

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Blessed Assurance in the Here and Now

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:10–11, KJV 1900)

Peter has just concluded a challenging exhortation to his readers to transform their lives by living out a fruitful faith. The setting is altogether how to live so as to glorify God and bear fruit that honors Him and ministers to His people in the "Here and now." His use of "Wherefore" to introduce the next thought clearly links what we now study with what we have studied in the prior lesson. Rather than failing to add those seven behaviors to your faith, Peter commands a different, and a godly alternative.

Occasionally folks who believe that you can gain and lose your eternal standing with God by how you act will point to such lessons as supposed proof of their belief. I suggest that a thorough and contextual examination of these lessons will disprove those interpretations. Further, any view that holds to the idea that one can lose his eternal salvation obviously contradicts the many passages that categorically state that this cannot occur. Consider as a very brief list of such Scriptures; John 6:37-40; John 10:27-30; Romans 8:31-39. Much of the confusion on this question grows out of a failure to distinguish Scriptures that deal with discipleship, a believer's conduct in the here and now, from the Scriptures that deal with the finished and successful work of Christ for the sins of His beloved elect. Scriptures dealing with our discipleship indeed solemnly warn us that we may fail in our efforts to follow and to glorify our Lord and Savior. We just concluded a study of a passage that distinctly reminded us that someone who has been purged from his old sins may become so callous and unfruitful as to forget that he was so purged. What a dreadful state for a child of God. Given that Peter just made that point (2 Peter 1:8-9), it is altogether appropriate that he would carry that point forward with a strong exhortation that his readers strive to avoid such a bad state of mind and life. "...give diligence..." to avoid that outcome. Adding the seven behaviors to our faith is an effective equivalent to our present, "...make your calling and election sure..." As a child of grace may become so unfruitful as to forget that he was purged from his sins, he/she thereby also loses all sense of being included in the blessed number of those whom God in loving and merciful grace chose in His Son. Nothing in this context indicates that this failure negates God's choice or the blessed

outcome of God's choice, but everything in the context warns us that we may walk away from a fruitful and God-glorifying life and become unfruitful and forgetful of our blessed state. Thus, in pondering our present passage, when I read "...give diligence to make your calling and election sure," my first question is "Sure to whom?" Nothing that we could possibly do can make our calling and election surer to God than what Jesus did at Calvary. Nothing! However, the context warns that, in forgetting that we have been purged from our old sins, we may become quite unsure about this blessed state in our own minds. None of us would trade places with the self-tortured Cowper, the incredibly talented hymn writer and poet who wrote "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform." Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote a thought-provoking poem "On Cowper's Grave" after the poet's death. One of her many thoughtful observations in this poem noted how Cowper's words gave so much comfort to so many believers throughout the English speaking world, but the poor man seldom found the grace to claim that comfort for himself. We may well celebrate the grand words of the man's poems, but we should also take solemn note that his self-tortured life should never be viewed as an example of Biblical faith. For whatever the reasons, Cowper could not steadily retain the comforts of his purged sins. Thus, he lost the blessings described in such passages as we have studied in the context of Second Peter, first chapter. Browning also rejoiced in her poem that the self-tortured man who seldom was willing or able to claim the blessing of a conscious assurance of his purged sins was then—after his death—in heaven with his Savior, realizing that that One who, in the peak of man's cruel torture against Him—and His own Father's momentary forsaking—cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:4) For me, Browning's most thrilling line recalls this event with the conclusion that Jesus did experience momentary forsakenness of the Father so that none—not even one—of His beloved children could ever say those same words!

Thus? oh, not thus! no type of earth could image
that awaking,
Wherein he scarcely heard the chant of seraphs,
round him breaking,

Or felt the new immortal throb of soul from body parted;
But felt those eyes alone, and knew "**My Saviour! not deserted!**"

We may rightly rejoice in Cowper's words that comforted his peers and so many Christians since his life, but we should not celebrate his tortured life that refused the very comforts that he gave to others. In this, Cowper is not a worthy example to be imitated. His refusal to take the comforts of grace to himself contradicts the very lessons that we here study from Scripture, lessons that lead us to a godly sense of security and peaceful joy in our loving Savior.

...for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall. Nothing about the single word "Fall" compels us to conclude that Peter intended an eternal separation. The context deals with present discipleship and with the danger of "Falling" into an unfruitful state of life that causes us to forget that we were purged from our old sins. Can we at all doubt that such a sad state of mind depicts a dreadful "Fall" from joyful, godly fruitfulness of a God-given faith?

For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The gospel opens the door for children of God to reach into heaven's treasures and drink that heavenly water of life right now. We need not wait till we arrive in heaven to begin enjoying those blessings. Our departure from this life and our entrance into the Lord's glorious and joyful presence shall be instantaneous. However, the entrance of which Peter here writes is ongoing, something that is "ministered" to us, not immediately dispensed. In that assuring lesson on His role as our "Good Shepherd," Jesus reminds us of this truth in several points. For example:

I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. (John 10:9)

And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. (John 10:16)

Do not overlook the point. Because He is—not shall become in heaven—the Good Shepherd, His sheep presently find deliverance and "...go in and out, and find pasture." He didn't come to give this blessing just to one culture or nationality, the Jews. "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold." He intended to expand His "Good Shepherd's" care to His sheep far beyond first century Judaism, "...in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:8b)

For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you.... Peter does not here describe our familial inheritance of eternal life, but rather a present "Ministering" of an "Entrance" into His kingdom, similar to Jesus' words in John 10:9, "...go in and

out, and find pasture." The normal daily routine for first century sheep required constant safe keeping in the shepherd's fold, a fenced, secure area, often guarded through the night by the shepherd himself sleeping at the gate, the one door of access to the sheep. Before a marauding predator could touch a single sheep inside that fold, it must deal with the shepherd. But, when morning came, the same shepherd who guarded his sheep by night opened the door and called the sheep to leave the enclosure and follow him into the fields, safe, nutritious fields of green grass that he had previously scouted to ensure the sheep's safety while feeding. Going in and out was a daily routine. It did not refer to leaving the shepherd and wandering into harm's way, but rather to the shepherd's "24/7" watchful care of his sheep.

When life's trials leave you tired, depleted, and ragged around the edges, you need a season of safe, secure rest in your Savior. And Scripture reminds us that He faithfully gives it to us. It is this present, blessed truth that Peter here reminds us to enjoy. It was quite possible that some of the sheep in a shepherd's care would occasionally wander away from the shepherd into harm's way. How many lessons do we find in Scripture that deal with this point, especially with the Good Shepherd's faithful pursuit and return of the wandering sheep?

When you receive the call or when you sit helplessly by the bedside of someone whom you dearly love and watch them slip slowly away from you, you need this "...abundant entrance" to be ministered to you, to remind you that your loved one is going into the presence of his/her glorious Savior, the "Good Shepherd" of His sheep. When the many trials of life that assault our faith come at us one after the other, we so need a season of rest in this "...abundant entrance."

The definition of the Greek word translated "ministered" in this passage adds support to the view that I have set forth.

...to make available whatever is necessary to help or supply the needs of someone—to provide for, to support, to supply the needs of, provision, support...'...and (God), who supplies seed for the sower and bread to eat, will also supply ...' 2 Cor 9:10.

... 'for I know that because of your prayers and what the Spirit of Jesus Christ will provide for, I shall be set free' Php 1:19.¹

God's faithful and abiding promise to supply our needs from His riches in glory exemplifies this abundant entrance, graciously ministered to us in our times of need. Thank Him for merciful entrance to His storehouse when we most need it.

¹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 460–461.

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