

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Jesus' Example Applied to Life: All Believers

Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. (1 Peter 3:8–9, KJV 1900)

Scripture fully instructs the believer in all areas of thought and conduct. Most of our problems occur when we choose either to ignore Scripture's teachings or force our wrested interpretations onto Scripture instead of allowing Scripture to refine and govern our interpretations. When I first started preaching, the two older preachers whom I viewed as my fathers in the ministry routinely walked me through a highly informative exercise. They would have me look at two Scriptures that appear to contradict each other. They would emphasize the apparent contradiction and ask me to resolve the apparent conflict. As Bible believers, we do not believe that Scripture contradicts itself. Any appearance of contradiction results from our misreading or misinterpreting Scripture. Thus my challenge was repeatedly to find the correct interpretation of both Scriptures that resolved the apparent contradiction. We may easily adopt a myopic view of one passage and arrive at a false interpretation and, therefore, a false idea. When we allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, seeking the interpretation of one passage that harmonizes with other Scriptures, we are more likely to arrive at the right interpretation of our passage, the idea that the Holy Spirit intended when He directed the human writer to write the passage.

As I read our study passage, I reflect on the sadly typical reaction that so many believers foster when they interact with believers who hold to a different interpretation of Scripture to theirs. Do they exemplify Peter's exhortation in these verses, or do they appear to enjoy and promote debate and conflict? The passage does not teach that God's truth in Scripture is fluid or changing, so that two people agreeing on any idea becomes God's relativistic "Truth." Throughout the New Testament, we repeatedly encounter bedrock truths that Scripture forbids us to alter or to compromise in our beliefs. Think of Paul's "...no small dissension and disputation..." in Acts 15 regarding the basis for our belief regarding salvation. Consider Paul's sharp rebuke of the Galatians whom he charges have forsaken the truth of the gospel for another Jesus and another gospel. (Galatians 1:6-10)

In writing the passage before us, Peter addresses believers in one fellowship and one region. We should begin with the premise that they were taught and agreed on the basic doctrines of

Biblical truth, likely by Peter himself. This exhortation does not appear to deal with professed believers who hold to conflicting ideas on the basis of salvation; by God's grace or by a blend of grace and human works, our belief included as a human work. (John 6:29)¹

Believers in a given local church or believers within a common fellowship of churches are clearly under Peter's teaching in this lesson. Go back to his opening address, and identify the named audience to whom he wrote this letter. We will examine this lesson from that perspective.

¹Quibble as they might, modern Christians who say that belief is not a work, so teaching that a person must believe to in some way complete the process of the new birth is a categorical contradiction to Jesus' own teachings on the question. In this context, some people asked Jesus the question, what they should do to work the works of God, works that God commands and approves. Jesus answered their question in a clear, straight-forward manner. We should accept His teachings over the contradictory teachings of folks today who try to tell us that belief is not a work, so requiring a person to believe to obtain the new birth is supposedly not salvation by works. If we accept Jesus' words, requiring belief is a form of new birth by works. The same apostle who wrote this account affirms the point in 1 John 5:1. The believer is already born again, so requiring belief for the new birth, and thus prior to it, cannot be defended as Biblical. Controversial as this idea is to modern Christian thought, Jesus makes the point, and we must believe Him over any other witness to the contrary. A few years ago, I heard a sermon by a man who had formerly been a strong defender of salvation by grace alone; after changing to the modernist view, he preached that, since God enables our belief, the folks who believed his former teaching should not be upset with him, because he still believed in salvation by grace. His new idea of grace was that God applies some of His grace directly to our sins and some of His grace to cause us to believe, but our belief remains a prerequisite to new birth. Jesus never taught in double-speak, so His preachers should not do so. The man's views in fact taught a morphed view of salvation by works in contradiction to Jesus' words in John 6:29.

1. ...**be ye all of one mind**.... This goal is to be our objective. Rather than looking for points of disagreement, the Holy Spirit commands us to look for points of agreement, and to focus on them in our interactions. We've all observed the bored adolescent who enjoys creating a conflict between two people. He/she creates the conflict and then sits on the sidelines, entertained by the clash. Adults who retain the personal immaturity of an adolescent may act similarly. We've all met folks who seem to attract conflict as a magnet attracts iron. Peter's words speak especially to those who are so inclined. The points that follow will outline the process by which we cultivate this one mind in a world so full of conflict and sinful tensions.
2. ...**having compassion one of another**.... Compassion in a problematic situation tends to foster compassion in others. Peter teaches us to pursue this exemplary compassion that nudges those around us to show the same compassion. Rather than magnifying faults in others, Peter directs us to conduct ourselves so that those around us will be inclined toward compassion, not toward magnifying faults in others. If we choose the course of emphasizing faults or failures, who among us can survive? Look in the mirror!
3. ...**love as brethren**.... The concept of Biblical fellowship among believers is not a casual take-it-or-leave-it idea. It is a **Biblical commandment**, so any conduct that leads believers in any other direction is wrong—sinful. Brothers may tussle with each other, but, when faced with reality, they will stand firm on the fact that they are members of the same family, and they will stick together against any who would divide them. I love the quip, "He ain't heavy; he's my brother." It captures Peter's point nicely. Instead of setting ourselves above other believers, Peter commands us to view each other as brothers and sisters in the same family.
4. ...**be pitiful**.... Peter's intent here goes a step beyond his "...having compassion one of another" point. Inevitably, we shall at times encounter fellow-believers who fail the "...one of another..." model of conduct. Regardless of our brother's conduct, Peter commands us to be full of compassion. Look for compassion in your own heart toward your brothers and sisters, whether they reciprocate or not. Avoid anything that cultivates criticism or fault-finding against your spiritual family.
5. ...**be courteous**.... The idea of courtesy calls for friendly, benign (Beneficial, never harmful or derogatory) attitudes and actions

toward others. At times other believers may say or do things that "Push our buttons," that irritate us or that fall short of how we believe they should act. How do we react to their irritation? Rather than responding in kind, pushing their "Irritation button," Peter requires us to respond with benign grace, courtesy.

6. ...**Not rendering evil for evil**.... Having been retired for several years now, I have recently paused to reflect on some of my business experiences. Interestingly, I focused on some of my notably frustrating moments in that career. At times, I responded in ways that I would not today change in any way. At other times, I reacted in ways that revealed my frustrations. As I reflect, the thought occurs to me quite clearly. Had I followed the Biblical principle that Peter here teaches, the outcome, even in my business experience, would have been far better than it unfolded with my lesser reactions. Our broken nature is strongly inclined to react in kind. Speak harshly to me, and I will respond with equal harshness. One would think that, eventually, we would pause to analyze the outcome of this behavior. If it never works, why do we continue to practice that same broken behavior?
7. ...**or railing for railing**.... "Evil" refers to actions. "Railing" refers to words. Peter closes the door and locks it shut. Whether in actions or words, when others treat us wrongly, God commands us to show them godly grace.
8. ...**but contrariwise blessing**.... I've often wondered. If we consistently responded with kind gracious words to those who treat us in evil ways or speak to us—or about us—in false, angry railings, what outcome might we see? How would they react? Yes, at first they'd react in speechless shock. Peter commands the same principle that Solomon taught. "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger." (Proverbs 15:1 KJVP) When we find ourselves on the receiving end of sinful wrath, a kind, soft answer, regardless of the other person's immediate reaction, will always produce better results than if we answered in angry kind.
9. ...**knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing**. Peter has taken us step by step through the attitudes and behaviors that enable us to "...be of the same mind." In commanding us to practice these godly concepts, God intends a good outcome for us. He has called us to live as "...children of light." (Ephesians 5:8) He has stored rich

blessings in these behaviors. We shall never experience those blessings apart from this conduct. He has called us to obey these teachings. Shall we show that we seek to be obedient children by striving to practice them? Or shall we take the alternate path and ensure His chastening rod on our lives?

The path of righteousness is seldom easy, but it is always right. And it always results in the Lord's smiling blessings, never His frowning rod. What path shall we choose today, tomorrow, and throughout the tomorrows that remain in our pilgrimage?

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