

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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God's Longsuffering: Salvation

And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you. (2 Peter 3:15, KJV 1900)

Scripture uses the word "Salvation" in its various forms in a number of ways. A safe approach to right interpretation of the word in any passage is to ask two questions. "Saved from what?" "Saved to what?" Think of the word in terms of its derivative root, "Safe." "Safe" from what or to what?

From the beginning of this chapter, Peter has focused his teaching on the Second Coming. He started the chapter by using an errant teaching of this doctrine as an example of the manner in which false teachers attempt to abuse or outright ignore Scripture and teach error. He methodically refutes this false teaching, but he also goes into significant details of the truth of Scripture on this same doctrine. He has already introduced us to the Lord's "Longsuffering" in Verse 9. Peter's emphatic point in Verse 9 is that the Lord may delay His coming from our timetable or perspective, but not from His. His return and taking His people, none "Left Behind," into eternal glory with Him, will occur at His time and in His way. In the meantime, He exercises longsuffering and continues to perform His work of grace, bringing His elect, one by beloved one, into His family and gracing them with His indwelling Holy Spirit during their sojourn.

In this way, Peter reminds us that the Lord's longsuffering is salvation. Simply put, His longsuffering will continue its quiet, but effectual work until He has completed that work. We should notice that salvation in this passage does not reside in anything that we say, think, or do, but in the Lord's longsuffering. In this contextual setting, "salvation" refers to the Second Coming and our bodily resurrection and entrance into eternal glory with our Savior.

The men who wrote the New Testament under the Holy Spirit's direction were either personal eyewitnesses of Jesus' life and ministry or first generation believers of those eyewitnesses. If you had witnessed someone whom you had known intimately—and knew to be more than human, literally so—experience a public death by torture, and if, three days later, you witnessed him alive, even showing the evidences of that torture in his very alive body, how strongly would you believe in Him? The New Testament consistently puts Jesus' death and resurrection at the heart of its truth and message. For them, the Lord's present absence was temporary, regardless the length of that absence, and they looked forward to His promised

return. This message was not so complicated that a rocket scientist would be confused by all of its dimensions. It was simple and straightforward. As He left in glory, He shall return in glory. As He left victorious over all who sought to destroy Him, He shall return, despite all who try to deny or confuse His return. The complicated teaching that dominates modern Christianity regarding the Second Coming, historically speaking, is an infant. It didn't exist prior to around 1827-1830, and, until 1909, the idea was spurned by most Christians. In 1909, the first "Scofield Bible" was published, popularizing the ideas of John Nelson Darby in a complicated and often diversified body of ideas known as "Dispensationalism." Simply put, this idea is around eighteen hundred years too young to hold any credible status as a valid interpretation of New Testament teaching regarding the Lord's promised return. (Ephesians 3:10; "...**now**...might be **known by the church**....") Scripture rejects the idea that the Lord's church was mistaken for most of its history; it rather teaches that the church of the Lord Jesus is the Lord's vessel for the knowledge and preservation of His truth from His ascension until His promised and certain return. (1 Timothy 3:15b) According to Scripture, God preserves His truth in His church, not by one man here and there who claims to rediscover old, but hidden truths.

At times, Peter and Paul seem to be "On different pages" in terms of their ministry. However, in fact, they were in perfect harmony. The Lord had one assignment for Paul and another for Peter. As with us, so with the apostles; when we ignore the Holy Spirit's direction and chase windmills in another man's field of labor, our labors are vain. When Peter traveled to Antioch Church, a Gentile Church where the Lord assigned Paul to labor, Peter found himself in a world of trouble. Galatians 2 summarizes this problem from Paul's perspective. Peter's divine assignment was to Jews, and Paul's was to Gentiles. Some commentaries interpret Peter's description of the people to whom he wrote his two letters as being "Diaspora" Jews, Jews who were scattered among the Gentiles throughout the Roman Empire. By location, we learn that Peter's first recipients lived in what is probably today north central Turkey. Paul's labors, beginning in Antioch, focused on Greece, and the southern coastal region of modern Turkey.

The disagreements that bothered Paul and Peter in Antioch (Galatians 2) were short-lived. By the time that Peter wrote 2 Peter, he appreciated the Lord's wise role in assigning His men to His field of labor. Paul and Barnabas (Closing verses of Acts 15) set a godly example for preachers today who differ over non-essential issues. These two men held to a very different assessment of a young gift. John Mark, later author of the Gospel of Mark, abandoned Paul and his companions under the pressures of faithful service. Paul still held this lapse fresh in his mind; Barnabas believed that the young man had learned his lesson and returned to profitable service. Although their disagreement at the moment was "...sharp," and they separated, going in different directions instead of together, both men kept this disagreement in perspective. Consider Paul's later fondness of both Barnabas and Mark. (1 Corinthians 9:6; Galatians 2:1, 9; Colossians 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:11)

We should carefully distinguish these minor human differences of inconsequential opinion from major differences on a vital or essential doctrine or a divisive, schismatic disposition. (Romans 16:17; Titus 3:10-11; Acts 15, and the Book of Galatians) The wise and Biblical minister will understand the difference and strive to rise above his humanity in the first instance and will wisely respect the teaching of Scripture and avoid those men who fall into the second category. A word of caution: those men who fall into the second category of schismatic or doctrinal error typically work to minimize the consequences or degree of their differences from Biblical orthodoxy. Paul holds to an obviously stronger negative view of denying the literal, bodily resurrection than the Church at Corinth. (1 Corinthians 15) Failure to recognize those major departures and follow Scripture's warnings against those who promote them endangers naïve, hungry sheep, as well as less informed ministers. Error ignored becomes bolder and more aggressive in seeking to overcome truth, and it will ignore Biblical behaviors and ethics in its insatiable hunger to gain followers. Consider; the minister who ignores Scripture's assignment of a man to serve a local church (Not usurp the role of pastor-at-large or regional mafia boss) and quietly works to entice members of any church anywhere to follow his ideas, fully knowing that his beliefs contradict that person's pastor, reveals by his unethical behavior that his motives, at the least, are not at all Biblical. On occasion when visiting a church I have specifically qualified my teachings with "If this thought differs from your pastor's teaching, stand by his teaching and pray for me." The man who seeks to promote himself and his error takes an opposite posture, working hard to gain followers to himself and his ideas, regardless of conflict with the local pastor's teachings. Jesus described just such an attitude. (Matthew 23:15; most first century Jewish leaders seemed more concerned with making proselytes to themselves than with denying

themselves and following Jesus, as well as teaching their students to follow Jesus)

While Peter and Paul may have realized a different assignment from the Lord, they both respected that the Lord had given the assignment, and both men stood together against those who denied the Lord's return and the final resurrection. (1 Corinthians 15; 2 Peter 3) To borrow an old, but wise cliché, the man who opposes nothing also stands for nothing. Scripture requires the faithful to do both, stand for God's revealed and uncompromised truth, and oppose those who contradict that truth and teach any other doctrine.

Scripture commands full obedience, not selective choosing of the doctrines that we like and equally selective ignoring the doctrines that we do not like. Our "Liker" is not the final moral arbiter of God's truth and commandments. Denying self is the foundational action of faithful discipleship, and willing or willful ignorance, the very attitude that Peter attributes to the false teachers in 2 Peter 3:5, is not an acceptable trait for believers who desire to glorify the Lord. It is as much in violation of Scripture to ignore all error and sinful conduct as it is to imitate the Pharisees and scribes of the first century and try to police every attitude and action of everyone we know. A godly balance discerns the difference between a superficial question, such as whether to take John Mark on a gospel labor or not, and essential beliefs that cross the boundary of doctrinal error, Scripture being the exclusive judge of doctrinal truth. One we are taught by example to forbear with grace; the other we are equally taught by Scripture to admonish and reject/avoid.

Peter respectfully reminds his readers that the Lord gave Paul wisdom in his writings to these same people. Given the stated location of Peter's recipients, we cannot identify any of Paul's New Testament letters as being written specifically to these people. However, Peter refers to something that Paul had written to his readers, likely a letter from Paul that is not contained in the New Testament canon. Paul himself implies that he wrote a letter to the Corinthian Church prior to our First Corinthians, another letter that we do not have as part of our New Testament Scriptures. (1 Corinthians 5:9; Paul specifically writes, "I wrote unto you in an epistle....") Thus, Paul wrote the Corinthians a letter prior to our First Corinthians. The Holy Spirit apparently chose not to include these letters in the text of the New Testament. We should not be surprised at this point. The men who wrote the New Testament letters likely wrote many other documents in their lifetime. The Holy Spirit intervened in their lives and guided them to write what we know as our New Testament. We should read the New Testament, not as interesting personal opinions of the human authors, but as a personal communication from God, using those men as His vehicle to write His message to us. (2 Corinthians 5:20, "...as though **God did beseech you by us....**")

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor