

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

Volume 28, Number 30

July 29, 2012



## God's Grace: Supreme Motivation to Godly Conduct

*And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear: Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God. (1 Peter 1:17-21, KJV 1900)*

Our English language can be quite a challenge for people who did not begin their life in an English-speaking culture. One word can take on diverse meanings, but typically the context in which the word appears will point to the correct meaning. Consider how many ways our language uses the word "Trunk." From an elephant's snout, to the storage compartment in the rear of our cars, to a decorative box in our home where we store family heirlooms; what a diverse array of meanings we have for one little word.

A key word in our study passage is the simple "If" that we see at the beginning of the quote. The word often states an unfulfilled condition.

*If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it. (Isaiah 1:19-20 KJVP)*

Here the Lord directed Isaiah to admonish and to warn His people regarding their choices of conduct. They faced two lifestyles, but, like their modern counterparts, they seemed intent on choosing foolishly, but hoped to avoid the consequences of their sinful choices. God warns them and us in these verses. When you make a bad choice, you shall surely face the Lord's judgments, be they the "...good of the land..." or the sword. Choose to be willing and obedient; do not doubt the outcome. God has promised the good of the land. Do not overlook that God requires two actions, not one. To be willing refers to our attitude about obeying God. Any man who has served as a pastor for any length of time has observed people in his congregation who were quite obedient, but they seemed to choose obedience more out of reluctant fear of the consequences if they didn't than out of a joyful and willing attitude. The blessings promised in this lesson come from a truly willing attitude, not from a reluctant disposition. When I first started preaching, I was occasionally disappointed when I heard preachers tell about how long they resisted their deep convictions to preach, seemingly always

emphasizing how sinful their rebellion was, almost as if rebellious sin was a merit badge for their calling. How can a man who boasts of his rebellious disobedience preach to people that God commands them to be **willingly** obedient? In this passage, "If" holds out two behavioral choices and links those choices with the certain judgments of the Lord that relate to them.

This same little word, "If," often appears in our language to describe a fact, followed by logical outcomes from that fact. In this use, "If" is a near synonym of "Since." "Since A is true, B follows." Or "**if** A equals 2, and **if** B equals 3, A plus B must equal 5."

There is no real question that Peter's first readers of this letter in fact were calling on the Father. Review the opening verses of the letter. Thus, the logical use of "If" in this lesson follows the second point above. It is equivalent to "Since ye call on the Father...."

In conversation with contemporary Christians, I find it sadly disappointing that most of them, even as they claim not to believe that their eternal salvation does not rely on their works, will in one way or another equate their eternal status with what they do. When they first encounter the idea that eternal salvation is wholly of God and not of anything that they do directly or indirectly, their first reaction is often, "Why, if I believed that, I'd just go out and sin to my heart's content, because my eternal salvation does not depend on what I do." They seem to wholly miss the consistent Biblical pattern that associates our faith in God with godly conduct, not with abominable sin.

In our study verses, Peter associates our godly conduct, both calling on God in prayer and living in godly fear, with our belief that our redemption did not occur by what we did or do. For the inspired New Testament writers, a strong belief in God's wholly sufficient and exclusive role in our eternal salvation never rationalized indulgence in sin, but rather a vibrant walk of faith that glorifies God for His "Amazing grace." For Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit to write these words, the stronger our

faith in God's saving grace the stronger our faith and hope in God become.

The underlying attitude that the, "If I believed that, I'd live my fill of sin" reveals is wholly alien to New Testament faith. It clearly builds on self-promotion, not glorifying God in our lives. (1 Corinthians 6:20) Put this attitude into a loving home and see how alien it appears. Do these people really believe that the more they show their love to their own children the more they encourage their children to rebel and abandon the values they learned in the home? When their own parents showered them with love, did they respond in this way?

When Jesus taught that self-denial, self-denial to the extent of a symbolic crucifixion, was a fundamental requirement of true discipleship, He put any form or degree of self-promotion attitude in the holy spotlight and condemned it. "What is in it for me?" "What is not in it for me?" "Who gets the credit for this?" All of these questions reveal an underlying self-centered attitude that, based on Jesus' words, excludes those who embrace the attitude from authentic discipleship. (Matthew 10:38; 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; 14:27) Five repetitions of an idea in the gospels compel our attention. For Jesus and first century Jews, a cross did not represent a cute piece of jewelry. It depicted the primary method by which the Romans implemented the death sentence against criminals. It would be equivalent to our referring to the gas chamber or the electric chair.

We glorify God in and by our lives as we call on God for His direction in our life choices, when we conduct our pilgrimage in godly fear, not pride-filled ego. What else matters, seriously? What else should we righteously consider in our attitudes and conduct? If we put these verses in the context of First Peter and the problem of suffering, often as persecuted Christians, the point becomes even stronger. When the wicked world in which we live is armed and poised to persecute, perhaps even kill you for your faith in Christ, will you still call on the Father and live your life in godly fear? And Peter's admonition is an emphatic "Yes."

Peter's use of "sojourning" in this context proves equally instructive. If we live our life with our eyes focused on the world around us, we are liable to settle into thinking that this is all there is. When things in this life fall apart, everything that we cherish crumbles, and we react in despair. However, once we entrench the truth of Scripture into our minds that we are "Sojourners," strangers who travel through a foreign land on our way to home, our whole attitude toward anything that we encounter in this life changes. Whatever we face, however disappointing at the moment, becomes a momentary hiccup on our way to a better country, home, ah, sweet, glorious home.

Having embraced this sojourner's outlook, we logically contemplate the reality of our arrival home. What is it like? What is the security of our safe

arrival? How is it that we know about this place? How did it become our home? Thus, the sojourner's mindset becomes the key to unlock Peter's lesson to our minds. He addresses these questions and answers them.

How does this sojourner's outlook impact our lives? I could tell you about many visits that I've paid to godly people, true sojourners, as they approached their hour of departure. Early in my ministry, I had a somewhat immature notion that I'd go to visit these people and comfort them. I can't describe the surprise that I encountered when repeatedly I walked away from those visits with the sense that those people gave me far more comfort than I gave them. I recall one incident that will exemplify the experience. A dear saint was in the intensive care unit of a local hospital. She'd had a major heart attack and was on a ventilator and all kinds of other equipment. With all the tubes in her mouth, she couldn't speak, but we had a communicative discussion nonetheless. During the conversation, I made a comment about her wanting to go home. She smiled and nodded. Then I pointed horizontally in the direction of her home from the hospital. She immediately reacted with a frown. When I responded, "You want to go home," and pointed up, she smiled and nodded her approval. I also recall a pastor who was highly beloved for his tender and encouraging visits to people in the hospital. He had a way of saying "Home," referring to heaven, that left no doubt in the minds of any who heard him about how strongly he believed what he said. Scripture repeatedly affirms these observations. I cherish the words of Scripture that describe Rachel's dying hour. "...as her soul was in departing (for she died)...." (Genesis 35:18) When Jesus took the two disciples to the mount of transfiguration, Luke's record indicates that they witnessed Jesus talking to Moses and Elijah "...of his decease that he should accomplish at Jerusalem." (Luke 9:31) Interestingly, the word translated "...decease..." in this verse is the Greek root for our English word "Exit" or "Exodus." Jesus' death was not something that the Romans or Jews forced upon Him. It was something that He "...accomplished..." Himself.

The sojourner's mindset looks past the trials of the moment and holds firmly with "...faith and hope..." to God. Hope in Scripture is never a senseless, unrealistic wish. It is joyful anticipation and expectation. The godly believer does not question his/her future with the Lord. He/she looks forward to it, lives in excited joy to think about it, and fully expects it. Folks, we are on a journey to a good land. Keep it in your heart as you travel.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church  
16434 Woodruff  
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor