

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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The Pilgrim Ethic: Ambassadors on Assignment

Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king. Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. (1 Peter 2:17–20, KJV 1900)

Not only does Scripture teach that faithful believers are pilgrims in a foreign land, but it also teaches that part of our official assignment in this foreign land is to serve as faithful ambassadors of our homeland. Peter's teaching instructs our ambassador's assignment.

Honour all men. To honor someone does not mean that we approve of their sinful conduct. It means that we honor their position as God's creatures, whether they do so or not. When Jesus taught the disciples (Sermon on the Mount, Matthew, fifth chapter) to love their enemies, He did not intend that we regard them as our best friends. Biblical love carries far more moral implications than sentimental, and we owe obedience to God's moral commandments to everyone, whether they obey that ethic or not.

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. (Matthew 5:44 KJVP)

If my enemy lies about me, God doesn't give me a free pass to lie in turn about him. If my enemy curses me, God doesn't give me the green light to curse my enemy. I owe my Christian ethic, and the behavior that it commands and compels, whether others follow it or not. This conduct honors them as I believe Peter commands.

Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. (James 3:9-10 KJVP)

James makes the same point in this passage. However dreadfully an individual may dishonor God's image in which man was created, godly believers are commanded to avoid this kind of double-speak. The more we curse another man the less God will honor our blessing of Him.

I cannot leave this passage without one side-note. This lesson poses an obvious difficulty onto those who believe that God causes everything that

occurs. If God causes everything that occurs, why would He cause something that He directed one of His inspired writers to conclude "...ought not so to be"? If it "...ought not so to be," why didn't God just not cause it in the first place? The lesson exemplifies the foolishness of false interpretations such as this.

Love the brotherhood. A believer owes more than mere honor to fellow-members of the family of God. For a full study of the moral implications of Biblical love, study 1 Corinthians 13, especially verses 4-7. Every verb that the Holy Spirit directed Paul to use to define and describe Biblical love is an action verb, not a sentimental, feeling verb. Our western culture has wholly corrupted this Biblical concept of godly love. What is the result of this corruption? A professing Christian rationalizes that he may muster up some kind of soft, sentimental feeling toward someone, and he has satisfied the Biblical commandment, even as his actions heap sinful actions against that person. Wrong!

Fear God. Honour the king. Although the excerpt contains two sentences and, thus, two complete thoughts, I suggest that our conduct in one action inevitably shapes and either makes or destroys our conduct in the other. A believer cannot truly despise the king, at least in terms of God's institution of civil government, whether the king lives up to God's "Job description" or not, while claiming to fear God. If we fear God, we are commanded with equal weight to honor the civil ruler or government under which we live.

Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. I fully appreciate that certain professions or work cultures may require labor unions, but I sincerely suggest that, if both employees (servants) and masters (employers or supervisors) obeyed God's commandments to them, there would be no need. Peter directs us to take the extra step in this directive. We might easily obey the commandment to be subject to a soft-spoken, gracious supervisor or employer, but Peter nudges a major extra step. He commands us to also be subject to the forward, imposing employer.

For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.

Although the principle might apply to a variety of situations in our lives, contextually Peter applies it to the master-servant, or employer-employee situation. For my whole adult life till retirement, I worked in a secular career. I have both observed and experienced the truth of these words. Seldom does a believer get into trouble by enduring wrongs with longsuffering grace, but we invariably suffer—rightly—when we react with personal gain or interest at the heart of our decisions. Several years ago I was complaining to Sandra that, over my years in secular work, employees often sought me out for counsel, but sadly people in the church try to pretend that they live above problems and seldom sought counsel from me or, for that matter, from other pastors. She made a very wise observation. When the Lord called me to preach, He didn't just call me to minister to the people in the church where I serve. He called me to minister to His children wherever I encounter them. My giving aid to people at my workplace was no less ministering to children of God than my work in the church.

For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. In recent years, I have noticed an informative behavior in people who are devoted to preserving their sinful conduct. They always manage to line up a list of people in their lives who are responsible for their troubles. They refuse to acknowledge that they are personally responsible for their life, their choices, and, yes indeed, for the predictable consequences of their bad choices. The "Blame game" is a sure way to spot rationalized sin. You may not immediately know the sin, but the attitude of always blaming others for your own bad, sinful choices shines like a beacon on the person's sinful rationalizations.

God is not in the manipulation business of mystically turning every sinful decision that you make into His glory. He warns us in Scripture of a rule that He will not compromise.

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. (Galatians 6:7 KJVP)

When we sow to our sinful flesh, we reap the Biblical consequences of that "Crop." When we sow to the interests of the Holy Spirit and God's commandments, we reap the blessings.

Peter will not compromise his point. When we commit a fault, a sin, there is no glory in that action for God, and He will not orchestrate our sin to whitewash it. If we listen attentively to the testimony of the indwelling Holy Spirit, we shall often see the ugly face of our faults, our sins. And if we heed the Holy Spirit's conviction for those sins, we listen to our broken heart and endure the chastening of the Lord, praying that we might learn His lessons and grow wiser by the experience. God gets no glory for our faults, and we gain no good.

Peter turns the point to his purpose. If we abide in well-doing, even when we suffer for it, our longsuffering is "...acceptable with God." Now we can legitimately honor God by this behavior.

I recall as a young man in the ministry hearing a story about my uncle, a wise and respected minister. Some sinful tensions had erupted among a few people, and my uncle was laboring to resolve them. He and a couple other men were visiting one of the offended parties in their effort to find a solution. They ran headlong into sinful anger. As they were preparing to leave, my uncle observed, "Well, at this point, the only thing we can do is to pray for the Lord to show us a remedy that we cannot find." The angry wife of the man they were visiting scowled at my uncle, "Brother Holder, why don't you just pray then?" The man who told me about this incident said that my uncle fell to his knees like he'd been shot, and he poured out his heart to the Lord. My friend who told of the incident said he had never heard such a tender, pleading prayer in all of his life.

Serving the Lord is not about salving our sinful ego or gaining our personal wishes. It is about seeking, always seeking ways to glorify the Lord in what we say and do. We may say and do many things that boost our sinful ego, but ego and God are never in harmony. I have known a few folks, even a few preachers, who actually enjoy hairsplitting arguments. They at times will even argue for a view that they do not believe, merely for the pleasure of the debate. Inevitably, they may gain their personal pleasure, but they gain it at a dear price; God is never honored in such a process. When did Paul or other New Testament writers ever argue for an idea that they didn't even believe, merely for the sinful pleasure of the dispute? Never! Their example instructs us. The Holy Spirit directs us to the mirror opposite behavior.

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3 KJVP)

What about us shall people recall with godly fondness when we are gone from this world? Will they relish the contention and schisms that we cultivated for our personal entertainment? Or shall they remember us for our meek, longsuffering, forbearing other believers in the love of Christ? Will we leave a reputation for being a peacemaker (Matthew 5:9), or will they remember our hairsplitting contentions? The man who comforts our families at our funeral does not preach our funeral. We preach it with every action we take and every word that we speak. What shall that message be? Will our legacy, what people remember about us, stir people to glorify the Lord?

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor