

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 30, Number 51

December 22, 2013



Falling or Growing: No Middle Ground in Grace

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, KJV 1900)

Effective communications of any kind, especially written, uses repetition to clarify and to underscore important points being made. In the first chapter of this letter, Peter devotes much of the chapter to the steps necessary—and commanded—to grow a God-glorifying, fruitful faith. In that context, Peter also warns his readers about failure to make our faith fruitful. (2 Peter 1:5-9) A person who at one time sincerely and truly believed in the Lord can so neglect that belief as to forget "...that he was purged from his old sins." So much for the false doctrine of progressive advancement in godliness; this lesson, along with many others in Scripture, refutes the notion. The one appearance of the word "Perseverance" in Scripture (Ephesians 6:18) is an admonition to continue faithfully and constantly in prayer, a necessary step to mold all the individual pieces of our Christian armor into a cohesive and effective defense against the onslaughts of Satan, as well as our only means of taking the offensive in our Christian warfare. And the command deals with praying for our fellow-soldiers in this Christian army, not in assuring ourselves of our own salvation.

We should take wise note that the New Testament does consistently exhort believers to grow in their godliness, not allow it to stagnate or to slip backward in its fresh vigor. Believer's sanctification appears in Scripture as an exhortation, not as an absolute or as a divine guarantee. Peter makes the point in similar tones as we see throughout the New Testament. He commands his readers to avoid falling into the snare of false prophets and their false doctrines; then he commands them to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Advocates of faith-healing, that one believer can in some way call down the Holy Spirit and heal another believer from physical illness, err in terms of the timing of their objective. When the Second Coming arrives and we all arise to meet the Lord in the air, none of us will arise with physical illnesses. And on occasion, praise the Lord, He does intervene in our lives to heal from physical illness, but He never puts Himself on anyone's leash to heal on our command or to heal all believers. Advocates of progressive sanctification, or progressive perseverance, likewise get their timing wrong. No believer shall arise at the Second Coming with sin in his/her life or with errant beliefs in the mind. We'll all arise without sin and without any faulty beliefs about God

and His work of grace in the lives of His covenant children. But neither universal healing of physical disease or of the disease of sin occurs in this life. Both ideas fail the test of Biblical support.

We readily grasp how we might grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, but how does one grow in grace? While Scripture defines grace as God's disposition that causes Him to save every one of His chosen children from their sins and secure to them an eternal inheritance in glory with Him, Scripture also defines similar grace as an attitude and behavior that should characterize the growing fellowship commanded between believers in the here and now.

Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man. (Colossians 4:6)

Do you always speak to your brothers and sisters in tones and attitudes that convincingly exhibit grace? Often in the Old Testament, salt was added to various sacrifices. Perhaps Paul's point by using "...seasoned with salt" serves to remind us of a central truth that Jesus repeatedly teaches; when we react in a particular manner to a brother or sister in Christ, we thereby also react to our Lord in the same manner. (Matthew 25:45) When we devalue a brother or sister's ideas that happen to disagree with ours and speak aggressively or harshly to them, putting them and their ideas down, Jesus reminds us that we show the same attitude toward Him. We fail in both commandments; that speech is not characterized by grace, and it is not seasoned with salt, "Flavored" to worship and to honor God.

Perhaps more significance appears in the order of things that Peter commands in our study verse than we often consider. We may gain intellectual awareness of Bible facts, but we cannot gain or grow in Bible knowledge, edifying, God-glorifying knowledge beyond the degree to which we season our lives, including our words, with grace. We only grow in the kind of knowledge that glorifies our Lord by practicing the kind of grace that Peter here commands.

Given the directness of Peter's words to practice both actions, we must face the alarming truth. The practice of grace, a God-kind of grace toward our brothers and sisters in Christ is a necessary step to

any form of God-glorifying growth in our true, edifying knowledge of the Lord. And given Peter's stated objective, "*To him be glory both now and for ever,*" we should work to pass every thought, word, and deed through the filter of what glorifies our God. If I talk down to a brother or sister who happens to disagree with me, what about my dishonoring that brother or sister glorifies God? How do I consistently speak to my brother and sister "...always with grace"? I must guard every conversation to ensure that my words manifest the same kind of grace toward my brother or sister that my Lord manifested toward me when He showed underserved and merciful kindness and saved me from my sins.

Based on Scripture, there is a predictable harshness that characterizes the words and attitudes of a novice in the faith.

Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. (1 Timothy 3:6)

While Paul's words in this verse apply specifically to qualifications for the ministry, similar immature and prideful attitudes appear in the words of any believer who fails to implement the maturing, fruitful additions to faith that Peter outlines in 2 Peter 1 or the same behaviors that he summarizes in our study passage. The novice thinks that he has everything all figured out, that he knows things about the Bible that seasoned, faithful believers who've gone before him ignorantly failed to grasp. His supposed superior knowledge inevitably nurtures sinful pride, one of Satan's favorite and most reliable snares for the immature believer. Whether dealing with a man whom we evaluate for a calling—and personal qualifications—to the ministry or with any believer, maturity in the faith, the quality that raises an individual above the state of a novice, has more to do with personal traits of stable, mature godliness than with "Clock time" spent in the faith. A casual believer who spends decades in the faith may have failed ever to add those seven traits in 2 Peter 1:5-7 to his/her faith. In this case, despite decades spent in casual, undedicated faith, this believer, after all those decades, remains a novice. Conversely, a relatively young believer who seriously immerses his/her mind in Scripture, and who strives to increase the practice of Scripture's teachings may grow to spiritual maturity in a relatively short time. I have seen examples of both behaviors, and my observation affirms that pride will characterize the pretended "Knowledge" of the novice while humility and grace will accompany the mature believer, both in word and deed.

How does one grow in the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? I provide a schedule of daily reading to the members of the church that I serve that will enable them to read their Bible through each year. Daily reading of this extent is

likely a first step, but we should never think that merely reading the Bible repeatedly each year will automatically impart a growing knowledge of the kind that Peter here commands. He does not direct knowledge to quote verses or know where to turn in the Bible to find one of the minor prophets. He qualifies the knowledge of which he writes in two ways; 1) It is knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, 2) It gives glory to God right now. We cannot divorce this knowledge from Scripture. We cannot grow in this kind of knowledge by our personal intellect or by developing our private philosophy of life. We only grow in the knowledge that makes Him central and that glorifies God by subjecting our minds to the teachings of Scripture, Scripture alone. If we magnify the words of a Bible dictionary, including a dictionary of words from the original languages of the Bible, above Scripture, using those definitions to interpret Scripture instead of honoring God's faithful promise to preserve His words (Psalm 12:6-7; do not overlook the plural form, "words," not "word") in every generation, we fail to rightly interpret Scripture, and we thereby fail to either gain Biblical knowledge of Him or to glorify God by our supposed knowledge. The Holy Spirit directed the men who wrote the New Testament to write in the dialect of first century Greek that was commonly spoken and written by people who lived in Greek-speaking cultures of that day. He gave them His words in their language. From the first century, Christians have faithfully labored to provide a quality translation of Scripture in the native language of believers. I cannot claim to have a working knowledge of New Testament Greek, and, frankly, many men who claim such a knowledge likewise fail the test. A man whom I have learned to respect for his steadfast faith and whom I consider a dear friend in Christ trained to be a Greek Orthodox priest, a major part of that training involving studies in New Testament Greek. On occasion I will write him for his knowledge of the Greek language on a particular word or passage of Scripture. I respect that he consistently nudges me to go back to my English King James Bible and study it diligently. His reason; based on his Greek studies, we cannot learn anything from the Greek language of the New Testament that we cannot likewise learn from the English King James Bible that we have in our hands.

The final and most refined trait for our spiritual journey, according to Peter's exhortation, is that what we care enough about to grow in it, grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, is to be so used by us as to glorify our God and Savior. We glorify Him by serving His children now.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor