

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 28, Number 33

August 19, 2012



True Obedience Prompts Sincere Love of God's Children

Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. (1 Peter 1:22–23, KJV 1900)

A careful study of a passage in its context guides us to its right interpretation and avoids many grievous errors. How many bad beliefs grow out of efforts to isolate a verse from its context and force it to appear to teach something that it doesn't teach? In our study passage, redemption has already been accomplished, and the readers' faith and hope is anchored in the Lord. The purification of which Peter here writes has to do with our walk, not with our eternal destiny. The people whom you love are "...brethren..." "Being born again..." identifies what has already occurred, not what is presently taking place.

Over the years I have occasionally (Thank the Lord, not often) observed men who claimed to have discovered more truth than their fellows, but their attitude toward men whom they formerly viewed as fellows, equals in the faith, they now view as inferior and less than brothers in the faith. Simply assessed by the stated principle of this passage, their arrogant attitude and conduct refutes their claimed discovery of deeper truth.

Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth.... Coming to know the truth is a glorious thing. Learning to obey it stabilizes and perpetuates that glory.

Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. (Isaiah 1:16-17 KJVP)

Isaiah wrote to God's people who had become cold and indifferent to their God and to His ways. They needed to repent and change the course of their lives, and these words gave them the roadmap for God's commanded new direction. Washing oneself and keeping clean is akin to purifying one's soul in obeying the truth. These people had become so accustomed to their sinful ways that Isaiah rebukes them with the fact that they must now learn again to do well. They had forgotten. As with Peter's words, this transformed life exhibits two dimensions, one toward God and His truth, and the other a tender and respectful heart toward God's children, particularly those in obvious need.

When Paul rehearsed his Damascus Road experience before a hostile Jewish audience in Jerusalem, he gives us more information about his experience than we read in the ninth chapter of Acts. This is Paul's personal commentary on his experience.

And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord. (Acts 22:16 KJVP)

The godly preacher in Damascus, Ananias, spoke these words to Paul. The Lord has already appeared to Paul, regenerated him, and even called him to his apostleship. For three days after the Damascus Road experience, Paul had been blind. (Acts 9:9) As Ananias visits him and preaches to him, his sight is restored. By analogy, Ananias instructed Paul on how to see clearly, not how to go to heaven when he died. In water baptism, by symbol or analogy, Paul could wash away his sins. Baptism in Scripture is consistently preceded by repentance. **Repentance comes first, followed by baptism.** In the three distinct actions that Ananias commanded Paul to do, Paul would clearly "...obey the truth..." Again, we see the parallel between our study passage and this personal experience in Paul's life. He experientially "...purified his soul..." in obeying the truth that Ananias taught him.

Occasionally, in an age that seems far more concerned with gaining numbers in churches than obeying Scripture, I have encountered the sentiment that says churches and preachers should blindly add members to the church and later worry about teaching them to repent. This attitude flies at cross-purposes to the consistent teaching of Scripture regarding the godly sequence of conversion events. The New Testament gospel always teaches the newly taught believer to repent first and then to submit to baptism. Given the brokenness of our world and of our own selves, all of us, a person who brings his sins with him through baptism is quite likely to defend his sinful conduct and rationalize continuance in it after baptism. Few truths are more clearly taught in Scripture than the right—the godly—sequence of life-changing actions that a believer is commanded to take; believe the

gospel, repent of one's sins, and then be baptized. That is the consistent Biblical model. It should be our consistent teaching model as well. We cannot state without doubt that the man whom Paul admonished the Corinthian Church to forgive and confirm their love to him was the same man whom Paul admonished in the clearest of words to put from them in First Corinthians 5, but most commentaries seem inclined to hold that he was the same man. Of the many errors that Paul confronts and rebukes in First Corinthians, this error alone involves only one man. And of the various issues that Paul addresses in Second Corinthians, believed to have been written some eighteen months after First Corinthians, this passage is the only example dealing with only one man. At the least, we have strong circumstantial evidence that the same man is the subject.

So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. (2 Corinthians 2:7 KJVP)

When the man rationalized and defended his sin, sadly, along with the church, in First Corinthians 5, they were both rebuked by Paul. Both the church and the man needed to repent. However, once the church knew of the man's repentance, Paul commands them to take the initiative and to forgive and to comfort the man. No better Biblical example of "Hate the sin; love the sinner" could be offered. We don't hate the sin by looking the other way or pretending that it doesn't exist. If we accept the teachings of First Corinthians 5, a challenge for many sincere believers who fall short in their Biblical knowledge, we must confront the grave fact that failure to act endangers a church's blessed state with the Lord. While weak believers seem more fearful of how the sinner might react to the church's discipline, Paul warns the Corinthians—and us—that we should be more concerned with how the Lord of the church reacts to our failure to uphold His teachings and commandments. When confronted with Paul's commandment in First Corinthians 5, some will protest, "I can't do that, for I too am a sinner." The Biblical answer is simple. Did Paul consider himself a sinner or a sinless perfectionist? Every act of church discipline against sinning members who have stubbornly perpetuated their sin rather than repenting is to be accompanied by earnest and abiding prayers and encouragements to the sinner to repent. And if/when the church sees evidence of the sinner's repentance, the example calls on the church to take the initiative and to restore the sinner, forgive him/her, and comfort him/her with restored fellowship in the church. No disciplinary action should occur in anger or harshness, but in mercy.

The priests of Old Testament worship were commanded to bathe their bodies and put on clean clothes before they entered into their priestly work.

On the annual Day of Atonement, they washed and changed clothes with each separate offering. Given Peter's teachings in our study passage, and the many other New Testament passages that teach the same truth, the analogy is clear. Those who make worshipping God their life's business need to work long, hard, and consistently to keep themselves clean from this world's sinful ways. We can only reach this state in one way, by obeying the truth.

While coming to know a little truth may cause one young and immature in the faith, a "Novice," (1 Timothy 3:6), a deeper knowledge—and a genuine practice of the truth will serve to mellow and to humble the believer. The novice, be he a man who aspires to ministry or not, will become prideful, arrogant, and judgmental against any who dare to disagree with him. The mature believer in the faith will understand that sound knowledge of the truth is to foster a tender and sincere, unfeigned, love of the brotherhood in the faith.

...see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently. If we accept the consistent New Testament pattern that teaches us that love toward others deals with how we treat them, not how we feel toward them, this passage glistens with instructive truth for our lives. Fervent tenderness toward others in the faith is the supreme virtue that Jesus set for our goal of faithful obedience.

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. (John 13:34-35 KJVP)

How did Jesus manifest His love for us? Did he sit quietly and with dignity in the temple, telling us how much He loved us? Or did He go into the pit of cruel abuse, even dying on a cross, to show His love for us? How then does He command us to show our love "...to..." not just for each other? He has just bewildered the disciples by washing their feet. Only a few days earlier, He rebuked the disciples in the heat of their dispute over who would be the greatest among them by teaching them that the greatest among them would be "...servant of all..." (Mark 9:35; 10:44; Luke 22:24 and context) Paul emphasizes this truth in Philippians, second chapter. The "...mind of Christ..." is the mind of the unassuming servant, not the mind of the domineering bully.

The Holy Spirit directed Peter to carefully craft this lesson so that the union between obeying the truth and our conduct toward others in the faith stands out prominently in the lesson. If a new person in the faith who needs to learn this lesson were to observe my and your routine attitude and actions toward other believers, would our actions teach them this lesson? Put simply, if our attitude and action were the only "Bible translation" that person reads, would he/she get the right message?

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor