

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## Called to Suffer?

*For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. (1 Peter 2:21–24, KJV 1900)*

We occasionally hear people who seem to be sincere about their faith speak of it in terms that more resemble Biblical carnality than Biblical Christianity. "God wants me to be happy, and I can't be happy with this woman whom I married twenty years ago. Thus, surely God wants me to get a divorce so I can be happy, the way He wants me to be." Yes, I've heard such unbelievable ideas, and so have many other pastors. True enough, the Bible defines happiness as a good thing, but it also defines happiness in terms of God's commandments, not in terms of our carnal ambition or appetite.

*Happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the LORD. (Psalms 144:15 KJVP)*

We attain Biblical happiness by obeying God's commandments, not by obeying our personal self-interest. If someone were to say these words to me today, I'd respond, "God wants you to be holy (1 Peter 1:15-16), and you can't be holy (wholly dedicated to Him and to His assignment to you) while you are doing something that God says that He hates; divorce, "...putting away...." (Malachi 2:16).

Various books in the Bible seem dedicated to, or focused on specific topics. First Peter is distinctly devoted to the topic of suffering. Based on Peter's teachings in this book, suffering is inevitable to life, but the cause of our suffering is determined by our choices and actions. We may suffer as a Christian, or we may suffer as an evil-doer, but suffer we shall. (1 Peter 4:15-16) Jesus didn't suffer because of anything wrong or sinful that He did. He suffered for His righteousness. That is His example to us. Despite having no guile or sin, wicked men reviled Him. When they reviled Him, He didn't complain that "It just isn't fair." He "...committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." When we feel that someone has mistreated us, we become so quickly incensed; our first desire may be to strike back or to defend our "Honor." Was Jesus concerned with His "Honor," or did He turn to the Father for His righteous judgment?

I recall a trying moment in my career when I was falsely charged with something. Looking back, I now realize that I was far too defensive. Had I followed Peter's words in this passage, the whole episode would have ended far better than it did. God is honored when we turn to Him in our trials, and, as we turn to Him, He promises to involve Himself in our trials. Whether we are talking about events specifically related to our faith-walk or about our secular careers, the more we practice Biblical Christian ethics, the more the Lord steps into our lives and blesses the outcome of those trials.

*...neither was guile found in his mouth.* Guile refers to misleading, obtuse, or deceitful words.

The absence of deceitful speech would have been "... particularly applicable to slaves in the empire, where glib, deceitful speech was one of their notorious characteristics, adroit evasions and excuses being often their sole means of self-protection."<sup>1041</sup>

A review of Acts indicates that a large number, likely the majority of first century believers, belonged to the slave class of that culture. The culture almost expected that slaves would speak with guile, play word games, and speak insincere words of submission to their masters. However, Peter's setting Jesus forth as our example strictly forbids any form of deceitful or misleading language. Few things irritate me more than a preacher who speaks with such carefully crafted words that you can't know for sure what the man believes. Occasionally you'll hear such preaching. If you believe A, and ask the man, he'll likely say, "Yes, that is exactly what I believe." But, if the next person who believes B questions him, he'll say the same thing. If we follow Jesus' example as preachers, no one will ever hear us preach a sermon and doubt what we believe and what we intended to teach.

<sup>104</sup> 104. James Moffatt, "The General Epistles, James, Peter, and Judas," in *The Moffatt New Testament Commentary*, p. 127.

<sup>1</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, 1 Pe 2:22 (Galaxie Software, 2003).

Regardless of the complexity of the episode, the more we align our attitude and conduct with Biblical teaching the more we discover the Lord's involvement and deliverance. This temporal deliverance is not guaranteed, however we think or act. It is contingent on our turning to the Lord and practicing His judgments that we find in Scripture. Herein is the distinction between our eternal salvation and our timely deliverances. God's eternal salvation is wholly contingent on God's eternal purpose in His Son, on the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and on the application of that purpose and work by the Holy Spirit. Nothing—not one thing—does God require of us in the process of that deliverance. However, Scripture consistently and frequently reminds us that our timely deliverances in fact are contingent on our faith-walk. If we follow Jesus' example, we realize His temporal deliverance. If we ignore and contradict His example, we shall surely suffer the consequences of our sinful actions. For this reason, I reject the errant idea that Scripture teaches only one salvation, or that eternal and temporal salvations are merely separate phases of one salvation.<sup>2</sup> Scripture does not so teach. Consider just four passages that demonstrate this clear distinction; two passages for each deliverance or salvation.

*And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, **Save yourselves** from this untoward generation. (Acts 2:40 KJVP; emphasis added)*

*Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this **thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.** (1 Timothy 4:16 KJVP; emphasis added)*

*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that **not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:** (Ephesians 2:8 KJVP; emphasis added)*

**Not by works of righteousness which we have done**, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; (Titus 3:5 KJVP; emphasis added)

In the first two passages, children of God save themselves by repentance and baptism, an active faith-walk; and the preacher saves both himself and those to whom he preaches, if he lives the sermons

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<sup>2</sup> The distinction between eternal and temporal salvation emphasizes the ultimate implications. Although God saves us from our sins and secures us to eternity with Him in time, the implications of that saving work last into eternity. Our obedience to the Lord's commandments saves us, but the implications of this salvation are temporal. They have no impact on our eternity with God.

that he preaches in the pulpit with his feet. In the third passage, salvation occurs as a result of God's gift (Notice, not God's "Offer"); the following verse emphasizes, "Not of works, lest any man should boast." In the fourth passage, our salvation, eternal salvation, is emphatically stated as not occurring by our works of righteousness, such as repentance, baptism, or practicing what we preach.

These four verses do not describe different points on one continuum, or two phases of one salvation. They define two distinct salvations, one wholly reliant on God, and the other the result of our following the leading, convicting, and enabling of the Holy Spirit, a true partnership between the Lord and us—of course, with Him wholly directing the course, and we obeying. (2 Corinthians 6:1-2; notice that Paul devoted the remainder of this chapter to telling the Corinthians—and us—precisely how to conduct ourselves so as not to receive "...the grace of God in vain")

*For even hereunto were ye called...that ye should follow his steps.* This passage does not teach us about God's effectual call of grace, but of His call to us to follow His example. In Scripture, God's "should" is always certain. We may safely rely on Him to fulfill them. Our "should" is not so certain at all. At times we may do what Scripture teaches that we "Should" do, but many times we do not do so. Peter draws the line clearly to direct us to godly conduct, actions that follow Jesus' example. We are always on safe and righteous spiritual footing when we follow Jesus' example.

*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. (2 Timothy 3:12 KJVP)*

In our soft, cushy world, we'd like to ignore passages such as this one. Paul doesn't say that we might incur persecution if we live out our faith. He said that we shall do so. If we truly practice authentic, New Testament Christian conduct, persecution is certain according to Paul; "...shall suffer persecution." Think of Peter's "Example" lesson. If Jesus suffered persecution because of His righteous conduct, we must expect, and therefore be prepared, that our righteous conduct will draw similar responses from wicked people in our day. Oh, do not miss a glaring point. Although Jesus indeed suffered at the hands of pagan Romans, His most frequent persecution came at the hands of highly religious Jews of His own nation. We would be wise to prepare for similar reactions, even from supposedly religious people.

In His suffering and death, Jesus atoned for our sins, fully so, and Peter will make that point before he leaves us in this context. But Jesus' sufferings were intended to do more than satisfy God's righteous judgment against us and our sins. His thirty-three years, over three of which we see in the public eye through four different accounts in the gospels, was also intended to show us how to live out the authentic lifestyle of our faith in Him.

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Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor