

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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What is Your Fashion?

Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. (1 Peter 1:13–16, KJV 1900)

As I ponder life's seasons and reflect on Scripture, I increasingly realize that my focus or personal interest in the themes of Scripture has shifted through those seasons. To borrow a line from a literary source, The Bible is a Book for "...all seasons." From childhood to our setting sun, God's Book gives us what we need to know and tells us what we need to do to glorify God in and by our lives. I effectively worked through three distinct careers during my working life, all related to business and financial management. Repeatedly in that career setting, I encountered people who relished the challenge of the complex. They never saw the future as simple choices between black and white. In my ministry, I have been alarmed at the number of very sincere believers who seem to think that their spiritual lives are clouded by similar complexities. When I turn from their compromised view of complexity to my Bible, I see a near-opposite setting. From Genesis to Revelation, God reminds His people that they constantly face two choices—only two. They may choose God's way and find rich blessings in their lives, blessings that yield honor and glory to God, or they may choose the opposite way and face the stern hand of God's chastening. Scripture does not identify any other alternative, none. As I review my own life and observe those around me, if we truly seek to glorify God, life is far simpler than we make it. The options really do harmonize with God's clear one-of-two choices.

This simple view of life appears in our study passage. What shall we do with the truth that God has taught us through the indwelling Holy Spirit, the contents of His inspired and preserved Book, our Bible, and godly preaching? Peter deals with only two options. We may respond "As obedient children..." or we may "...fashion..." ourselves according to our former lusts in presumed ignorance, an ignorance that God rejects in Romans 1:18-23. Interestingly, the wicked in the sheep-goat analogy of the Second Coming (Matthew 25:44) attempt to plead ignorance, but God refutes their claim and charges them with conscious sin against knowledge. The wicked in the final Day of Judgment shall have no excuse to plead, especially not ignorance. More often than not, the person who makes the wrong choices

works long and hard to rationalize what he/she does rather than seek God's insight into the right and wrong of their deliberate actions.

As obedient children.... A parent teaches, both by words and by personal example, hoping that the child learns the lesson and obeys it. Neither in human families nor in the family of God do children always learn the lesson taught or obey the example set before them. The instructive parent doesn't program the child like a robot to obey. The successful parent and the obedient child work together so that the child fully embraces the ethics that the parent teaches. (2 Corinthians 6:1) The child is immature and often easily distracted, so the lessons must be repeated regularly and clearly. Scripture uses repetition quite effectively, "...shew John again..." (Matthew 11:4) As God's people in the Old Testament, despite the Lord's repeated teachings, warnings, and judgments against them for their sins, returned to their sinful ways, Paul warns us to avoid their negative example and to transform our lives. (1 Corinthians 10:6-12) Even as we judge them severely for their inexcusable rebellion against the Lord, we must take heed that we avoid the same behaviors that they practiced. One of the saddest books that I read in the Old Testament is the Book of Judges. During an era that saw such noble men as Gideon (Hebrews 11:32), Israel repeatedly turned from the Lord to their own ways, only to consistently face their God's righteous judgments. But did they learn? It seems not. (Judges 21:25) Shall we learn to obey God, or shall we promote what is right in our own eyes?

...not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance. When a woman prepares to attend a special function, she will spend a lot of time with the mirror and her closet, trying on various garments until she finds just the one that she thinks will be appropriate for the occasion. She wants to appear at the event in "Fashion" suitable for it. What is fashionable to God for our lives in the here and now? Do you imagine that the latest clothing trends pay any serious attention to God's model for the way people should dress? Should we please God or men? Should we be concerned with what God thinks about what we do and say, or do we need only to consider how other people will react?

We usually associate the word “Lust” with various sexual sins, and the association is Biblical. However, Scripture hardly restricts the word to this one category of sin. Sinful humans “Lust” for power, for praise from the people whom they respect. They “Lust” for just about anything that magnifies self and their own sense of self-importance. For the last month, one line from the lyrics of an old popular song has haunted my thoughts. “It’s my belief; pride is the chief cause for the decline in the number of husbands and wives.” I’d expand the devastation of pride far beyond marriage to every godly pursuit that Scripture commands. Do we long for God’s glory, or do we mask our pride, our desire to magnify self, with an appearance of glory to God? How popular are the identifying traits of godly Christians in the pulpits and in the pews of our day? (Linger long in Philippians 2, especially verses three through five) The leading members of many churches will gleefully quote Paul’s words about Christ Jesus coming to save sinners “...of whom I am chief,” (1 Timothy 1:15). You’ll occasionally hear them trumpet the false humility (Often a dead-give-away of entrenched pride) that says, “If I had lived in Paul’s day, he couldn’t have truthfully said those words, for I would no doubt have been a greater sinner than he.” However, if you dare confront that same person with a rebuke for a specific sin that he/she has committed, just watch how quickly the hackles go up. Wait. You just said you were the chief of sinners, even more so than Paul, so why should you take offense if someone merely points out one of those sins to you so that you might repent and remove it from your life? Whatever the sin you called to their attention, you just saw yet another sin that dominates their life, pride.

Paul richly employs the clothing analogy to exhort us to the godly life. (Colossians 3:8-14; Warren Wiersbe insightfully describes this verse as teaching us to put off “**Grave clothes** and put on **grace clothes**”) If we accept this common Biblical analogy of clothing to our lifestyle, the things that we daily choose to say and do, how “Fashionable” do you think we appear to our God?

But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. We tend to think of “Holy” as defining sinless conduct. The word more depicts our mindset, the root from which our behaviors grow. It described the various vessels that Moses directed to be placed in the tabernacle of worship. Everything in that tabernacle was wholly dedicated to God. The Levites didn’t use a tabernacle cup in the temple at the morning sacrifice, and then use it for water at dinner time that night. Those vessels had one and only one purpose. They were wholly dedicated to God. They were “Holy.” Peter uses this same word to command us in the conduct of our lives. We might think we are “Holy” if we isolate our Sundays, but how well do we live up to this commandment on

Wednesday or Thursday? This God-focused life is Paul’s point as well as Peter’s.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. (Romans 12:1 KJVP)

Two terms stand out that emphasize the theme of Peter’s teaching in our study passage.

1. ...**living sacrifice**. The sacrifices that the Levites offered to God in Old Testament worship were all dead. Our acceptable and proper “Sacrifice” to God in our day cannot be dead. It is alive. In fact, it must be vibrant and “...living...” for God to accept it and to bless it.
2. ...**holy**. Paul uses the same word that Peter used, wholly dedicated to God. He further explains the character of this living sacrifice, “...acceptable unto God...” If what we do, including our motives as well as our actual conduct, is not “...acceptable unto God,” we fail the “Holy” test, and our conduct fails the “Living sacrifice” test. God will not accept our sacrifice.

The bedrock New Testament passage for godly discipleship requires that we deny self, take up our cross (From the Biblical perspective, not a piece of jewelry, but a death sentence to self), and follow Jesus. (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23) Luke adds an additional qualifier, “...daily.” To be a true and faithful disciple of Jesus, we cannot occasionally practice these three actions; we must do so daily—every day.

Does this behavior intimidate you? Do you feel inadequate to live up to it? You should. If not, you don’t get the point of Scripture. Despite the challenge, Paul adds that this behavior is our “...reasonable,” or rational service. Given what our Lord has done for us, nothing less is suitable. Only this behavior is spiritually “Fashionable.”

The admitted difficulty of this lifestyle explains both logically and Biblically why so few who give passing approval of Christianity fully embrace it and live by its teachings. When Jesus commanded His disciples to “Strive” to enter the strait (narrow and difficult) gate, He was describing an active lifestyle, not what dead people do to gain life. As Jesus cautioned that only a few would find and enter that strait gate, He explained the reason, “Because strait is the gate....” Large numbers will profess belief in Christ, but only a few are willing to deal with the real difficulties of the gate. How hard are we willing to work to discover and to enter that narrow, difficult gate? When we face those two distinct paths, will we choose the easy broad way of openness and tolerance, or will we choose the narrow, difficult way of godliness? Will we choose the lust of pride or the path of holiness, wholly devoted to God?

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor