

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Shepherd and Bishop

Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls. (1 Peter 2:24–25, KJV 1900)

When we read the word "bare" (Current spelling "Bear"), we think of a burden, and that is Peter's intent in this lesson. If we can imagine our sins as a weight, Jesus took the weight, the legal weight of our sins onto Himself. He took them to the "tree," the cross, and there He disposed of their weight. I shift between amusement and frustration almost every Easter when I read the silly debate in the religious section of local newspapers over whether the Jews or the Romans were responsible for Jesus' death. These people claim to be informed Christians, but they apparently failed to read Jesus' own words.

Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father. (John 10:17-18 KJVP)

Earlier in this lesson Jesus says that he shall lay down His life for His sheep. In these two verses, He emphasizes the point. When Jesus said, "No man taketh it from me..." He meant what He said. The right answer to the silly question is that neither the Romans nor the Jews killed Jesus. He consciously, willingly, and intentionally gave up His life on His terms and at His time. In Acts 3:15, Peter charged the Jews with killing "...the prince of life..." He is charging them with their murderous intent; there is no real contradiction at all.

Jesus took the legal burden of our sins to the cross, died for them, and satisfied God's righteous law for them. In reality, He took the legal penalty of our sins onto Himself, the real burden of our sins that must be resolved before we can have peace with God.

...that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness. Apart from Jesus' work for us and in us, we would have no interest in either God or in doing righteousness. However, Jesus' work in destroying our sins "...on the tree," becomes the power by which the Holy Spirit enters our lives in the new birth, and changes us, giving us, for the first time, a hatred of our sins, and a love for God and righteousness. Titus 2:11-14 provides the details of this work. Not only does the new birth impart a new life into us, the life of God, but it also

imparts a new nature and a new appetite for righteousness. He now convicts us by the permanently indwelling Holy Spirit, and by the new nature that He gave us in the new birth that we "...should live unto righteousness." You will occasionally encounter believers who think of the Holy Spirit like an occasional visitor. Sometimes He shows up and works His will in us, and sometimes He "Leaves us to ourselves." No Scripture ever so much as implies that the Holy Spirit is so random or occasional in the life of a born-again person. Quite the opposite, Scripture teaches that that indwelling Holy Spirit permanently abides in us.

...by whose stripes ye were healed. This phrase—in fact the whole lesson—builds on the language of Isaiah 53. Notice Isaiah's words.

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5 KJVP)

In the form of Jewish poetry—repetition of the idea, not rhyming sounds—Isaiah drives the point home regarding what Jesus accomplished in His death. Rather than describing four distinct events, Isaiah effectively gives us four lines of Hebrew poetry. The same idea is repeated four times in different words.

1. He was wounded for our transgressions.
2. He was bruised for our iniquities. This line effectively restates, and thereby emphasizes the first line.
3. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him. The same idea is emphasized further in this third line. We have peace with God at the cost of His life. He took the weight of our sins on Himself and destroyed it.
4. With His stripes we are healed. In our contemporary Christian culture, you will hear frequent mention of this phrase from the health and wealth gospel teachers, but they ignore its contextual meaning. They ignore the context and attempt to apply these words to physical healing from disease or illness. Jesus healed many people, and He still does so, but the point of this passage deals with the sin disease,

not with physical illnesses. Isaiah's statement says too much for the folks who trumpet these words. They offer healing on conditions; if their hearers will do certain things, they might be healed. You will notice that potential healing is not the point that Isaiah makes. He states a present fact, "...we are healed." In harmony with the first three lines of the verse, Isaiah adds an incredible emphasis by this fourth statement. In each of the four lines, he says the same thing, adding emphasis with each repetition.

For ye were as sheep going astray.... Peter identifies his readers as sheep, but, like sheep, they at one time in their past were far too eager to go astray, to leave the Shepherd and the fold, to do their own thing. In the analogy of sheep and goats, particularly in terms of Jesus' lesson on the final Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46), what is a child of God before regeneration? Is he a goat who is changed into a sheep? Or is he a dead-to-God sheep, acting more like a goat than a sheep? I suggest the second of these two descriptions. Peter is describing how these people lived prior to their new birth. They were constantly—and only—inclined to go in the opposite direction from God and righteousness.

...but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls. Both in the analogy of a sheep's behavior and in the grammar of the verse, the sheep is passive in this action, and the Shepherd/Bishop is active. It isn't that the sheep decided that he was being a naughty sheep, so he should reform and go home. Even as the Shepherd/Bishop takes His merciful and loving action in this lesson, the sheep is actively "...going astray." So was every one of us when the Holy Spirit in the new birth came to us, gave us eternal life and changed our nature.

This pattern appears in Paul's teaching as well.

For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:3-7 KJVP)

At the very moment when we were foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers (different) lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another, the kindness and love of God acted in the new birth. Not only did He

not save us because we did good works, but He saved us at a time when we weren't doing any good works, none whatever. We were actively engaged in sin when divine grace mercifully entered our lives and effected this miraculous change. Because of Scripture's description of us prior to our new birth, comfortably living in sin and enjoying it, the whole idea of salvation by works misses the point of Scripture. Likewise, the idea that God in some way uses human agency in the new birth fails, for no human agent can alter the sinner's love for sin that he is actively engaging prior to the new birth. If, as Scripture consistently teaches, we were actively engaged in our sins up to the moment of the new birth, nothing could possibly reach our lost state other than divine grace and mercy. And that is what Scripture teaches in Titus 3 and elsewhere. Paul's personal experience on the Damascus Road also affirms this truth. One moment he was angrily, eagerly pursuing saints to kill or imprison them for their faith in Jesus; the next moment he is stricken to the ground. One moment he despises this Jesus; the next moment he calls Him "Lord." And all of this was wholly unexpected by Paul. The God of grace—and the grace of God—is the only power sufficient to accomplish the new birth in a sinner.

This miracle of grace should not surprise any serious Bible student. Think about Paul's Damascus Road encounter with God. At the very moment when the event takes place, Paul isn't struggling with deep conviction or a guilty conscience over his sinful life. What does Scripture say that he is doing?

And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. (Acts 9:1-2 KJVP)

Paul was actively, eagerly, aggressively acting on his "...threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord..." If you check the meaning of the Greek word translated "suddenly" in Acts 9:3, you will discover that the word means "Unexpectedly." If Paul had been struggling with conviction in his conscience, the Lord's appearance would not have been a surprise to him. However, given the stated testimony of Scripture, that he was acting on his "...threatenings and slaughter," for the Lord to appear to him, strike him to the ground, and turn his whole life around was indeed a surprise, wholly unexpected by Paul.

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor