

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Trusting God for Now and for Eternity

But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us; Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf." (2 Corinthians 1:9-11)

People who reject God's sovereignty in saving sinners typically offer their reasoning, "What security is there in thinking that your eternal destiny is not in *your* hands?" I counter with the precise opposite point. Given the Biblical revelation of what man typically does with holy things committed to him, what security do you have with the idea that your eternity depends on you? God committed the moral simplicity of one law to Adam and Eve in an ideal world, and they failed. God committed a comprehensive way of life, including His laws, to the nation of Israel, and they failed. What security do you have in thinking that you can, or will, do better than they?

In our study passage Paul skillfully weaves together his trust in God, both for his survival in the trials of life, particularly the trials that resulted from his ministry, as well as for his joyful participation in the final resurrection of the dead. God's deliverance in one situation provides assurance of His deliverance in the other. In no way did Paul reject his own mortality in this passage. Second Timothy records the manner in which Paul realized that his work and time were ended and he would soon die the martyr's death and be with Christ in glory. He did not at that time change his mind regarding God's deliverance. Rather he embraced death itself as his final deliverance into the glorious presence of his Savior.

As Paul looked back on past trials that had tested his metal and threatened his life, he could thank God for intervention and deliverance. He could even thank God that the trial nudged him to trust God more and himself less.

As we conclude our exploration of the three-pronged features of our relationship with God, loving, fearing, and trusting Him, we should anchor our thoughts in this bedrock truth. The single most significant truth of Scripture is its

proclamation that God is trustworthy. Regardless of the trial or the circumstance, we may trust God without reservation to be God, to be righteous, kind, and holy. We may equally trust Him to be true to His promise never to leave nor forsake His own children. There is no Bible teaching that God's faithfulness will prevent His children from suffering the trials, difficulties, and uncertainties of life, but Scripture consistently records that He will never forsake us in those trials.

This theme at the beginning of Paul's letter to the Corinthian church sets the tone for the letter.

"This is, indeed, a theme which provides a key to the whole epistle. Is Paul assailed by anguish of spirit? It is God who always leads him in triumph in Christ (3:13ff.). Do we have the treasure of divine glory in earthen vessels? It is that it may be seen that the exceeding greatness of the power is of God, and not of self (4:7ff.). Is the Apostle always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake? It is that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in his mortal flesh (4:10ff.). Is the outward man decaying? Yet the inward man is renewed day by day (4:16). . . . The climax is reached in the twelfth chapter where Paul explains how through the endurance of a 'thorn in the flesh' he was taught that God's grace is all-sufficient and that His power is made perfect in weakness (12:7ff.). This was a principle to which even our Lord submitted in providing our salvation, for He was crucified through weakness, but is alive through the power of God (13:4). It is a theme, therefore, which points to the unity of the epistle, and which in

particular links the concluding to the opening chapter.”¹

In our frail perspective of God’s workings we often tend to isolate our eternal security from our timely experiences. Scripture makes no such concrete distinction. God works differently in our daily lives than in His work for our eternal security, but we should never doubt that He remains faithful in both dimensions of our life.

The contemporary “health and wealth” gospel is one of the most diabolical errors of Christian history in its blind rejection of the Biblical fact that faithful believers often suffer trials and difficulties. While advocates of this error would claim that any difficulty in one’s life indicates that he/she simply didn’t trust God enough, Paul affirms that the Holy Spirit warned him and prepared him that in the very act of serving God, “...bonds and afflictions abide me” (Acts 20:23). Paul further affirms this same point in our study passage. Sometimes our faithfulness leads us to our greatest difficulties. Is this not the point that Jesus made when He described the way of the faithful life as a “strait” (difficult) and narrow way? Health and wealth advocates set up sincere believers for an incredible sense of guilt at the very time in life when they most need assurances of God’s faithfulness. Logically they must infer that Paul was incredibly lacking in faith to have suffered so much hardship in his life. This teaching categorically contradicts Scripture’s teaching.

The assurance of Scripture for each of us is that God remains true to His character, to His gracious providence on our behalf, and to His promise to go with us through the trials.

The passage actually blends three assurances together. God’s past deliverance encourages us to believe that He shall stand by us in future trials. His faithfulness in standing by us throughout life assures us that His eternal provisions for us are secure. Whatever difficulty life brings, we may safely trust Him that we shall ultimately experience the resurrection of the body and enjoy Him for all of eternity.

In addition to assuring us of God’s faithfulness Paul uses this passage to reinforce our thoughts regarding the benefit of the spiritual community of believers, “*Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons*

thanks may be given by many on our behalf.” Successful Christian living never occurs in isolation from the community of believers. None of us is so stalwart in our faith or unwavering in our conduct to succeed alone. Nor does God lead us to isolate ourselves from His people and “go it alone.” Satan loves to isolate believers, for he knows that he can destroy them when they stand alone and apart from the influence of other believers. They may well avoid his enticements to fall into major moral sins, but they cannot avoid the many other pitfalls that he instigates against them, including bitterness of spirit, and at times the “Elijah complex,” the idea that “they” have all forsaken the right way and “I alone” am left holding to God’s true ways. God rejected Elijah’s idea that he alone was left to stand against the sins of the day, and He equally rejects our own prideful thought that we alone are left as God’s faithful followers in our world. This “I’m the only one left who is faithful” idea actually cultivates human pride, one of Satan’s most successful tactics against God’s children.

We may trust God faithfully to stand by His people in trials. He remains consistently true to His word. How about your own commitment? During the last week, how much time did you spend in prayer for the believers whom you know? Did you pray for God to under-gird them and give them His blessings and comforts in their trials? Did you pray for them to be blessed in their work and walk? Many years ago a faithful preacher told a delightful experience he had. His ministry took him to a different part of the country from where he grew up. After years of successful ministry, one day he was visiting an older member of the church that he served. The old fellow mentioned in the conversation, “It just seems that your preaching nowadays is not as powerful as it was when you first came to our church.” The pastor immediately questioned, “Dear Brother, are you praying for me as earnestly as you did in those days?” The man choked back a tear and began reflecting on his passivity toward the ministry and his church. The next Sunday after the morning sermon the old man walked up to his pastor, tears running down his cheeks, and said, “The Lord blessed me today powerfully.” Many times when a mediocre sermon is preached the preacher must take responsibility for his own neglect, but I suggest that often the lack of power reflects a lack of powerful prayer in the pews. How strongly do you pray for your pastor before each sermon? How much do you help in his ministry? Try praying harder and see how he preaches.

¹Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, 2 Co 1:9 (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003).

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
Joseph R. Holder Pastor