

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"



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Rich Spiritual Growth: What does it look like?

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged. Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons. (Colossians 3:18–25)

Sadly, far too many contemporary Christians wax eloquent when the topic of loving Jesus comes up, or for that matter, the topic of how we should allow the word of Christ to dwell richly in us. In many cases, however, when the focus burrows down to how we apply these themes to our lives, eloquence vanishes, and the interest quickly wanes. Once Elder C. E. Darity told of preaching at a church where every doctrinal point received a loud "Amen" from a member of the congregation. Later in the same sermon he shifted his focus from doctrine to the application of Biblical ethics to the way we are to live. Noticeably, the "Amen" corner became eerily quiet. Finally, Brother Darity quipped, "Where are all the 'Amens' I heard a few minutes ago?"

In our study context, Paul has not changed his theme. He has not shifted from his "Put off" and "Put on" emphasis that we considered earlier. The whole "Put on" process involves a number of actions that Paul clearly outlines in this chapter. It begins with our personal "Put off" and "Put on" as a dominant attitude that needs to govern every aspect of our lives. A wise man once observed that Paul's "Put off" list is actually divided into two sections. We might call the first section the "Big sins" section, and the second the "Smaller sins" section. We might readily look at the "Big sins" list and react with pride that we have wholly "Put off" all those ugly, heinous sins. However, if we have not equally eliminated the sins in the "Smaller sins" list, we have no basis for celebration. A woman may purchase a high-end, expensive dress with style and colors that look beautiful on her, but, if she accessorizes it with cheap, distasteful items, she destroys the beauty of the dress. To bring our whole spiritual wardrobe together into a tasteful (Paul uses the word "become" in Titus 2:1) spiritual ethic, the second list is no less significant than the first.

We begin with our personal "Put off" task. Then we follow it with our personal "Put on" actions. When you examine the detailed "garments" in these two lists, you effectively narrow the field of qualified "well-dressed" Christians to a fairly small count. Didn't Jesus tell us that those who make it through the "strait" and "narrow" way are few? He was not identifying the number of people who go to heaven, but rather the number of people who achieve godly, authentic Christianity in this life. The number is indeed "few." In my first semester of college, I enrolled in Chemistry 101. The professor was a brilliant lady with a no-nonsense attitude toward teaching. The classroom was full. At the first session of the second semester, the classroom was half-full. Almost half the students decided not to continue. I noticed the difference and wondered how the professor would react. Interestingly, her first words made a point that might well apply to this issue of the Christian "few." She looked out over the class with eagle eyes and quietly stated, "Now that we've separated the adults from the children, let's learn some real chemistry." Are we mature enough spiritually to learn some "real Christianity"?

Paul develops the two sections of his list with equally necessary steps.

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. (Colossians 3:15)

Think of the most recent sin problem that overcame you. As you considered the sin, how did you rationalize it? How did you justify engaging it instead of repelling it? As you pondered this action, do you recall a nagging sense of conviction, a distinct unsettling of your peaceful fellowship with God? Indeed you did.

Do you see how Paul's exhortation in this verse addresses your experience? If you had "listened" to the peace of God in your conscience as you contemplated this sin and followed your sinful self-interest to rationalize and to justify it, would you not have promptly dismissed it and avoided it? You failed because you refused to allow--Paul uses the word "let"--the peace of God to rule. You subdued and suppressed the peace of God rather than "letting" it rule your heart.

Paul then moves us into a collective interaction with other believers. We cannot possibly put on our "grace clothes," or in any way present a credible testimony of a godly life apart from intimate, transparent, active, and regular fellowship with other believers. Isolated, keep-to-myself Christianity is no part of Biblical Christianity. It is more a farce, a charade, than a valid expression of New Testament Christian living. In godly interaction with other believers, we voice our admonition and encouragement to them from enriched lives, a heart in which the word of Christ dwells richly. An anemic heart that stifles the peace of God cannot speak edifying words to other believers.

We round out that process of "socially integrated" Christian living by practicing only those things that we may do "...in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ," coupled with active, engaged prayer.

And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. (Colossians 3:17)

At this point Paul grabs us by our sanctified wardrobe and takes us into the life-changing, startling reality of what such a true--"Put off" and "Put on"--transformation means. He challenges every one of us to apply these specific principles to our personal conduct. Otherwise, all his teaching about "Put off" and "Put on" are little more than empty platitudes. What does "real Christianity" look like, up close and personal? Here it is.

1. *Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.* Often "conservative" Christians throw rather sharp criticisms at the feminist movement, deservedly so, but in all candor, we may only throw those darts if we are actively practicing Paul's teaching here. Far too many professing Christian wives put on a fairly decent show of submission, but in fact they will quietly acknowledge to their friends that applying subtle deceit to get their husbands to do what they want has been a nearly lifelong habit, one that they

take pride in doing quite adroitly. For such a woman to criticize the feminist movement is a sad act of hypocrisy. What are they doing, albeit with subtlety, differently than the "feminista"? An anchor point not to miss; since when does the Bible exhort Christians to apply the same strategy the devil uses so adroitly in their active practice of Christian living? (2 Corinthians 11:3) At times I've been both frustrated and amused at women in a church business meeting who make a pretence of avoiding speaking in the church, but, to be sure they were "heard" in the discussion, they carried on extensive "conversation" with their husbands about what they wanted and didn't want. This admonition is only half of a greater issue, but no woman who professes to be a faithful believer can ignore it or, worse, openly circumvent it, and present a credible testimony to her faith.

2. *Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.* Husbands, the same New Testament shoe that cramps your wife's feet may well cramp yours. Buckle up! Paul does not say one word about it being your obligation to brow-beat your wife, to constantly remind her--nag her--about her need to submit to you. He rather commands--yes, the word is commands--you to love her. Always in the New Testament, "love" refers to actions, not to sentimental or emotional feelings. Paul understands human nature, especially sinful, human pride. Notice his special warning to the men, "...and be not bitter against them." Paul's requirement that husbands love their wives is so intrusive, so strong, and so contrary to "male ego" that he reminds men to avoid becoming bitter against their wives. Love her joyfully, not bitterly or resentfully. Husbands, if you would practice Paul's exhortation more faithfully, you might discover that your wife no longer feels the need to play the subtle deceit and the mind games of controlling you without your knowing it, something of the neck turning the head syndrome.
3. *Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.* In Ephesians 6:1-2, Paul writes similar words, concluding with the observation that the commandment (one of the Ten Commandments) for children to obey their parents is God's "...first commandment with promise." Parental indulgence is a

major factor in the "dysfunctional" family problems of our day. Unbiblical indulgence is as damaging to a child as unbridled abuse. Both parental actions violate Scripture and bring about deep wounds to the sad children in such families.

4. *Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.* A father who applies harsh discipline, be it spanking or other non-physical measures, stands in open rebellion against this New Testament instruction. In the process, he is liable to drive his child into angry rebellion, depression, discouragement, and--in the end--a choice of a lifestyle that rejects his own profession of faith in Christ. Fathers, are you really willing to risk these consequences? Please, no. Measure your own heart as you measure your acts of discipline toward your children.
5. *Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God....* Some conservative churches forbid union membership for their church members. I do not believe this prohibition is necessary, but I do believe if more employers and more employees practiced their Christianity in the workplace, both harmony and productivity would go off the scale in a positive direction. Through a long and varied career in the business world, I had occasion to observe both sides of the "labor" culture at their best and at their worst. Scripture equally instructs believers on both sides of this question. How incredibly timely and relevant to the world in which we live.
6. *And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.* Paul hasn't addressed every possible cultural or societal issue in this comprehensive list, but he has provided sufficient details that we know how to apply Biblical ethics to any and all situations we might face in our life. Whether we consider our roles in the family (wives, husbands, children), or our role in the business world, God requires us to do whatever we do as if we "reported" directly to our Lord and answered to Him directly and personally for our actions. Now that sobering thought is life-changing, is it not?

7. *But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.* God never ignores sin. He never rationalizes or justifies our sinful choices. He promises--and He is always faithful to His promises--that any practice of wrong will face Him and His holy judgment. This sobering thought points out the gravity of our daily choices and actions. It also strips away every excuse we could possibly offer for our sinful choices. It equally strips away every fallen, human, sinful inclination to blame someone else for our personal sins. Ever since Adam tried to blame God for his transgression, fallen human nature has eagerly sought someone else to blame for its personal sins. Any time we point the finger of blame at anyone other than at ourselves for the sins we commit, we imitate Adam, not Christ. God has imposed His personal mandate against sin, and he personally enforces it, holding us personally accountable and responsible for the sins we commit. So your father was abusive. "...there is no respect of persons" with God. So someone said or did something that hurt your feelings, and you want to--or in fact did--strike back. "...there is no respect of persons" with God. Do you want to know whom God will hold accountable for every angry outburst, every indulgence of your sinful appetite, every rationalized sin you ever commit in your life? It is simple. Just look in the mirror!

We could easily consider Paul's "up close and personal" list of Christian behaviors in this chapter and conclude, "Real Christianity isn't for sissies." And we would be correct. Are we ready--today, right here, and right now--to repent of our self-indulgence, of our "blame game" finger pointing, and of our rationalized indulgence of sins in our lives? Are we prepared to start applying life-changing Christian ethics to work in our own life, where we live and breathe? Well, Paul has given us the blueprint, the model. Only one thing remains. Will we do it? Or will we continue our old habits of sin? Will people know us for our amazing new wardrobe of "grace clothes," or will they quietly and politely, but distinctly hold their nose and remember us for our distasteful "grave clothes"? We stand at our spiritual closet. The day lies ahead of us. What shall we wear today? What shall we wear each day for the rest of our lives? The cliché may well be an overstatement but here it applies. "The clothes make the person." How will you be known?

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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
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