

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Consequences of Refusal to Make Faith Fruitful

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. (2 Peter 1:5-9, KJV 1900)

Throughout this lesson, Peter has repeatedly and precisely admonished his readers to take certain actions, to add these seven behaviors to their God-given faith. Not once does Peter tell his readers that, if they are really a child of God, that these behaviors have been irresistibly and irrevocably decreed by God. He urges his readers to take the action. As he concludes the list and draws inspired conclusions from his admonitions, he identifies one godly outcome if we obey, if we add these seven behaviors to our faith. Further, he also identifies two sad, but certain consequences that any believer in Christ, anyone with God-given faith, shall suffer if he/she fails to add these behaviors to their faith. God commands the behavior. He provides the grace by which we may take the commanded action. However, nothing in this context or elsewhere in Scripture so much as hints that God irrevocably decrees these behaviors for all who are born again. God's governance over His family follows the model of a loving, wise, and caring Father, not a cosmic puppeteer. He knows what behaviors follow His commandments and produce rich spiritual blessings. He also knows quite well that any contrary behavior shall produce regrettable and highly undesirable consequences. In this passage, He gives us both potential outcomes in simple language. He does not tell us that we may freely choose either path. Nor does He tell us that we actually have a third alternative. We have only these two. He commands us to follow the righteous path, but He also warns us that choosing the wrong, the sinful path, shall bring bad consequences. *But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.*

Peter doesn't tell us that we must practice each of these seven behaviors to infinite perfection. They must be in us. We must practice them to some degree. Secondly, they must abound in us. A rare occasional practice of one or two of these behaviors fails Peter's inspired test. For a behavior to "abound" in us, it must be regularly practiced. We strive to make it our habit of conduct, not an occasional exception to our otherwise routine failure to add them. We should follow these behaviors so

consistently that they become part of our reputation, what people think about when they think of us, what they expect us to do because of our past conduct in the heat of life's trials.

Peter describes a life-transforming result from the abounding practice of these seven behaviors. "...they make you..." The habitual practice of these behaviors changes who we are and how we live, how we react to the difficulties of life. Paul repeats a similar admonition.

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (Romans 12:2)

Adding these seven behaviors to our faith not only transforms our conduct, it also transforms our minds. Only as we habitually practice these behaviors do we increasingly and convincingly prove to ourselves what is God's "...good, and acceptable, and perfect, will..." Paul does not write that we shall prove that God's will is good, acceptable, and perfect. He tells us that this behavior enables us to prove "...**what is**..." that will.

...they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. "barren" implies no fruit at all. "unfruitful" could involve a minuscule amount of fruit, but either outcome falls distinctly short of the God-glorifying fruitful life that results from the habitual development and practice of these seven behaviors. Peter closes this letter with an exhortation to growing knowledge.

But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen. (2 Peter 3:18)

We may grow in knowledge and become a bona fide Pharisee who thinks that he knows God's law and will to perfection, but still fail in our fruitful life to His glory. However, growth in the joint qualities of grace and knowledge will purge the self-exalting know-it-all attitude out of us and drive us to these

seven behaviors, one of which is interestingly knowledge, but the crowning grace that protects us from ourselves and our potential self-promotion is charity, the ideal companion to Peter's "grace." As we grow in knowledge, we may grow stronger in all seven. Having the knowledge, the true knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, is a good thing, but it is only good when we add grace to the equation and add it to our God-given faith.

But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. As a pastor, I am amazed at how often believers who fail to add and to maintain these behaviors consistently to their lives begin to prove Peter's point in this verse. One of the first erosions that you observe is a self-deluding notion that they can forget these godly behaviors, turn to sin, whatever besetting, deceiving sin has blinded and hypnotized them at the moment, with no consequences whatever. Life goes on. The sun rises in the morning. "If I ever decide that I want to go back to God, He loves me. He'll take me back." Scripture does remind us that God is forgiving, amazingly so, but Scripture also reminds us that His forgiveness in the here and now is contingent on repentance, not a casual "If I decide that I want to go back" attitude. As a pastor, I can only help those wandering sheep who have faced the reality of their sin and have confronted and started down that godly path of repentance. Ah, our God knows exactly how to bring the rebel to his knees. He may not slap godly sense into the erring child within the first twenty-four hours of the child's sinful departure. But Scripture warns us that we must face God and the inevitable consequences of our sins. Consider:

*For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. **It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.** (Hebrews 10:26–31, KJV 1900; emphasis added to Verse 31)*

While most modern believers try to apply this lesson to the unsaved, those not born again, both in context and in the closing sentence, Paul applies the lesson to a child of God who sins wilfully. The person has a sensitive conscience to sin, the indwelling witness of the Holy Spirit that strips away

any pretense of sinning in ignorance, of not know that your conduct is sinful. In context, this person has experienced the benefits of the full and finished work of Christ. If this person chooses the right path and exercises the boldness of action based on what he/she has in Christ, all the blessings that we read in Hebrews 10:19-21 are available. But the continuance of these blessings of bold access and a spiritual open door into them is contingent.

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. (Hebrews 10:22–25, KJV 1900; emphasis added)

Paul underscores the contingency with "Let us..." not with a false claim that God has decreed that all "...real children of God shall do these things." Notice the three contingencies.

1. ***Let us draw near.*** You can't draw near to God with a true heart or with full assurance of faith unless you are striving to add Peter's "List of seven" behaviors to that faith. It is precisely these seven behaviors that refresh and vitalize our knowledge of God's loving grace, giving us the sense of assurance, of "full assurance of faith."
2. ***Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.*** Paul links the blessings of awareness of what we have in Christ with our holding fast. You can't ignore the godly behaviors that Peter names and also hold fast. Impossible.
3. ***...let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works.*** No believer in Christ can live the Christian life in isolation, apart from other believers. God never calls His children to live in isolation, but rather to live in community with other born again believers. In fact, we fail the Biblical test if we do not regularly interact with our brothers and sisters in the faith. Not only does God call us to all of these behaviors, but He also calls us—commands us—to live so intertwined with other believers that we may influence them, "...to provoke unto love and to good works." You can't do any of these things apart from your active involvement in the community of believers, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together...."

It is this kind of believer who, in forsaking these behaviors and in forsaking his/her assembling with brothers and sisters in the faith who shall face the consequences of the willful sin named in this passage. And the eventual outcome is a fall, yes indeed. But this passage does not teach final apostasy or falling away from one's eternal life. ***It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*** Paul doesn't write that you fall out of His hands, but into them. The Lord's righteous and, when necessary, severe (Romans 11:22) judgments are inevitable if we turn from the Lord and follow this path of willful sin away from Him and from His people, our spiritual family of brothers and sisters in the faith, the "...assembling" of which he writes.

Paul will further explain this fearful consequence shortly. (Hebrews 12:5-13) His complete analogy builds on the permanent and loving setting of God's family. Regardless of how "Dysfunctional" (a sadly overworked word in our day) our earthly family may have been, do not err by imputing all the bad experiences of that family onto God, your heavenly "Father," a word that Scripture, inspired-by-the-Holy-Spirit Scripture, uses frequently. As our Father, He makes no mistakes. He is never "Dysfunctional." But never doubt for a moment that He also is not a cushy grandfather type whose "Dysfunction" claims to love you too much to chasten you, to consistently and clearly bring you face to face with your sins and to bring the chastening consequences of those sins down on you. Never "Dysfunctional," He promises in this passage that He loves you enough to chasten you, a word that defines a loving and responsible parent's loving correction of a truly "Dysfunctional" and disobedient child. God's chastening is not intended to kill, to eternally expel, His child. That kind of action would be penal, intended to punish, not to correct. His chastening is intended to help us come face to face with our willful sin against Him, and thereby lead us in goodness to repentance. (Romans 2:4)

As a minister, I can teach these truths. I can remind those who hear me preach, or read my writings, of God's certain blessings, even the certain blessing of severe chastening. But I cannot supplant the Holy Spirit. I cannot choose the time or the way in which an erring child of grace should face chastening. I cannot convict the erring child's conscience, but I can remind that child of Scripture's teachings, as I do in these writings and in my preaching. Sadly often, preachers fail in their Biblical assignment and, at the same time, strive to supplant the work, the family ministry, of the Holy Spirit in His erring children. When Peter preached the gospel on the day of Pentecost, he boldly reminded those people of their high sin, of participating in the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, God Incarnate and their promised Messiah. Despite the entrenched pride in these people, the Holy Spirit, not Peter, drove those words to the

heart, and thereby "...they were pricked in the heart..." (Acts 2:37) While some in the audience remained entrenched in pride and rejected Peter's words, some were touched. Only after those who felt the "prick" of conviction in the heart cried out, "Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37b) did Peter do what every godly minister is charged in Scripture to do. When a child of grace feels the sting of conviction and goes to a minister for answers, then the minister can give godly, Biblical help by telling that child to do exactly what Peter told those people, "Repent and be baptized..." (Acts 2:38)

After several weeks of lingering with Peter and this enlightening and admittedly challenging list of commandments, I close this section of study with the same passionate warnings that Peter wrote. Do not be content with faith alone. If you try to do so, you will soon forget that you have it, and anything else good and gracious from your Lord and Savior. Which path shall you choose today, tomorrow, and every tomorrow that you have to live? Shall you consciously choose the path of barren, unfruitful, and frightening loss of memory that God in grace purged you from your sins and has a glorious inheritance for you with Him in eternity? Or shall you make Him and His righteousness first priority of your life, a righteousness defined by these seven specific behaviors, and by the "Having—Let us" exhortations of Paul that we have studied? Will you choose the path of joyful blessings or the path of willful sin and its fearful end, falling, albeit into His hands? You may hide your unfruitful blindness from many godly people, but you cannot hide it from Him. And when you fall, when you finally and certainly wake up on your face in your own sinful mud pile, you will not be looking at me or another believer. You will be looking squarely into His face! There are no other choices, none whatever. With each day and each decision that we make, we choose the path of fruitful, God-glorifying joyful blessings, or we choose the path of chastening consequences. Listen to the Holy Spirit's stinging prick. Choose the right path. It is not a once-in-a-lifetime choice. It is a daily, hourly choice. Form the habit. Choose Him and His way. These are Biblical and "Family" warnings and admonitions to children of God, spoken from the voice of experience, but more importantly from the voice of Scripture.

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor