

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Gospel Ethics Grounded in Resurrection Ethics

But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. Use hospitality one to another without grudging. As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:7–11, KJV 1900)

When shall the Second Coming occur? Ask the question and prepare yourself for a multitude of bizarre answers, many of them claiming to know the date. Interestingly, the "I know the date" error is the easiest of all errors to refute. Simply watch your calendar. The day after the predicted date, if you wake up and the Second Coming didn't occur, you know the pseudo-prophet was wrong. Scripture teaches that the Lord's return is imminent, not immediate. What do I mean? Probably the simplest meaning of "Imminent" is "Soon to happen," as contrasted with "Immediate," which suggests "Nearest or next to happen." Every prophet of the Lord's "Immediate" return has failed. However, the New Testament consistently teaches that we are to live our lives as if the Lord were coming back "Immediately," though the date of His actual return is imminent and precisely unknown to us, though certain. If we search the Scriptures, we find no prophecy that remains unfulfilled, its fulfillment delaying the Second Coming. Only one thing stands in the way of the Lord's return, His chosen time.

Most studies of the Second Coming wrongly attempt to isolate that event and Bible doctrine from all others. Studying any major Bible doctrine in isolation from other major doctrines inevitably leads to errant interpretation. God's truth is comprehensive and harmoniously integrated, not isolated segments of piecemeal ideas. As different as the two themes might seem at first thought, the New Testament links the Lord's return with our present conduct. No, we do not control or influence His return by what we do or fail to do. However, the New Testament teaches that a true belief in the Second Coming shall surely alter our conduct in this present world. A weak belief in the Second Coming understandably predicts a pessimistic view of life, while a strong belief in the New Testament's teaching of the Second Coming empowers us to face every trial with the bright hope of a glorious day that awaits us. Denial of the literal bodily resurrection inclines people to a careless use of their body, while belief in the literal bodily resurrection reminds us to use the body that the

Lord shall surely raise and glorify at His Coming for His glory now in service to Him and to His people. Two examples come to mind, 1 Corinthians 6:14 (Dealing with sexual sins) and 1 John 3:3. Peter makes this link in our present study passage. Because the "...end of all things is at hand..." Biblical ethics demands that we adopt the "Pilgrim" mindset, live now so as to honor our glorious "Homeland" and King until we complete our homeward journey.

...be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. "...therefore" directs us back to "...the end of all things." We often frame our ideas about Bible words in reference to our present culture. In our world, "Sober" most often is used in contrast with drunk or intoxicated; sometimes solemn and utterly void of humor. If we attempt to understand the word through the lens of our present culture instead of through Scripture, we will likely believe that "Sober" means that a smile or a gracious, pleasant disposition is equivalent to overt sin, so we adopt a "Sourpuss" grumpy attitude. How does Peter identify true "Sobriety" in this passage? He does not associate being sober with a frown or a gloomy face at all. In Peter's understanding, "sober" means that we actively engage life in watchful prayer. We may "Watch" our brothers and sisters as their critic, hoping to discover some flaw or mistake in them, so that we may think ourselves their superior, and criticize them. Or we may watch **with them** against our common enemy on the battlefield of life, uniting with them as good soldiers of Jesus Christ in our united battle against the adversary. As good soldiers, we understand that we are not the general over the army, but soldiers under the "Captain of our salvation." We report to Him, and we engage our adversary based on "Orders" handed down by Him. Peter's words suggest that the more carefully we watch the more inclined we shall be to prayer. If we think that we face a weak and paltry adversary, our reaction would be to stamp him out as if we were smashing an invading ant in our kitchen. However, if we wisely and rightly observe our adversary, we realize that he is powerful and unprincipled. We understand that we cannot

possibly defeat him apart from the wise grace of our Captain, so we immediately go from watching to praying. For Peter, this attitude depicts being sober.

And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves.... "...above all things..." suggests both breadth and priority. It implies breadth in that it covers anything "Below" it, as a roof covers the whole house. It suggests priority in that charity holds a higher position than any of the other things that Peter will cover in the following list. Regardless the things that we do in our Christian conduct, particularly in our personal interaction with other believers, any action that does not clearly reveal a godly affection for that person shall end badly. Paul will admonish Timothy to *"...reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."* The three actions that Timothy is to take all deal with some element of failure or deficiency on the part of his hearers. If Timothy approaches these people with an arrogant or superior attitude, he shall alienate them, not only from himself, but likely from their active faith in fellowship with other believers as well. Reproof, rebuke, and exhortation are essential to a growing, healthy godliness, but healthy growth only results when the person reproving, rebuking, and exhorting carefully flavors his actions and words with grace. (Colossians 4:6; 2 Timothy 2:23-26) We especially see the godly model of the correct pastoral attitude in 2 Timothy 2:23-26. The godly pastor will not endlessly engage the sheep in his charge in debates over "...foolish and unlearned questions." Rather he will labor to teach them through the exemplary attitudes and actions that Paul lists; gentle, apt to teach (Not apt to debate or argue endlessly), patience, and meekness. Most sheep who argue with other sheep often actually argue with themselves. The wise pastor will quietly and gently labor to help this sheep grow in his faith so as to understand that godly charity should empower and drive all of his/her words and actions in the brotherhood of the faith. I shall never, God willing, apologize for those seasons when I labored with gentle grace to help sheep who "...oppose themselves" come to terms with their Lord and with their faith.

...for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. Christians who see Biblical love, "Charity," as little more than their sentimental emotions toward others tend to misread this clause. In their minds, charity ignores the multitude of sins in their brothers and sisters, almost as if they condone the sinful conduct. Think of Peter's words from a New Testament perspective. Jesus came and died for our sins, thereby "Covering" them with His atoning sacrifice of Himself. Where in Scripture do we ever sense that God ignores our sins? If He ignored them, He wouldn't have died for them, would He? To cover sins requires that we take whatever remedial steps within our power to eliminate the sin. If we show this kind of charity toward our brothers and sisters in Christ, when we see them sin, we will

go to them and reason with them, hoping to influence them to repent and turn from their sin, not tell them that it doesn't really matter to you whether they sin or not.

At this point in the lesson, Peter lists several major attitudes and actions that put this kind of overarching charity into action.

1. *Use hospitality one to another without grudging.* Hospitality and grudging are as near to opposite attitudes as one could imagine. Any effort to show hospitality that grows out of an unconvinced heart potentially takes on this contradictory quality. You see an outward appearance of hospitality, but you also sense a grudging "Why do I have to do this silly stuff anyway?" The Biblical principle of hospitality builds on the "Pilgrim principle." We and all of the Lord's children are pilgrims in a strange and often lonely world. Anything we can do toward a fellow-pilgrim to encourage him/her or to remind them of our homeland and our King we should do with kind and joyful grace, never begrudgingly.
2. *As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.* The Lord richly bestows multiple gifts on His children. He doesn't bargain with us for the gifts. He doesn't bestow the gifts based on how intelligent we are, or how handsome. He gives them freely. Thus, it behooves us to use those gifts in the same way, freely and with merciful grace toward our fellow-believers. A steward in New Testament times was a person of responsibility, hired to manage and protect property that belonged to his master. He was charged to protect his charge as if it belonged to him. Our stewardship is one of grace. Peter uses an interesting word here, "manifold." God's grace in Scripture refers to a divine attribute and a divine attitude. Our common word "Gracious" approximates the idea, but Biblical grace goes far beyond human graciousness. While Scripture teaches that God saves us from our sins because of His grace toward us, it also teaches that God's grace flows to us abundantly and constantly for many other uses and blessings in our lives. We need that grace to live above our begrudging humanity. We need it to take our pride captive and replace our pride with humble grace as we labor with other pilgrims. Paul warns us not to receive God's grace in vain. (2 Corinthians 6:1-10) If we study this lesson in its context, we readily learn that Paul is not suggesting that God's saving grace can be taken in vain,

but the grace that enables us to minister that grace to other believers can be—and sadly often is—received in vain. Immediately upon framing this exhortation, Paul goes into a list of things that he labors to accomplish, beginning with “Giving no offense in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed....” How did Paul accomplish the many difficulties that he names? By not receiving God’s grace in vain, but by receiving it and using it to minister to other believers as freely as the Lord gave it to him.

3. *If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.* As we consider our personal ministry toward other believers, we must face that we can do precious little without words. The words that we use in our interaction with other Pilgrims must be framed by “...the oracles of God.” Literally, “oracles” refers to holy writings, to Scripture. God doesn’t sanctify our imagination and tell us to become creative in our faith. He emphasizes throughout Scripture that He has provided us with a full and complete source of information and instruction for all that we do in our faith-walk. In recent years, I have sadly often encountered men, sometimes preachers, who openly claim that the New Testament actually says next to nothing about the details of how and what a New Testament church should do and not do, concluding that God has given us freedom to choose our own path and way. Do these men never read 2 Timothy 3:14-17? I suggest that this attitude reveals more than its fans suspect. They have read the Scriptures, but they have consciously chosen to ignore them and to go their own way rather than submitting to God’s way. God clearly predicts the outcome of this mindset. Read the last verse of the Old Testament Book of Judges. Doing what is right in our own eyes always leads to the confusion and to the judgments of the Lord that fill the pages of Judges. I call this willful ignorance, an attitude that Peter associates with the wicked people who deny the Second Coming, not with faithful servants of God. (2 Peter 3:5)

4. *...if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever.* Our ministry is commanded and directed by the Lord. Our ability to serve in that ministry with honor to our Lord is also commanded by Him. We are commanded to use what He gives us, in the way He directed us to use it, and to use it always to glorify Him, not ourselves.

Whether we use the word “Ministry” to refer to a preacher or pastor or in the broader sense of the word’s New Testament use, the word deals with serving God by serving others. To the extent that any man begins to think and to do things based on his personal interest, he has failed his ministry, and he shall never glorify God as long as he follows the sparks of his own self-made fire. (Isaiah 50:11)

Although Peter wrote to a collection of otherwise unknown believers in what we know as the northern region of modern Turkey, his words richly instruct our faith today. Are we listening? Do we seek the Lord’s glory or the warmth of our own fire? How we use what the Lord has given us reveals the answer to these questions. Based on what other believers see in us, how might they answer these questions about us?

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor