

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

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## Gospel Suffering

*If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister; Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church: Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God....*  
(Colossians 1:23-25)

The contemporary "health and wealth" gospel error did not start the idea that serving God will guarantee that you get everything you want out of life, and everything you do will prosper. The idea seems to be as old as fallen humanity. God knows our motives, and He blesses us when our motives, as well as our actions, are right with Him.

*By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. (Hebrews 11:24-25)*

Notice the contrast that faith draws between two ways of life; affliction with God's people or the pleasures of sin for a season. Consider Moses' early situation. Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and raised him as a prince. He could have had anything he desired. He lived this life for forty years. What punctuated this first chapter in Moses' life? Eventually Moses became aware of his tie to the slave people, Israel. Then God revealed Himself to Moses and called him to lead Israel out of Egypt. Still too full of himself and too full of Egypt, Moses thinks that, since God has called him to lead Israel out of Egypt, he can do anything he wishes. He can be God's surrogate over Israel, as well as their protector. When he murders the Egyptian and later learns that his murder is known, he runs as far as he could go away from Egypt. How typical of God's children when they try to serve God while full of self.

I suggest that Moses did not come to full "years," to spiritual maturity, for another forty years. He suffered in the desert for the second forty years of his life while God purged too much of Moses out of Moses. When he returned to Egypt to do what God called him to do, Moses actively rejected any political option that he might have claimed. He openly aligned himself with his people and served as God's man, not his own

man, before the pharaoh. Why did Jesus make self-denial the first requirement of faithful discipleship? Before we can do what God calls us to do, we must walk the Moses path. We must get self out of self, deny self, and learn that we are to serve God because He is God, not because we want to get something for ourselves from God. Notice in the Hebrews 11 passage; neither option included what Moses wanted for Moses. His two options included temporary sin-pleasure or suffering affliction with God's people. Sin-pleasure maintains some of its luster for the child of God, but the child of God who learns the lessons in Faith's classroom understands something that those who drop out of Faith's classroom never understand. Anything that interferes with our serving God, serving Him to the extent of suffering affliction, however entertaining or ego pleasing it may be, lasts for a very brief time. We drift through the seasons of the year in a heartbeat. No sooner than the fresh breath of spring arrives than it fades into the heat of summer. The child of God who learns Faith's lessons will not allow the self-satisfying, self-serving appeal of sin's pleasures to detract him/her away from the greater work of serving God by serving His people, even if they are humble slaves in a luxurious world empire.

We should avoid limiting the notion of sin's pleasures to the indulgence of a few of our more base or vulgar appetites. The inordinate love of money can lead us into sin's pleasures. The refusal to curb our ego, even in our duties in church, can lead to sin's pleasures. The admiring look of good people toward us as we do right things can lead to sin's pleasures. Once a man approached my uncle, Elder J. D. Holder, after my uncle had preached at a church meeting. The man lavished praise on my uncle for the excellent sermon he had preached. My uncle listened silently for a few moments, and finally could hear no more, "Brother, the devil tells me the same thing almost every time I step out of the pulpit."

*Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you....*

The Colossian Christians knew of Paul's ministry and sufferings on their behalf. They rejoiced that Paul so regarded them and blessed them in his ministry. When Paul wrote, "If ye continue..." he had no thought of questioning the Colossian's salvation, their eternal standing with God. He well knew that they were God's beloved children.

*...and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church....* The first time I read this passage, I was bewildered. Did Jesus not fully suffer for our sins? Did He neglect something when He suffered for our sins? When I finally looked at the passage in its context, the tension disappeared. What does "...behind of the afflictions of Christ..." have to do with our following His example? As Jesus suffered unselfishly for His people during the Incarnation, He calls on each of us to deny self, and to give self in service for His people. Jesus' suffering for our sins lacked nothing. In that supreme act of unselfish, sacrificial service, He gave each of us the perfect example. He directs us to follow His example. Deny self, reject the self-serving ambitions that attract attention, praise, or any form of recognition to self, and become wholly lost in serving the needs of God's people. The first thing to suffer when, and if, you take this giant step will be your ego. For the first time in your life, you will realize why Jesus linked denying self and taking up one's cross daily. In the first century a cross was not a pretty piece of jewelry that you hung around your neck, wore on your lapel, or connected to the zipper of your Bible cover. It represented the Roman method of capital punishment. However, in this case Jesus requires that we become our own executioner! Friends, authentic New Testament discipleship is not for the fainthearted.

*Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God....* We do not choose ministry. Notice in this verse that Paul does not refer to his unique position as an apostle, but to his role as a minister of the gospel. When I started speaking in the church, I constantly asked my seniors questions. On one occasion I recall asking a number of different men how they would explain a man's entering the ministry. Do they simply choose it because they are gifted public speakers, solid thinkers, or exceptional Bible students? To a man, every preacher who answered my question gave the same answer. A man doesn't choose to enter the ministry. God calls him to it. Otherwise, there is no ministry. Several years ago I was listening to someone on tape or CD preaching on this question. He made a rather startling point. "If you

think you are called to preach, but you can be content to not preach, by all means continue to sit and not to preach." At first, this idea seemed unsettling. However, the more I thought about it the more I understood the man's point. A man may decide that preaching is the best way for him to gain recognition in the church, to influence and to lead others, something that he enjoys doing and wants to do. So he decides to claim a call to the ministry. Wrong! He'll never preach, and he'll never bless people with his attempts to preach.

*...according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God...* God's calling burdens a man to serve others, not seek service from others. "...given to me **for** you..." makes a powerful point. God never calls a man to preach for the man's personal benefit, but rather for the service and blessing of His children. To the extent that a man focuses on "my ministry," he will fail--and fail miserably. How can a man preach the gospel of Jesus when he has refused to practice Jesus' first two and primary steps of basic discipleship, self-denial and cross bearing?

We should not be surprised at the corruption of ministerial service. Look at the titles that corrupt teachers claim for themselves, all titles that magnify the man. What title did Paul claim? "Minister" in this verse comes from a Greek word that referred to a servant, literally a slave.

...to provide continuous and possibly prolonged assistance and help by supplying the needs of someone—to provide for, to support.<sup>1</sup>

The New Testament requirement of a minister of the gospel demands that the man in this position serve others, not demand or even indirectly to seek service to himself. "...he desireth a good **work**." (1 Timothy 3:1b) I added emphasis to the word "**work**." The God-called preacher who fulfills his ministry works. He serves both God and God's children. He ministers to God's children with grace and with patience. He strives to help them grow themselves. When he compromises his calling by striving to grow himself, to gain prestige or anything for the benefit of himself, he has lost the New Testament vision of his ministry. This work is not for the faint-hearted, but what a blessing it is when a man exhibits the selfless service as Paul exemplified it--as Jesus exemplified it to Paul.

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<sup>1</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible societies, 1996).

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