men*," and approached each on their own particular terms, so should we. God will bless your wisdom.

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