

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## Spiritual Addition

*And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. (2 Peter 1:5-9, KJV 1900)*

The Bible is quite clear in its distinction of things that God does sovereignly and wholly independent of human means or instrumentality from things that He commands us to do—and holds us both responsible and accountable to do. It is emphatically clear in its teachings regarding God's moral commandments to humanity, and especially to His people. The obvious outcome should be clear, though people often seem to get dreadfully confused with these two ideas. Some folks will insist that man must in some way contribute to God's exclusive work, requiring the unregenerate to do what Scripture teaches that they cannot do, while others go to the opposite extreme idea and claim that God does everything. Scripture rejects both ideas as extreme and errant. What does Scripture teach? God doesn't sovereignly and irresistibly do what He commands us to do, and we cannot do what He teaches in Scripture that He alone can and does do. Respect for both of these boundaries would eliminate much confusion and error from the community of believers. Simply applied to our study passage, Peter not only commands his readers to add certain specific traits and behaviors to their faith, he urges them to give "...all diligence..." to do so. If God intended to do this adding, there would clearly be no need to admonish us to give diligence to do what He decreed to do.

The many "If" conditional statements in the Bible add tremendous weight to the point that God has imposed a personal, moral accountability and responsibility onto individuals for their conduct. The final Day of Judgment would be a farce, not a righteous judgment, if Scripture's moral commandments from God were anything less than His moral commandments to accountable moral creatures. Likewise, all of the conditional promises of blessings to born-again people in and for obedience would be nonsensical unless God holds us responsible for those actions. He holds us both responsible and accountable to Him and to His moral law for our conduct. If He intended to perform that moral action, either directly or indirectly, there would be no logical or moral reason to command us to do so, much less hold us

responsible for our failure to do so. In our study passage, Peter closes his list of seven additions to be made to our faith with one of those "If" conditions. "...if these things be in you and abound...." How do these things get to be "...in..." us and to abound? At the beginning of the list, Peter commands his readers to "...add..." them to their faith. If a reader obeys and adds these things to his/her faith, then they are present and abound. If a reader disobeys and refuses to add them, the reader lacks those things, a sad consequence that Peter will fully describe in this context.

Peter adds more weight to this truth. "...they make you...." Conduct forms our moral character. It "Makes" us the moral--or immoral--person that we are. Peter is not addressing robots whom God orchestrates by cosmic puppet strings. He is addressing regenerated, living children of God to take control of their minds (Philippians 4:8-9) and bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), using them for God and His glory, and not for satisfaction of their own sinful appetites. If we obey Peter's commandment, that obedience reshapes our lives to the glory of our God, "...they make you." If we fail this commandment, we also face the consequences of our actions, "...blind, cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten...." How sadly pathetic for a child of God, born of the Holy Spirit, and God's law written within, to so consciously choose to ignore that conviction and walk contrary to it as to forget what God in grace did for and to him.

On the first extreme mentioned above, we claiming the ability to do what God alone says in Scripture that He does, you see the error of eternal salvation supposedly accomplished by human effort or instrumentality, including the claimed ability to cause your own new birth, despite Jesus reminding Nicodemus that the new birth comes from above, the exclusive work of the Holy Spirit, blowing where He pleases. (John 3:1-10) With the second extreme, claiming that God alone performs what He commands His people to do, you will occasionally see one of two extreme ideas. The first idea is quite rare--thank the Lord--but it does occasionally appear. This idea claims that God literally causes every event or action that occurs. Advocates of this

idea face the obvious moral dilemma that their idea makes God the cause of sin. They will contrive various philosophical ideas in their attempt to dodge that dilemma, but, in the end, their effort fails. Only a few advocates of this idea dare to face the immoral consequences of their error head-on. I once read from the pen of one such man; by partially quoting Romans 6:17 and misrepresenting the verse, he claimed that Paul said that he thanked God that the Romans had lived as the servants of sin. God is to be thanked that we serve sin? Blasphemy!

A second more common form of this error dresses more respectably, but in the end is as foreign to Scripture's truth as the first. I have heard advocates of this error say, "In my life, God does all the good, and I do all the sinning." If in fact God does all the righteousness that we ever perform, pray tell why the New Testament is so full of commandments such as those that we now examine in our study passage? If God intends to "Do" all of the righteousness that He commands me to do, why bother commanding me to do it? He shall do it Himself. Advocates of this idea conveniently leave a vast unexplained middle ground of moral quicksand that they never explain. If God supposedly knows that you only sin, "...left to yourself," why does He ever "Leave" you to yourself? Does He not indirectly contribute to your sin if He knowingly "Leaves" you? If He knows that you can and shall only sin when left to yourself, He must shoulder some responsibility for leaving you in a condition in which you could not do otherwise than sin. Aside from this moral dilemma, advocates of this idea fail to support the idea that God ever "Leaves" His children to themselves with even one passage, while the Bible overflows with passages that teach the opposite. "I will never leave thee..." (Hebrews 13:5; notice the outcome of this blessed promise in context) "...never leave...nor forsake..." hardly reads as compatible with "Left to ourselves," does it?

This idea wholly ignores the vast teaching of Scripture regarding the moral and spiritual effects of the new birth. It presumes, errantly so, that we are just as immoral and depraved after regeneration as before, something that Scripture confronts and refutes with every commandment addressed to regenerate children of God in the Bible. Review briefly Jesus' words to Nicodemus in the third chapter of John. Apart from this new birth of which Jesus speaks, no one is capable of either seeing or of entering the kingdom of God. Only by the change made in the new birth does a human being either see or enter the kingdom of which Jesus spoke to Nicodemus. Visit the third chapter of Romans where Paul cites some twelve or thirteen Old Testament Scriptures to emphatically describe the depravity of the unregenerate--not born again--person. Do you see any indication whatever that a person in this condition is at all interested in seeing or entering the Lord's kingdom? None whatever.

Where does this interest in God's kingdom originate? Ah, Jesus makes the point clearly. When He performs the new birth, He imparts an interest in God and in God's kingdom in the person. Other Scriptures speak of God's writing His law in their hearts and minds, of their now having a moral conscience that is sensitive to sin and to righteousness. Do you really think that a person who matches Paul's Romans 3 description of the depraved sinner would be interested in attending church on a Sunday morning and worshipping God or visiting those in need to minister to them? What transforms a black sinner into such a person? The new birth doesn't merely give its object a new opportunity to start fresh with God, the populist teaching of our day. It gives someone spiritual, eternal life who, in the specific sense of spiritual life and relationship to God, was dead, wholly dead in his sins. (Ephesians 2:1)

When Peter writes that our adding these things to our faith "...make you..." he describes our applying the moral and spiritual graces of new birth to our minds and bodies as God commands (Not irresistibly decrees) us to do. Through the indwelling Holy Spirit, God indeed provides the necessary conviction and ability, but He commands us to put His presence and grace to use. He does not do "...all the doing" for us in these things. He enables us in the new birth, and He convicts and directs us through the indwelling Holy Spirit and His law written into the very fabric of our new being.

Teaching a similar truth, Paul commands the Romans to "...be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind..." (Romans 12:1-2) When Paul in another context teaches this same truth, he does not write that God does all the doing and willing of our obedience, but that He works in us "...to will and to do of his good pleasure." (Philippians 2:12) Paul fills this context with one commandment after another that illustrates what we are commanded to do in the performing of that which the Lord commands through His abiding work within us. In the immediately prior verse, Paul gave the Philippians a broad directive, "...work out." This is something that Paul commanded the Philippians to do. He did not tell them not to bother; that God will do all the doing in His own good time.

We shall linger in this context of Second Peter. The lesson is clear. We cannot always plumb the depths of God's mystery, but He leaves us without excuse to grow in godly knowledge (From Peter's present list, virtue and knowledge) in our understanding what God commands us to do and not to do. Peter reduces this truth to simple mathematics, addition and subtraction. Subtract the fruitless, sinful things that your sinful nature embraces, and add these seven graces to the "...like precious faith" that God has given you. That faith is the foundation. Now He commands us to build on it, and He does not leave us to ourselves as to what to add or how to do it. But He also does not indicate that He will add them if we do not.

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Worship service each Sunday  
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10:30 A. M.  
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