

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 31, Number 4

January 26, 2014



Unbelief Destroys

I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not. (Jude 5, KJV 1900)

The wise task of every Bible student must focus on "...rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15) What God inspired some thirty to forty men to write over a span of around fifteen hundred years, and subsequently preserved for His people throughout time (Psalm 12:6-7), is all truth. How we interpret those Scriptures is true only to the extent that we follow the leading of the same Holy Spirit who directed Scripture's writing in our interpretation and application. He doesn't forsake His inspired writings and occasionally give various individuals a special "Revelation." Nor does He reveal one interpretation to one of His children and a different, contradictory interpretation to another. He guides His children who seek His truth to the words and the right understanding of His Book. True revelation today comes through our prayerful study of Scripture, and it is available to all of those who so study it, not to a self-proclaimed elite class who defend their ideas by claiming a "Revelation."

Our study passage poses interesting challenges to us in our pursuit of rightly divided Scripture. We could examine any number of Scriptures that categorically proclaim the truth that all for whom Christ died shall eventually receive the benefit of the merits of His death and end securely and unquestionably with Him in eternal glory. (John 6:37-39; John 10:27-28, Romans 8:35-39; to name only a few)

Given the clear and repeated teachings of Scripture that none for whom Jesus died shall finally be lost or destroyed from the loving presence of their Savior, how should we interpret our study verse? It refers to an Old Testament lesson of major significance. After more than four hundred years in Egypt, God delivered His people, literally, under the protective covering of blood. Study the Passover lesson that forms a part of the deliverance record of Exodus. When God saw the covering of blood (Lamb's blood; John 1:29), He "Passed over" that house, not visiting death to its firstborn. Thus, the people of whom we read in our study verse have been saved by God from slavery in Egypt, including being saved from the death of their firstborn by the blood of a slain lamb. If we interpret their being destroyed in our study verse as being separated from the love of God, we must face a glaring contradiction. If we accept, as I do without apology, the divine origin and preservation of Scripture and therefore read it as a harmonious

message from God, we search for interpretations that remove the discord between verses in favor of a view that brings all Scripture on a topic into harmony.

I will not minimize or diminish the obvious fact of our study verse, that destruction inevitably follows unbelief. Nor will I interpret the destruction so as to leave it appearing as if it matters little whether we believe God or not. Jude obviously warns his readers of a grave danger that they must make every effort to avoid, and the only way to avoid it is to believe God regarding the faith once delivered to the saints, not believe the false prophets of whom he warns his readers. Paul assures us that God's foundation in keeping His own is secure; He shall not lose them. He is equally clear in his teaching that false teachers may overthrow their faith, a grave tragedy, not a minor coincidence. (2 Timothy 2:16-19) Paul's "Great house" analogy that immediately follows these verses continues his lesson. If we go to sleep in our faith and fall under the evil teaching of those who err, men such as Hymenaeus or Philetus, what impact do we have on this great house? Paul warns that we become dishonorable vessels in the house. Is becoming a dishonorable vessel in the Lord's "great house" your goal? No? Then equip yourself to avoid the malignant-to-your-faith words of the false teacher. A false teacher will not always say that the resurrection is past, but he will teach something as preposterous as this idea when examined by the Scriptures, rightly divided. And, as with these two men, they will find a way to make their error sound appealing and plausible to their hearers, as if they have discovered some long lost truth of Scripture.

In most fields of human thought and behavior, our human nature seeks extremes rather than moderation. In the case of destruction that we study in this passage, we should avoid either of two extreme ideas. 1) One extreme idea ignores the many Scriptures to the contrary and interprets this destruction as eternal destruction. 2) The opposite extreme idea acknowledges some marginal loss from unbelief, but works to minimize the loss as if it is a small or inconsequential thing. If this "destruction" were so minor or inconsequential, why did Jude warn his readers so strongly against it? Nothing—or no one—can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. However, we are liable to attitudes and conduct that destroy our fruitful and

God-glorifying service in the Lord's "great house." Paul reminds the careless Corinthians that failure to rightly observe the Lord's Supper had caused many of the Corinthians great spiritual harm, "...many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep," (1Corinthians 11:30) sleep a likely indication that some had died for their spiritual failure to honor the Lord in His Supper, not at all unlike Ananias and Sapphira. (Acts 5:1-11) That you or I may at some time have failed to live up to our faith and didn't die for the failure in no way diminishes the gravity of spiritual failure or of the Lord's righteous, but righteously severe-at-times judgment. In Paul's charge against the Corinthians, there can be no doubt that he associated the troubles of some in the Corinthian Church with their failure to honor the Lord in His Supper, "For this cause...."

Let's consider just one of many passages that affirm this grave warning to believers.

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. (Hebrews 3:12-13)

Notice that Paul's warning is to "brethren," not to hell-bound pagans. He is warning believers, children of God, to avoid the grave consequences of unbelief and failure to enter into God's abiding rest of faith. Notice the path of unbelief that Paul reveals. He directly associates "*an evil heart of unbelief,*" a state of mind, with "*departing from the living God,*" sinful conduct that follows this unbelief.

However, take special note and learn well the godly alternative that he directs us to follow, "*But exhort one another daily...lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*" He does not write that we should be highly private and reserved, never exhorting another believer unless we consider his present course to be most grave. He commands us to "*...exhort one another daily.*" Many churches in our time, like the church that I serve, have members who live a significant distance from the meeting place, as well as from each other. How often during the week do you think of a brother or sister and pray for them? Great! How often after praying for this brother or sister do you take the time to phone them and let them know that they've been on your mind and in your prayers? How many times do you simply speak a word of encouragement, exhortation, to them to strengthen them in their faith walk? This "**daily**" exhortation is Paul's objective.

Paul also warns his readers of bad things that happen when we fail to "*...exhort one another daily,*" "*...lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*" In the first Biblical example of Satan's deceit, Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3), we see his uncanny ability to deceive. His underlings are well trained. They use

the same diabolical strategy on you and me. They will twist reality so smoothly and so repeatedly that you are liable eventually to think that your sinning is actually not sin at all, but something that God secretly wants you to do.

The results of unbelief and inevitable sin that accompanies it are always the same, hardness. In the Hebrews 3 passage, Paul repeatedly warns his readers of the danger of a believer hardening his heart, "Harden not your hearts...." Sin isolates a believer from his own spiritual sensitivity and love for his brothers and sisters in Christ. When you observe a person in a church who shows up on Sunday morning, but quickly exits without lingering to interact with other believers, beware—and pray for this person. You are witnessing the fruits of this growing hardness. Nudge—"exhort"—this person with tender love and engaging conversation.

...through the deceitfulness of sin. The root cause of this growing hardness is no mystery. Paul directly associates this hardness with "...the deceitfulness of sin." It may well be that this believer who begins to isolate himself from other believers has convinced himself that he is more righteous, more spiritual than other believers, so he is merely preserving his intense spirituality by avoiding contact with you inferior sad-sack, half-hearted believers. Perhaps the most obvious marker of sin in a believer is this deceitfulness that grows out of hardness.

You see, Satan has a deceitful scheme, and Paul warns us to avoid and to dismantle that diabolical scheme. In Ephesians 6, Paul teaches powerful truth through the analogy of the Christian life with warfare, and he teaches the Ephesians—and us—to be sure that we have all of our Christian armor intact and that we are fully dressed in it. Soldiers sticking tightly together and communicating with each other are a powerful force against their common enemy. If the enemy can isolate one soldier from his fellow-soldiers, that soldier is easily surrounded and defeated. It is this adversarial strategy that Jude and Paul warn us to understand and to avoid.

Jude's warning reminds us that, while our eternal life in the love of God is secure, fully earned and settled at Calvary, every believer in this world lives in constant danger of the adversary's deceitful aims to plant seeds of unbelief, to cultivate those seeds, and to subtly, ever-so-slowly entice us into his twisted and deceitful thinking that surely produces spiritual hardness in us. If he establishes his beachhead with a little hardness in our heart, he can assault us and defeat us. He can thereby destroy our joy and fellowship in Christ.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor