

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Grace Grows us; Stable, Strong, and Settled

But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. (1 Peter 5:10, KJV 1900)

How can we recognize the impact of God's grace in others or in ourselves? I've known a few people who said the right words, often including "grace" in their vocabulary, but the language of their conduct was strangely void of grace. Their words and actions toward the people around them are more characterized by harshness and judgmentalism, far more indicative of devoted legalism than grace. A foundational belief in God's grace influences us to act out of grace toward the people in our lives as God "Graces" us with His kindness. Others speak of grace and choose to ignore sin in their lives and in the lives of the people they know. If questioned, they dismiss their soft attitude toward sin by saying that they believe that God's grace neutralizes sin, so they have no reason to be bothered by it. And a few sad souls go so far as to say that they believe that God actually causes sin so that He may then cause our glorious salvation, so we should not judge sin harshly. The sickening softness toward sin could go on endlessly, but these examples should more than suffice.

When we turn from popular opinion to Scripture, we see the mirror opposite view. Scripture is never—ever—soft on sin. And Biblical writers never suggest that God caused sin. In fact, quite the opposite, they write that sin comes from God's arch-adversary, and that God consistently opposes and condemns it. If God were as soft on sin as some who claim to believe in God, why did He send His Son to suffer such unspeakable suffering for our sins? Does that noble act of grace in any way suggest that God is soft toward sin?

Peter wrote a rich, instructive letter to believers who lived in a rather remote region in the north central area of modern Turkey. They were faithful, and they suffered for their faith. Peter's first letter emphasizes the reality of suffering as a Christian. We should interpret this lesson, as the whole letter, in the context of an inspired apostle's spiritual instruction and comfort to suffering saints. Peter's first readers were born again. They had come to active faith in Christ, so much so that they faced suffering for their faith, and they were steadfast in that suffering. If we accept the letter in this light, Peter's closing words in our study passage come to life in us today.

Peter enlightens us to both the difficult and the blessed, as does Paul. Those who live a godly life

in the Lord "...shall suffer persecution." (2 Timothy 3:12) Paul affirms the same truth. "...being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it." (1 Corinthians 4:12b)

In our culture, believers do not know persecution as Christians have historically suffered it, and as many Christians in other cultures suffer today for their faith. Peter skillfully constructs two aspects of suffering in this letter. A believer who compromises his/her faith shall suffer because of that failure. Suffering in this setting may occur at the hands of other people, though that is not as likely as in the opposite case. However, every regenerate person who sins against knowledge, against the witness of the indwelling Holy Spirit and God's law written in their heart and mind, shall surely suffer the Lord's severe chastening. Hebrews the twelfth chapter explains this theme in detail.

In our present context, the emphasis is on the godly suffering for their faith, not being chastened for their sins. While God brings chastening into our lives, sinful, and sometimes envious people instigate the suffering of this passage. The Jews delivered Jesus to Pilate for crucifixion because of envy. (Matthew 27:18) In two instances, unbelieving Jews reacted against the apostles because of envy. (Acts 13:45, 17:5) In one case, Paul wisely observes that some who preach Christ do so from the wrong motive, envy. (Philippians 1:15) In this case, we should cautiously note that Paul did not celebrate that people were preaching a false gospel in which they happened to mention Jesus. If we follow the passage, we learn that they were preaching the truth, but their motive in preaching the truth of Jesus was not to glorify Him, but to feed their sinful envy. They apparently observed godly men who preached Christ and received the blessings of that faithful service, and they enviously sought the benefit for themselves, but they sought it apart from the godly lifestyle of the faith walk. There is no indication in this passage that Paul celebrated because some people preached a false gospel, which he describes in the first chapter of Galatians as another gospel that promotes another Jesus.

Despite the conspicuous absence of persecution in our culture, we should learn that godly, faithful believers shall surely face the frowns of unbelievers and of believers who disagree with them and their

faith. Based on Scripture, it would be an oddity if you didn't suffer, not if you did.

Suffering endured in grace conditions the believer for spiritual growth, strong, healthy growth in grace. As Peter prepares his readers for the certainty of suffering, he also encourages them for the spiritual growth that lies ahead for them. We would like to think that we can read our Bibles, give key passages some serious study, and pretty much drift into spiritual strength and health on auto-pilot. Scripture disagrees. The inherent pride in everyone of us loves to grow in our spiritual soil. It will convince us that we know the truth so fully and so clearly that anyone who dares to disagree with us is unquestionably wrong. Scripture is consistent in its teachings that suffering is far richer soil for spiritual maturity than our ego. (Psalm 119:71) In our present culture, void of overt and severe persecution, suffering that refines our faith and burns out the dross of our ego may occur in a variety of ways, but Peter reminds us that it needs to occur before we are fully prepared to grow strong in our faith.

...*stablish, strengthen, settle.* I cannot think of three spiritual traits that are more essential to a mature, godly, profitable life in the faith than these.

1. **Stablish.** Scripture affirms that God and His truth are unchangeable. He doesn't revise His "Truth" from one human generation to the next. He doesn't hide His truth from His saints for centuries, only to now reveal it to the latest novice in the faith. He doesn't lead people in sound faith to constantly change what they believe, and, at each point of changed belief, trumpet, "The Lord has now revealed to me that...." Such lack of stability contradicts this trait of spiritual stability. While any group of humans who live in a long, historical line of beliefs inevitably pick up some traditions along the way, those who wisely learn their faith, also strive to know the difference between traditions picked up along the way and God's fixed truth. Scripture doesn't tell us in expansive details how to do every little thing that a church body should do, but it does give us a sound, general guide by which to assess those issues. (1 Corinthians 14:40) After confronting the bizarre denial in the Corinthian Church of those who denied the resurrection, Paul exhorted the Corinthians to be "...stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." (1 Corinthians 15:58) Many years ago I had the sad experience of observing a man who had been a dear friend begin a rather rapid and startling drift away from stable, Biblical truth into one errant belief after another. With each change in his belief, this man would preach and talk his new beliefs, and he would

repeatedly react in shocked surprise that everyone around him didn't change their beliefs as quickly as he had done. The man lacked this godly, Biblical trait of stability in the faith.

2. **Strengthen.** No matter how much we know or how strongly we believe Biblical truth, none of us is so grounded in the faith, so strong and clear in our understanding and belief that we do not need yet more strength in the faith. The heartbroken, suffering saint who has learned the lessons of faith through his sufferings is equipped to trust in the Lord and to grow stronger in that trust. (Isaiah 66:1-2) The poor, contrite spirit is God's chosen dwelling place for rule and intimate blessings that the proud heart never knows or rejoices to experience.
3. **Settle.** The "Settled" saint has become grounded in both his/her convictions about Biblical teaching and about the faith walk that applies those truths to the way we live. In our relativistic culture, many Christians have forsaken the Biblical truth that walking by faith does not mean doing your own thing and asking God to bless it, whether it matches His teachings in Scripture or not, the proverbial "Leap of faith" into the dark. They fail to understand the truth of Biblical faith. Faith guides us to leap out of the darkness of ourselves (Isaiah 50:11; the sparks of our own fire, the knowledge of our own making, always leads us to lonely sorrow). In gracious contrast, the settled believer looks outside of self to God for his/her light, and strives to implement what God reveals from Scripture through faith. Note that **God never reveals through faith anything different than He has already revealed in Scripture.** True faith in us affirms and agrees with the faith of Scripture.

Our study is to find the traits of grace in us that reveal God's grace directing our conduct. Paul and Peter agree, as do all of Scripture, for each writer wrote as the one true Author of Scripture directed them to write. (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:19-21) What is the image of grace in our life?

That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. (Ephesians 3:17-19, KJV 1900)

The rich, peaceful indwelling Christ fosters love, other-centered, God-centered love, not self-

centered love. It leads us to comprehend Biblical truth about God and His work that transforms our life and strikes us speechless at the wonder of God and of His grace. You don't work to get this attitude. It is a natural fruit of the deeper conviction toward God, a conviction that has gone through the Biblical process of suffering, stablishing, and settling in grace. Grace that saves is as amazing to observe in a person's life as to contemplate in the salvation of a lost sinner.

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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
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