

The Epistle of Jude

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No. 1. Warnings.

It has been surmised that the Epistle of Jude was the last of the inspired epistles. In any case it is very appropriately placed, in our arrangement of the Scriptures, immediately before the book of Revelation; for while Jude speaks of the corruption and apostasy of the Christian profession, the Revelation foretells the judgment that must follow in all its terrible detail.

Jude having taken his pen in hand purposed to write with all diligence concerning the common salvation, but, led by the Spirit of God, he is constrained to write concerning a special evil which made it of all moment that he should exhort the saints to contend earnestly for the faith.

There are common evils — the world, the flesh, and the devil — to which all who enjoy the common salvation are exposed at all times and in all places, Jude, however, writes neither of the common salvation nor of the common evils. He has before him a special and very terrible form of evil — *the corruption of Christianity by ungodly men inside the Christian circle.*

To obtain a clear conception of this appalling evil, let us remember that the apostle John had already written of those who "went out from us, but they were not *of us*" (1 John 2: 19). Jude likewise traces the evil of which he speaks to those who are not "of us" for he says in verse 4 they are "ungodly men." There is, however, this important difference, the ungodly men of whom John speaks "went out," whereas the ungodly of whom Jude writes "crept in." In result, the difference is very great. If ungodly men "go out," they will become *opposers* to the truth outside the Christian circle. If the ungodly creep in, they will become *corrupters* of the truth inside the Christian circle. To oppose the truth is indeed solemn, to corrupt it is far worse. It is of this special and terrible evil that Jude writes. He lays bare its insidious commencement in the days of the apostles; he exposes its deadly character; he traces its evil

course through the succeeding ages, and foretells its overwhelming judgment at the coming of the Lord. Its continuance through the dispensation clearly proves that corruption inside the Christian circle is an evil that no accession of light can arrest, no revival can check, and no reformation can remove. The Lord alone can deal with it at His coming. First then Jude presents before us

THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE EVIL (Jude 4).

Corruption inside the Christian circle commenced through certain men creeping in unawares. That they came in unawares clearly shows that they deceived the saints by a good profession and a fair appearance. They made a profession of Christianity and were received as true Christians. Really the ministers of Satan, they appeared as ministers of righteousness. The evil, too, commenced in apostolic days, for Jude is not simply warning us of evil to come in the last days, but of evil that was present in his day. Paul had said, "I know that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you not sparing the flock." But when Jude writes, the grievous wolves are already at their nefarious work. He does not say there will be certain men but "there are." Having thus indicated the commencement of the evil, Jude proceeds to set forth

THE CHARACTER OF THE EVIL (Jude 5-10).

We have seen that the men who brought in the corruption were in fact "ungodly," however fair outwardly. The character of their ungodliness is twofold.

First they turned the grace of God into lasciviousness. In the Epistle to Titus we learn that grace is the principle on which God is saving men, and by which He teaches the believer to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world (Titus 2: 11, 12). The great principle by which God is saving men from sin, and teaching them to live soberly, is made the occasion by these ungodly men to gratify the flesh and indulge their lust, at the same time keeping up a fair profession and moving in the Christian circle.

Secondly, they deny "our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ" (R.V. and N.T.). This is the refusal of all authority. They do not deny the name of Christ, but they will not submit to His authority. They deny "our only Master." This is lawlessness, and lawlessness is the determination to do one's own will.

Here, then, we have the two great characteristics of this corrupting evil — *lust and lawlessness*. Of necessity lust leads to lawlessness, for the man who is determined to gratify his lust will be impatient of every kind of restraint. Who can deny today that that which bears the name of Christ upon earth is marked by lust and lawlessness? Truly the evil may take many different forms and show itself in very varied degrees, but on every hand there is increasingly manifest a spirit of self-will and self-indulgence combined with a spirit of rebellion that rises up against all authority.

Moreover, Jude not only portrays the character of the evil, but he also shows what it involves and whither it leads. It involves the hopelessness of apostasy and leads to overwhelming judgment. To prove this beyond all question, Jude recalls three terrible examples in the history of the world. First he reminds us of those who were saved out of the land of Egypt but afterwards were destroyed in the wilderness. What was the secret of their downfall? Lust and lawlessness. They lusted after the things of Egypt, and they rebelled against God (Jude 5).

Secondly, Jude brings forward the angels which kept not their first estate. The reference is not to the fall of Satan and his angels, for, as we well know, they are not at present in chains but are allowed to wander to and fro on this earth. This is a second fall of angels, presumably referred to in Gen. 6. The

secret of Satan's fall was pride, by which he sought to exalt himself to the throne of God. The secret of this second fall of angels was lust, by which they left their own habitation and kept not their first estate (Jude 6).

Lastly, Jude recalls the dark history of Sodom and Gomorrha, cities that gave themselves over to lust and lawlessness (Jude 7).

In connection with these three examples there are several facts we do well to remember:

Firstly, the underlying evil in every case was lust in some form.

Secondly, the effort to gratify lust led to rebellion against the authority of God.

Thirdly, rebellion against God involved the abandonment of the position in which God had placed them. This is apostasy.

Fourthly, in every case apostasy brought about overwhelming judgement. There is no hope for the apostate.

Israel fell to lusting, rebelled against God, and thus abandoned their position of outward relationship with God in which they had been placed. This was apostasy and led to their judgment — they were destroyed. The angels lusted and abandoned the angelic position in which God had set them.

This, too, was apostasy and in consequence they are abandoned to judgment — "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." Sodom and Gomorrha lusted and abandoned the natural order which God had ordained. This again was apostasy, exposing them to the judgment of "eternal fire."

How intensely solemn the warnings of these terrible examples! How loudly they proclaim that the corruption and rebellion that marks the great Christian profession of today is leading to the hopeless horror of apostasy — the total abandonment of the Christian position. For apostasy there is neither recovery nor remedy. There is nothing in front of corrupt Christendom but the judgment, long-foretold, at the coming of the Lord with ten thousands of His saints.

However, Jude does not leave us to make the application of these examples, for the facts adduced he himself applies to the corrupters of Christendom (Jude 8-10). They, too, are marked by the lusts of the flesh. Not governed by the revelation of God, they become infatuated with their own filthy dreams which defile the flesh. They, too, are marked by lawlessness. In the eager pursuit of their dreams they revolt against all authority; as it is said, they "despise lordship and speak railingly against dignities" (N.T.). Mere natural men, they can know nothing of the things of God, for "the things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God." Of these things that they know not, they speak evil, and in the things which they know naturally they corrupt themselves, for, as one has truly said, "man cannot become as a beast without debasing himself far below the beast; and that which only testifies in the beast to the absence of a moral element, in man will testify to the presence of an immoral one."

Here then we have all the elements that mark corrupt Christendom. Filthy dreams instead of the revelation of God; the body defiled rather than being used for the glory of God; lordship despised in place of submission to the authority of Christ; dignities railed against in place of due recognition; evil spoken of spiritual things and natural things corrupted. Such is the solemn picture, not of degraded heathendom but, of civilized Christendom. To this condition there can be only one end. But before presenting the terrible end of the corruption Jude portrays in a few brief sentences

THE COURSE OF THE EVIL (Jude 11-13).

He vividly sets forth the development of the evil by the use of three more illustrations drawn from the Old Testament. Recalling the history of Cain he exclaims of the corrupters of Christendom, "Woe unto them! for they have gone in THE WAY OF CAIN." The way of Cain was the way of *natural religion*. Cain was a religious man, but his religion was according to the thoughts of fallen man and not according to the revelation of God. His natural religion led him to belittle sin, to despise God's provision to meet sin, to attempt to draw nigh to God on the ground of his own works, and to persecute the true child of God. Alas! through the corruption of ungodly men, the large mass of professing Christians have gone in the way of Cain. The popular religion of the day ignores the revelation of God, and takes no account of sin in the sight of God. It treats the fall as a mere myth and hence, denying that man is fallen, has no use for the atonement. Rejecting the propitiatory work of Christ, it naturally falls back on the works of men for the ground of acceptance with God. Moreover, it holds in great contempt, and special hatred, all those who, cleaving to the revelation of God, trust in the atoning blood as their only plea, and love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth. Upon all those who follow in the way of Cain God pronounces "Woe."

Jude continues by appealing to the history of one of the most depraved men in the Old Testament. He says of these corrupters, they have run "greedily after THE ERROR OF BALAAM for reward." This desperately wicked man was governed by covetousness. In the pursuit of gain he would fain make merchandise of the people of God, and was even ready to proclaim error if by so doing he could obtain the reward. This has been rightly called the ecclesiastical error, or how many there are who hold high official position in the professing church who simply use the position to make merchandise out of the people of God, and are ready to teach error to obtain rewards. This evil rises to its greatest height in the corrupt system of Rome marked, as it is, by "merchandise of gold," and every choice and precious thing that man's heart can covet, from "gold and silver and precious stones" down to "the souls of men." If the professing church can make merchandise with the truth of God, it will not hesitate to barter with the souls of men (Rev. 18: 12, 13). Such is the modern repetition of the error of Balaam.

Lastly Jude says of these corrupters, they have "perished in THE GAINSAYING OF CORE." The sin of Korah was twofold; on the one hand, he openly rebelled against Moses and Aaron saying, "Ye take too much upon you . . . wherefore . . . lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord "; on the other hand, not content with his own-position, he usurped the place of priestly intercession that alone belonged to Aaron (Num. 16: 3, 9, 10). He sought to degrade Moses and Aaron to the level of the congregation, and to exalt himself to the level of Aaron. Alas I the modern answer to the gainsaying of Core is only too manifest. From pulpit and press, from convention and conference there flows an ever-rising tide of rebellion against the Christ of God, combined with the exaltation of man. Christ is degraded to the level of fallen man, and man is exalted to the level of God. Religious infidels masquerading as Christians dare to say that too much is made of Christ while claiming for man rights and honours that alone belong to Christ. This rebellion against Christ linked with the exaltation of man is the very essence of apostasy and will end in the appearance of that great apostate, "the man of sin," "who opposeth and exalteth himself against all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he sitteth in the temple of God showing himself that he is God" (2 Thess. 2: 3, 4).

Such is the terrible course of the evil by which Christendom is being corrupted. Commencing with the way of Cain — or religion that, ignoring revelation, is framed according to the natural heart of man — it develops into the error of Balaam, making religion a matter of merchandise; and ends in the gainsaying of Core, which is apostasy.

Jude multiplies metaphors in expressing his horror of these evil corrupters of the professing church. They are sunken rocks* leading to shipwreck; clouds, giving promise of refreshing showers but in reality without water and the sport of every wind: trees, for a time making a fair show but bringing forth no fruit, twice dead (by nature and by profession), and in the end rooted up: raging waves of the sea, making a great display of power, but in reality foaming out things that are to their shame; wandering stars, appearing with meteoric brilliancy for a time only to wander into "blackness of darkness for ever."

{*Translated "Spots" in A.V. See R.V. and note in New Translation by J.N.D.}

Thus Jude ranges over land and sea and sky to find figures wherewith to expose and condemn this fearful evil. Yet let none think by reason of these striking figures that these represented are monsters of iniquity in the sight of men. Rather, indeed, they appear as angels of light and ministers of righteousness feasting in company with Christians, and feeding themselves without fear; showing, indeed, on their part, that they have no conscience, and on the part of the Christians, that their true character is not discerned.

Having thus learnt the character and source of this great evil we are finally permitted to see

THE JUDGMENT OF THE EVIL (Jude 14-16).

For the backslider there is a way of recovery; for the apostate nothing but a certain fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries. Apostasy ends in the crushing judgment, foretold by Enoch, and fulfilled when the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints. Enoch in his day, surrounded by the world of the ungodly, looked to be caught up to heaven, and foretold the judgment that was coming. Once again the Lord's people find themselves surrounded by the ungodly, they too look to meet the Lord in the air, and they know that judgment must follow upon apostate Christendom. In that day not only the "ungodly deeds" will meet their due reward but "*all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.*" From the days of the apostles to these last closing days the Person of the Christ has been the constant object of attack by ungodly corrupters within the church. But no "hard speeches" "against Him" have been forgotten. All will be remembered and all will be recalled only to recoil in judgment upon those who have so lightly dared to sit in judgment upon the Son of God.

But those who have belittled Christ have ever exalted man. If they have spoken "hard speeches" against the Christ of God they have also uttered "*great swelling words*" concerning sinful men. The degradation of Christ is ever linked with the admiration of man. Moreover, behind the hard speeches against Christ there is ever a low walk. Such are "murmurers, complainers, *walking after their own lusts.*" Lust is the real secret of antagonism to Christ and admiration of man.

Hard speeches against the Christ of God must raise the righteous indignation of the true children of God; and yet they can to a very large extent afford to treat the authors of these hard speeches with silent contempt, knowing that the time is soon coming when all will be dealt with in judgment. The irreverent handling of God's revelation, the wicked perversions of Divine truths, and the blasphemies against the Person and work of Christ, whether on the part of higher critics, religious infidels, or graceless professors, have not been passed over by a Holy God. For centuries He has kept silence, and borne in long-suffering patience, while men, ever growing bolder in rebellion, have heaped up wrath against the day of wrath; but at last every "hard speech" will receive its crushing answer, and every opposer will be silenced and condemned, for "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their

ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."

No. 2. Encouragement.

If the warnings of this short epistle are intensely solemn, the encouragement is exceedingly precious. In the opening verse the saints are addressed as "called," "beloved," and "preserved" (N.T. and R.V.). Neither the corruptions of Christendom, nor the failures of the saints, can thwart the purposes of God. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." However dark the day, there are those who are called according to the eternal purpose of God; and those He has called are the objects of His unchanging love; and those He loves are the subjects of His preserving care. This speaks of what God is for the saints rather than of what the saints are for God. God has "called" us; God "loves" us; God "preserves" us. What God is for His people is thus presented as the abiding and only ground of their blessing and security. Later Jude will indeed exhort us as to our responsibilities, but as ever under grace, we do not attain to a place of privilege by carrying out our responsibilities, as our legal hearts might think, but being set in a place of privilege certain responsibilities follow.

Were it not for the call of God, the love of God, and the preserving care of God, all would be swept into the corruptions that abound on every hand. Moreover the blessings of "mercy" and "peace," and "love," can still be enjoyed however dark the day. And not only enjoyed, but "multiplied." If evil abounds and difficulties multiply, then mercy and peace and love will also be multiplied (Jude 2).

Having thus reminded us of our privileges, Jude proceeds to instruct us in the mind of God for His people in the midst of abounding corruption. However dark the day God has a path for His people. First then we are exhorted to

CONTEND.

We are to *earnestly contend* for the faith which was once delivered to the saints. "The faith" of which Jude speaks is not the personal faith by which we believe, but that which is to be believed — the truth. When error prevails and opposition raises its head it is not sufficient that we should expound the truth, we must contend for it. This implies conflict, but when Christ is assailed, and the truth is at stake, we must not shrink from fighting the good fight of faith under any plea of Christian charity.

Moreover it is *"the faith"* for which we are to contend, that is, the whole circle of truth. We are not simply to contend for a particular truth. This indeed has been done, with the result that the truth as a whole has been lost, and sects have been formed to maintain a particular truth such as holiness, the presence of the Spirit, the unity of the church, or the coming of the Lord.

Further let us note that the faith for which we have to contend is the faith "*once delivered unto the saints.*" The word "once" has the force of "once for all" (See R.V.). It admits of no addition, no modification, and no development. There is no fresh communication of truth to the saints. It has been delivered to them once for all. We may have much to learn about the truth. God may grant fresh light upon the truth already revealed, and we should grow in our apprehension of it. But the truth itself has been once for all delivered to the saints. And for this we are to contend. Not the truth held in measure by the Fathers, or handed down by tradition, or crystallized by the creeds, or obscured by faulty teaching, but the faith once delivered to the saints in the very form in which it was delivered.

Again, it is well to remark that we are not called to contend with error. Many sincere souls have

done so and formed crusades against different glaring evils. There are occasions, indeed, when contending for the truth necessitates the exposure of evil. But the great business of God's people is with the truth, not the error. Jude does not say earnestly expose the error, but "earnestly contend for the faith."

If then we are to stand for the truth, there is another word used by Jude that we do well to emphasize. In Jude 17 he says,

REMEMBER.

"Beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ." If we are to contend for the faith, how deeply important that we should "remember" the very words in which the truth has been delivered to us through the apostles. The so-called Higher Critics may call in question the apostolic words, theologians may belittle their words, but the Word itself states that if a man is spiritual he will acknowledge that the things written by the apostles are "the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14: 37). Moreover, submission to apostolic teaching is the great test which proves by what spirit a man speaks, "He that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error" (1 John 4: 6).

Here, however, it is the prophetic warnings of the apostles that we are more especially called to remember. What a comfort that we have not been left unforewarned of the terrible evil. Enoch prophesied of the evil; the apostles warned us of it. So while we cannot but grieve over the corruption, there is no ground for surprise, and no need to be disheartened; rather should our faith be confirmed as we see the fulfilment of the apostles' words. The prophetic words of the apostles confirm the warnings of Jude. They too have warned us of the appearance in the last days of men who would make sport of Divine things, being led by their own unholy lusts. Such, while nominally associated with the people of God, actually walk apart as having no fellowship with them. They are natural, not having the Spirit of God. They may occupy prominent places in the pulpits of Christendom but, as one has said, they deride the simple faith of their forefathers, preach a so-called morality instead of Christ, and seek in every possible way to undermine the inspiration of the Scriptures, and the truths of Christianity.

If however we are to contend for the faith, we are further reminded in Jude 20 of the necessity for individual

BUILDING.

We cannot rightly contend for the faith unless we are building up ourselves in our most holy faith. We are not called to build ourselves up in all the different forms which evil may assume. We shall not be able to resist error by simply having an acquaintance with error. We can only meet error as we are built up in the truth. Moreover, our faith is a "most holy faith." So that in being built up in the faith we are not only gaining a deeper acquaintance with the truth, but we are increasingly wrought upon by the truth. It has a holy, sanctifying effect upon our souls, leading to a greater separation from the evil by which we are surrounded (John 17: 17). Furthermore, Jude has linked up with "building" the importance of

PRAYING.

This, to be effectual, must be "praying in the Holy Ghost." There is much said about prayer today, but we may well pause and enquire: "Is it prayer in the Holy Ghost?" Two things will mark such

prayer. It will be prayer according to the mind of God as revealed in His Word, and it will have Christ and His interests for its object. The Holy Spirit can never lead in a way contrary to the Word of God, and ever has Christ before Him. The great mission of the Holy Spirit in the world is to exalt Christ. He has not come to make the world that cast out the Son of God a pleasant, decent, and happy world. He is here to take a people out of the world for Christ. The "building" will lead to "praying." The greater the diligence with which we build ourselves up in our most holy faith the better we shall be able to pray in the Holy Ghost, and the greater will be the conscious need for praying in the Holy Ghost.

But praying in the Holy Ghost leads to a further important exercise expressed by the word

KEEPING.

"Keep yourselves in the love of God" (Jude 21). Prayer in the Holy Ghost puts the soul in close touch with God, and to be in touch with God is to enjoy the conscious sense of His love, for God is love. As Christians we all admit the fact that God loves us, but it is another thing to live in the consciousness of His love. Yet what is more important, or more blessed, than to walk in the constant sense that we are loved by God! The religious world — Cain's world — may hate us; many of God's dear people may misunderstand us, but God loves us. Circumstances may be difficult, sorrows may accumulate, and evil may abound; but if we keep ourselves in the love of God, none of these things will be allowed to call in question the glorious fact that the love of God, expressed in Christ, is streaming down upon us through the opened heavens. Just as we are kept in the love of God, we shall be delivered from love of the world (1 John 2: 15); kept in love with the saints (1 John 5: 1); and led out in love to the sinner (2 Cor. 5: 14).

Moreover, this love will not be satisfied until we are with Christ and like Christ. Then indeed God will "rest in His love" and joy over us with singing (Zeph. 3: 17). This leads to a further exercise brought before us in the word

LOOKING.

Keeping ourselves in the love of God, will lead to "looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." Mercy upon mercy meets our need every step of our pilgrim way, but the crowning mercy will take us right out of the scene of need to meet the Lord in the air and enter into the fullness of life in life's eternal home. On earth we may have caught a glimpse of its glory, enjoyed a taste of its sweetness, in heaven we enter upon its fullness.

Building, praying, keeping and looking express the mutually dependent exercises by which the soul is kept in the midst of the prevailing corruptions of Christendom. Such exercises are, however, largely individual, but this does not signify that we are to think only of ourselves in forgetfulness of others. Jude having led us into the fullness of eternal life, takes one look back into the welter of evil, and in the midst of it, and associated with it, he sees many of the people of God. "Have you taken heed to yourself?" then Jude seems to say, "You will be able to care for others." Hence his words are

HAVE COMPASSION.

If your heart is kept in the love of God, your heart will go out to those that God loves. Yet we are not exhorted to have compassion upon all. It is only of "some" we are to have compassion, making a difference. The leaders in apostasy are treated with horror, not compassion. But there are those that are led, not wilfully, but ignorantly, and for such we are to have compassion. Others are involved more

deeply in the evil, the fire seems ready to kindle upon them, but even so we must seek to rescue such, pulling them out of the fire, at the same time hating the evil in which they are found. Unbounded compassion for the people of God must ever be linked with uncompromising separation from the evil with which they are linked. Even as it was with Christ, of whom one has justly said: "In Christ there is a compassion that knows no limit to the sinner combined with infinite separation from his sin." To show compassion we shall need Divine love; to make a difference will call for Divine wisdom; to pull any "out of the fire" will require Divine power; and to "hate the garment spotted by the flesh" will demand Divine holiness. How great then the need for building ourselves up in our most holy faith, and praying in the Holy Ghost.

Jude has exposed the evil in all its horror, and warned, encouraged, and exhorted the saints; but his final resource is God Himself and all that God is for His people. The magnitude of the evil and the weakness of the saints fades from his view, and God alone remains. Hence, he can close the most solemn epistle ever penned with the most glorious burst of praise. Jude has gazed upon the ruin of that which professes the name of Christ; he has taken a backward glance at the beginning of the corruption; with prophetic gaze he has looked on to its solemn end; but, at last, from the midst of the wreck and ruin of a corrupted Christendom, he looks up, and at once, in spite of the dark outlook, he breaks into praise, "Unto Him that is able to keep us from falling and present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy."

Jude seems to say, "I see the corruption that has come in, I see the rising tide of evil, I see the saints may fail in 'building,' and 'praying,' and 'keeping themselves;' but I see there is One in the glory who is able to keep them from stumbling, bring them safely home, and present them faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. I see the judgment day is coming for the ungodly professors — a day of gloom and sorrow; but I see the presentation day is coming for all His saints — a day of glory and exceeding joy." It is for us in like faith to take up the language of Jude. As we view the ceaseless stream of blasphemies poured out by Christless professors and received with indifference, or even applause, by the great mass of Christian profession; as we see the foundations attacked, truth fallen in the street, and evil men and seducers waxing worse and worse, we may well enquire, "What will the end be?" But, thanks be to God, for the comfort and encouragement of His people, He has left us in no uncertainty as to the end. Jude tells us the end for the corrupters, the end for God's people, and the end for God Himself. All will end by the apostate corrupters meeting their just judgment, the saints of God being presented faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, and God Himself will receive "glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever." The passing sorrows of time will give place to the exceeding joys of eternity. Our joy to be there, His joy to have us there. "He shall see of the fruit of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied." The One whose soul was once exceeding sorrowful even unto death, will be filled with "exceeding joy" for eternity. Well may we exclaim with Jude, "To the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."