

Ask Away – December 17

1) What does Paul mean when he says, “...that the sharing (*koinōnia*) of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing..”? (Phlm 6)

Moo comments, “This verse is universally recognized as the most difficult in Philemon. A glance at several English translations will reveal several key differences in interpretation” (compare the NIV, NLT, HCSB, and ESV). Moo prefers the option where Paul is praying that Philemon’s *fellowship* with other believers, based on faith, might be effective. Moo says, “Paul assumes, then, that Philemon exists in fellowship with other believers. His prayer is that that fellowship might *be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ.*” He summarizes with the following paraphrase: “Philemon, I am praying that the mutual participation that arises from your faith in Christ might become effective in leading you to understand and put into practice all the good that God wills for us and that is found in our community; and do all this for the sake of Christ.”¹

2) What does it mean to “pervert the grace of our God into sensuality”? (Jude 4)

The wonderful forgiveness that is freely given by God has often been taken advantage of by those who wish to live however they want. For example, Paul said, “Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more...” (Rom 5:20). Does this mean that we should continue sinning that grace may abound? “By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?” (Rom 6:1-2). Jude knew that false teachers were encouraging believers to do sinful and immoral things, telling them that God’s grace would simply abound all the more, and he rightly condemned this teaching as a perversion of grace (cf. Rom 3:8).

3) What is Jude talking about when he says, “And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he [Jesus] has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day”? (Jude 6)

The angels mentioned are likely some of those who joined with Satan in his rebellion (cf. Rev 12:4), but the exact meaning of “left their proper dwelling” is unclear. Some feel this is simply a general reference to the apostasy of Satan and his followers. If this is true, it raises the question of why some angels received a special judgment of “eternal chains” while others did not. Others think Jude is making a reference to the strange event recorded in Genesis 6:1-4 (cf. 1 Enoch 6-12). If this is correct, it raises the question of how spiritual beings could have impregnated mortal women. Rather than be dogmatic about either view, it seems best to focus on Jude’s main point—not even beings as great and powerful as angels can escape the just punishment of God.²

¹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), pp. 389-394.

² For more extended discussions of this issue, see Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 50 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), pp 50-53 and Douglas J. Moo, *2 Peter and Jude*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), pp. 240-243.

4) What is Jude talking about when he says that Michael disputed with the devil about the body of Moses? (Jude 9)

This reference comes from the ancient Jewish religious work known as the *Assumption of Moses*. The essence of the story is as follows: After the death of Moses the archangel Michael was sent to bury the body. Satan came and argued that Moses was not worthy of a decent burial, for he was a murderer, having killed an Egyptian and hidden him in the sand. Michael's statement, "The Lord rebuke you," was a reverent response which invoked God's authority, not his own. The fact that Jude cited the *Assumption of Moses* does not mean that he thought it was inspired or even completely true. It simply means that particular story was true.³

5) What does "...building yourselves up in your most holy faith..." mean? (Jude 20)

Building yourself up in the faith means doing the things that will help you grow and develop spiritually. This includes: (1) reading, studying, memorizing and meditating on God's Word; (2) praying; (3) participating in church; (4) sharing your testimony with others; (5) spending time in fellowship with believers; and (6) engaging in good works.

³ See Walter C. Kaiser Jr., Peter H. Davids, F.F. Bruce, Manfred T. Brauch, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), pp. 754–756 and Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties* (Victor Books, 1992), pp. 549–550.