

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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One's Beliefs Have Consequences

Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. (1 Corinthians 15:12-19, KJV 1900)

In the last study, we noted that Paul refers to the Corinthian Church by the commendable clause, "...wherein ye stand" regarding the resurrection. However, as we examine our present study, we realize that some members of the Church at Corinth had departed from the faith and embraced the errant denial of the resurrection. How does Paul deal with this schism in the church? Rather than ignore it or, commonplace in contemporary churches, protest, "Oh, but he is such a good brother," Paul exposes and rejects the error no less directly than he rejects the moral error of Chapter Five. The problem with doctrinal error has nothing to do with a person's personality. Often the wildest heretics have the most winsome personalities. Otherwise folks wouldn't give their heresies the time of day. The issue is quite simple. Do they stand in the truth or not? Scripture emphasizes that believers in a local church or in a common fellowship should agree in their faith and spiritual conduct. (Romans 12:16; 1 Corinthians 1:10; Philippians 2:2, 3:16, 4:2; Ephesians 4:5, 13-16) Paul, Peter, and John all give us inspired and rather simple, detailed instructions regarding how to reject error or, when it invades the church, repel it. After godly admonition, you avoid the person (Romans 16:17-18; Titus 3:9-11). You do not engage him in endless debate and ungodly wrangling.

Folks who engage in errant beliefs and choose to live in conflict with brothers and sisters who are supposed to share a common faith, tend to add ever-increasing ethical compromise to their error. They seek to gain disciples to their ideas, and they often will work deceitfully to do so. Jesus confronted this sinful conduct. (Matthew 23:15) So should we. Scripture speaks with emphatic clarity about this schismatic attitude and conduct. (Proverbs 6:16-19; Scripture reserves the idea of God hating people to a careful few, but it includes this person in the list) People who choose to compromise their ethics often put themselves on a moral "Slippery slope" on which they sink deeper and deeper into their questionable ideas and conduct; a point that Scripture affirms and warns the godly believer to avoid. Review all of the "same

mind" passages listed above. Example; years ago I knew a man who strongly believed and defended the doctrines of grace. Over time he abandoned these doctrines and became, by his own confession, a gnostic. However, despite his reversal of beliefs, he thought that everyone who had formerly respected him should treat him as if he had not at all changed his beliefs.

...how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? Here we discover that some, possibly only a few, of the Corinthian folks were not in fact standing in that sound truth that Paul had preached to them and that Scripture affirmed. They utterly rejected him and his teachings. Instead of affirming the foundational truth of Jesus and the resurrection, they remained in the church while claiming that there was no resurrection of the dead at all. At this point, Paul begins methodically to expose these errant beliefs to the grim reality of their implications. One cannot embrace an idea and ignore or avoid the logical and inevitable consequences of that error. So Paul begins to reason. If in fact there is no resurrection, what are the consequences that these people must face?

1. **Jesus did not rise from the dead.** He is the power and cause of the resurrection for the child of grace. If there is no resurrection, you can't avoid facing that every tenet of the gospel that proclaims and builds on His resurrection is false. If your gospel is false, why do you bother to claim it and to embrace it at all?
2. **Our preaching is vain, empty and meaningless.** Why preach a fantasy and claim it to be true?
3. **Your faith is vain.** What part of Biblical truth stands independent of Jesus and His resurrection? How about none of it? None whatever. Every aspect of your faith is empty if Jesus didn't rise from the dead.
4. **Paul and every other gospel preacher is a false witness.** We all proclaim that God raised Jesus from the dead, the centerpiece of our

proclamation. If He did not arise, we are false witnesses.

5. **Your faith is vain.** Paul repeats the previous point. The Corinthians need this emphasis. They simply cannot claim to be godly, faithful believers in Christ while denying the most foundational truth of His Person and work.
6. **You are yet in your sins.** Talk about consequences. If Jesus didn't arise from the dead, you still have a sin problem with no solution whatever. How do you expect to resolve that problem without Jesus? You can't, so deal with the reality that it imposes on you.
7. **Loved ones who have died have perished.** If Jesus didn't arise from the dead, we have no evidence and no hope of any life after death. To borrow the cliché, you are like your pet dog Rover, "Dead all over."
8. The capstone of error. **You are the most miserable of people alive.** If you claim to be a Christian and to hold membership in a Christian church, but you reject this bedrock truth, you effectively claim to believe in Jesus as a man, not as God manifest in the flesh, much less risen victoriously from death, so your belief makes you literally the most miserable person imaginable. To borrow the logical inconsistency of dressing up a dead atheist for his funeral, you are all dressed up with no where to go.

Paul hardly ends his list of consequences with these points, but he gets our attention with them.

...how say some among you...? Paul confronts the inconsistency in the error that these people in the Corinthian Church had embraced and obviously were attempting to spread among the membership to the extent that even Paul at a distance away became aware of their ideas. We do not live in the age of apostles. There is no Paul or John today to confront a church wherever error may erupt. Sadly, there are occasionally "Wannabe" apostles who attempt to take such usurped authority to themselves and to work to impose their unorthodox ideas onto any and all people whom they happen to know. It has been my observation that they typically and very carefully choose to work out of the local pastor's awareness among weaker members in the faith whom they may influence to follow them and their ideas. Plant the seed and encourage the weak-in-the-faith member to quietly spread the error when the pastor isn't around. Scripture never approves of deceit. (Proverbs 6:16-19 leaves no doubt about God's view of this conduct)

If we accept that no apostles are alive today, we logically must conclude that each local church is a separate entity, accountable to the Lord for her conduct, not to political mob bosses who work behind the scenes to control everyone they know. And each church with her members should work harder at maintaining local harmony in the church than at following anyone outside that church. Over

the years, as I have studied such passages as mentioned above from Romans 16 and Titus 3, I've pondered how precisely to deal with those who work at spreading their error within a fellowship of churches. My conclusion is that both passages give precise instructions to each local church, instructions that each church should follow when confronting and rejecting error, regardless the source of the error that invades their number. One church and her pastor can't control what another church and pastor do, but they are responsible, responsible to God, for what they do. Within the church, they should practice these verses simply and consistently. Often folks who invest in promoting error do so with much ego and pride. The best way to starve sinful pride is to simply ignore it.

In dealing with the moral issue in 1 Corinthians 5, Paul uses a principle that as fully applies to doctrinal error as to immoral conduct, "...a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." (1 Corinthians 5:6) In bread dough, you introduce yeast, leaven, to the solution in one area, but very quickly the leaven permeates the whole mass of dough. Paul warns that error imitates leaven. Thus, he never teaches that a church dealing with those in error should merely ignore them and hope they go away or do not cause lasting harm. He does not attack the person. The personality is not an issue. He does attack and reject the error for it is the issue.

If we consider the idea of resurrection, literally, coming back to life and, in the case of Biblical resurrection, being glorified and taken into timeless eternity to consciously know the Lord's presence and to be aware of and to praise God for our personal redemption (Revelation 5:9), the idea transcends the human mind to grasp. On occasion when preaching a funeral and teaching on the resurrection to comfort the family, I have observed the skeptical body language of people from the medical community who were in the audience. I also, however, rejoice to have known a good number of physicians who were devoted believers who rejoiced in this truth. Luke, the inspired New Testament writer, was a physician. You and I have hope of resurrection on one and only one basis, Jesus and His own resurrection. Our belief of that truth cannot originate from our natural mind. We come to believe in the resurrection from the evidence set forth in Scripture, affirmed by the witness of the Holy Spirit within. (Romans 8:19-23) Do not miss that Paul's first and "Star" witness to the resurrection at the beginning of this chapter is "...according to the scriptures." Paul repeats this point in verses 3 and 4. Think about his reasoning. You have multiple eyewitnesses of an event, including over five hundred people who collectively witnessed it. Not only so, but you are also an eyewitness of the event. However, when you set forth your case for others to consider, hoping that they will also believe it, your first witness is the writings of Scripture, not one or even all of these

eyewitnesses. They all serve as supporting witnesses to the primary testimony of the written record of Scripture. Scripture is not the only witness, but Paul makes the case that it is his first witness.

After thoroughly rejecting the errant denial of the resurrection within the Corinthian Church, Paul turns the negative factor of their denial into an occasion to preach the positive truth of the resurrection, outlining this truth thoroughly and simply for the Corinthians and for us. While direct and uncompromising in his confrontation of those who held to the errant idea, Paul seeks to gain them, not alienate them. Obviously, they need to repent and to abandon their errant beliefs, and they need to stop advocating their error to others in the church, "...how say some among you...?" In the end, requiring that people face the consequences of their ideas, good or bad, is an essential strategy in exposing error, exposing it to those in the error so that you give them good reason to abandon it and embrace the truth. Study First Corinthians 15 in terms of consequences of belief. First, go through the chapter and list the many consequences of believing in no resurrection. Then go back over the chapter and list the many consequences of believing in the resurrection, beginning with Jesus and His resurrection. If you reasonably compare the two lists of consequences, there is no real contest at all. Think of just one consequence that Paul mentions.

1. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.
2. No restate the opposite premise, the truth that Paul preaches. If in this life and in contemplating the life to come, we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most joyful, hopeful, and blessed.

No less real than Job's self-reminder, we should ever encourage a fruitful and believing mind toward this glorious Biblical truth. Job thought of a tree in its dormant season. It looks dry and lifeless. But, when the spring sun begins to warm the soil and the spring showers water it, you begin to see new buds of life and vitality sprout out from the tree's branches. Surely, reasons Job, there is far more hope for us with our loving, merciful God than for a tree in the forest. (Job 14) I choose the inspired and true words of Paul. I believe in Jesus and the resurrection, a very literal, physical, bodily resurrection that shall transform my present frail body into a new form (Same body; better form) suitable for praising my God for His merciful love and grace throughout an endless and joyful eternity. How about you, Pilgrim? Will you join me on this joyful path?

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor