

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

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## A Personal Faith

*The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son. Greet ye one another with a kiss of charity. Peace be with you all that are in Christ Jesus. Amen. (1 Peter 5:13–14, KJV 1900)*

Although many cultural features of our nation may lend themselves to the Christian faith (Faith meaning lifestyle, not a philosophical belief), one of our greatest sources of pride is more an enemy to the faith than its friend. Our pride in personal independence may be more inclined to resist the community of the faith than submit and harmonize with it. Some of the people I've known who, at first glance, appeared to be most dedicated to the faith, were actually far more remote to it than most observers would conclude. From Genesis to Revelation, those who follow God faithfully do so as part of a greater community of like-minded believers.<sup>1</sup> That fierce "Rambo" independent, do-it-my-way-regardless attitude that our cultural pride magnifies directly contradicts Jesus' bedrock principle of true, Biblical discipleship, that thing which we call self-denial. The first Biblical step to faithful discipleship is not self-magnification of one's independent, me-first-know-it-all-do-it-all-myself mindset. It is denial of self, for only to the extent that we deny self are we able to take up our cross, the New Testament instrument of self-crucifixion. Taking up one's cross does not mean magnifying self and going about Christianity "My way." It means dying to self. In fact, Paul writes, "...I die daily." (1 Corinthians 15:31) This die-daily mindset hardly fosters the Rambo-me-first-always-right independent spirit that much of our culture adores and seeks to imitate.

Conservative Christians quickly emphasize that wives are commanded by Scripture to submit to their husbands, and they quote Ephesians 5:22 to support their insistence on wifely submission. However, those same people conveniently ignore Ephesians 5:21, "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God." Paul wrote this commandment to the whole Ephesian Church, not to women or to an isolated segment of the church.

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<sup>1</sup> Elijah may be one of a very few exceptions. A study of God's direction to Elijah explains his isolation. God sent him to warn and teach the northern kingdom to repent of their pagan idolatry and return to Him. He must stand alone with God to fulfill his charge. Even so, several of Elijah's failures richly instruct and warn us against the dangers of trying to live our faith in isolation from godly, like-minded believers.

The same man who insists that his wife submit to him must deal with Paul's commandment that he submit to his brothers and sisters in Christ no less than he expects—and sometimes demands—his wife to submit to him. Interestingly, we need not leave the chapter in First Peter where we are presently studying to find this instruction emphatically stated.

*Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. (1 Peter 5:5)*

To the degree that a believer, man or woman, in the church refuses to submit in grace to his/her brothers and sisters, to that same degree, he/she shall face God's resistance, not His support and grace. We face this truth in all areas of the person-to-person interactions between individuals in a church that especially manifest themselves in the more mundane decisions of how to decorate the church building or related matters. How many of those good folk in the church who smile and quote such verses as this are willing to speak up and tell the church that, despite their personal preference for a given color or decor, they shall joyfully support what the church body decides?

Throughout the New Testament, we find frequent mention of this thing called "Church." We live in an era in which professing Christians often choose to ignore the New Testament's teachings on this topic, choosing to worship God their way and on their terms. You cannot read the New Testament's teachings on the doctrine—and the literal institution—of "Church" and avoid the obvious Biblical point that a local church is a specific, identified body of like-minded believers who volunteer, under the directions of their Lord, to meet and to do the business of "Church" as taught in the New Testament. You are not a member of a local church based on the coincidental fact that you show up on a Sunday morning and meet with a particular body of people. Part of the New Testament's teaching emphasizes that those who belong to this church make a lifelong and life-changing commitment to their position in the church.

*I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints.... (1 Corinthians 16:15 (KJVP))*

You can't "...addict..." yourself to a body of people while consciously ignoring them or contradicting them with every word and attitude you reveal of yourself. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul makes a similar point regarding the churches in "Macedonia."

*And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God. (2 Corinthians 8:5 KJVP)*

The independent believer boasts of giving himself/herself to the Lord, but stops distinctly short of also giving self to other believers, an act that Paul identifies as occurring "...by the will of God."

The time was when strong believers in God's grace for eternal salvation would teasingly criticize their friends who believed in salvation by works for "Cutting all the grace out of the Bible" by consciously ignoring those passages. In our time, many of those same strong grace believers proudly cut First Corinthians the fifth chapter effectively out of their Bibles and simply refuse to consider it as inspired Scripture, much less actually strive or even pretend to obey it. Little do they consider that the same God whose grace they so admire inspired these words, and He no doubt shall not take their willing ignorance of His words—His commandments—lightly.

Notice the warm community terms that Peter uses in our study lesson.

1. ...*elected together with you*. No doubt, these people were God's chosen people in terms of their eternal standing with God, but this context focuses more on their present standing and conduct. Often when we bother to take the time to study the Bible in its contextual flow, we discover that Scripture uses a word in various settings to teach quite different lessons. "Elected" doesn't always refer to our eternal standing in God's purpose for the people who shall inhabit His glory with Him throughout eternity. I suggest, despite their occasional benefit, that a concordance and *Treasure of Scripture Knowledge* are the faithful Bible student's two greatest enemies. Both documents nudge us to ignore context and chase a single word all over the Bible, never pausing to examine the context of Scripture in which the word appears. I have compared this habit to serving a hungry sheep a cheap, TV dinner, when that sheep needs a nutritious, gourmet meal. Shame on the lazy preacher or

teacher who uses such documents to short-circuit long, prayerful study of Scripture as God gave it to His people in flowing context. If "TSK" or a concordance can reconstruct sound, in-depth Biblical insights, why didn't God create computers a few centuries earlier and endow them with the power of preaching and teaching?

2. ...*saluteth you*. In a military setting, a lower rank soldier or a soldier of equal rank "Salutes" his fellow. The word requires respect and the spirit of submission to prevail.
3. ...*and so doth Marcus*. Mark, in other passages sometimes referred to as John Mark, the author of the Gospel of Mark, could have claimed a position of high respect and demanded that church folks salute him, but not so. He joins the good people with Peter in saluting Peter's recipients of this letter.
4. ...*my son*. More than mere respect, this term often appears in Scripture to reinforce the fact that we belong to the Lord's family, so we should treat each other as family members, not as competitors or adversaries in a nice club.
5. *Greet ye one another with a kiss of charity*. Scripture teaches us to guard and discipline our emotions, but it powerfully teaches us that true, godly love, "Charity," compels action, not merely sentimental feelings.
6. *Peace be with you all that are in Christ Jesus*. And the end of it all; the acknowledging of our true familial relationship with other children of God in His family, the ethics of grace that should govern our conduct, only reaches its goal when our words, attitudes, and actions result in greater peace among the people in our circle of believers. Our goal should never be about getting the maximum number of people to agree with us or do what we want. It is about promoting godly peace, a culture in which God works powerfully to reveal His directions and will to His people.

Six terms fill Peter's closing thought to this letter. No contemporary believer can practice the underlying attitude that Peter here commands while also priding himself/herself in the independent "Rambo" spirit of the modern "Christian."

One of many traits that the New Testament emphatically commands for members of this church community is that they live together in harmony, in unity, not in me-first combative discord. God commanded and honored this unity no less in the Old Testament than in the New.

*A Song of degrees of David. Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell*

*together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore. (Psalms 133:1-3 KJVP)*

Notice that this good and pleasant attitude of unity is comparable to Aaron's anointing to the office of priest by the holy, anointing oil. What is David's conclusive point? Refuse to abide in this deep spirit of unity, and you effectively refuse to submit to the Lord's anointing. You may go through the motions of worship and priestly service, but you do so without the Lord's anointing. How did God view people in the Old Testament who pretended to be priests to God, but whom He had not so appointed or anointed? Do we really want to go there? The Lord's judgment is not kind toward such folks.

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Worship service each Sunday                      10:30 A. M.  
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