

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 32, Number 27

July 5, 2015



Biblical Tradition

Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle. (2 Thessalonians 2:15, KJV 1900)

We rightly defend the concept that Scripture contains every truth that a believer needs to know and to believe. However, this point does not mean that Scripture reveals every detail of every possible situation a believer will ever face. One principle that Christians historically raise to explain this point is often referred to as the "Perspicuity of Scripture." The idea is that God reveals every truth in Scripture that He regards as important for His people to know and to believe. The principle further states that the more importance God places on a truth the more "Ink" or space and clarity He gives that truth in Scripture. I would add a second point. We should distinguish between essential and non-essential ideas in Scripture. I define essential Biblical teachings as those that relate to God, who He is, how He governs the universe as well as His family, and what He does for His people. Even in our life conduct, Scripture reveals what God considers to be important for His people to do, but He does not reveal every possible action in every possible culture or setting for all of time. In terms of our conduct, He does reveal ethical (Another word for "Moral" in this discussion) principles that He commands us to apply to our life conduct. While every life situation is not revealed in Scripture, the right attitude and moral principle that we should follow is indeed revealed. Otherwise, Scripture fails its self-description as being a thorough furnisher to the man of God for every good work. The fundamental principle of "Moral" or "Ethical" conduct requires that we carry a certain personal responsibility for what we do, good or bad, righteous or sin. Folks who hold that God actively causes everything that occurs, and, for that matter, causes every righteous act exclusively or "100%," abandon the principle of moral conduct. A puppet dangling on the ends of strings at the movement of the puppeteer does not engage in moral behavior. The idea that God 100% causes every righteous act that we perform likewise abandons the Biblical principle of moral accountability and responsibility in favor of the unbiblical and fatalistic puppeteer idea that they believe. This fatalistic idea also contradicts Scripture's description of the new birth. The historical idea of man's total depravity is a Biblical description of unregenerate (Not born again) man, but it does not rightly describe the Bible's description of the born again child of grace. When the Lord writes His law in the heart and mind,

the born again person is no longer totally (In the historical sense of being depraved in all of his faculties) depraved. Biblical discipleship requires that we study Scripture to learn its teachings regarding the moral principles (I have no problem referring to or thinking of "Moral absolutes" as set forth in Scripture) that Scripture teaches, and applying them to the personal situations that we face in life.

A Biblical tradition might be the application of those Biblical principles to our daily experience. Scripture never commands, "Joe, prepare to become an accountant." Scripture does teach, and emphatically so, that, regardless the career I choose, that I practice that career with Biblical ethics always applied to my career. For five years after my retirement I taught part-time at a local Christian university in its School of Business, primarily accounting classes. The university asked me to teach the accounting principles clearly, but they also asked me to include sound Biblical moral principles as well, a task that I gladly took to heart. I was able to teach my students what I had believed and tried to practice in my secular career. While many businesses and governmental agencies in particular, frown on their managers "Mixing religion and business," I discovered that they almost all highly approve of their managers practicing the moral principles of Scripture in their business conduct. Thus, the practice of Christian ethics in a business career is an asset to a believer, not a liability.

We do not read the specific details of the traditions that Paul delivered to the Thessalonians; only that he taught them to "...stand fast, and hold..." those traditions which he taught them. Some of those traditions Paul taught the Thessalonians "by word." He taught them these principles in his personal preaching and teaching. Others he taught in his written letters to them, "...our epistle." In both First and Second Thessalonians, we read clear moral/ethical principles that Paul taught this church to observe. The moral principle of our taking responsibility for our conduct appears clearly in Paul's words in the first letter, regardless the circumstance of life.

For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know

how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor; Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. (1 Thessalonians 4:3-6)

Paul did not write that, if God willed or purposed the Thessalonians' moral conduct, they would surely and irresistibly do it. Notice the moral weight is clearly laid onto the Thessalonians themselves, "...that ye should..." God has revealed His will regarding our moral conduct. Knowing that revealed will, we "should" obey it. When we do obey it, we are living according to God's will. If we fail to do so, we have only ourselves to blame, never God. As a pastor, I have occasionally encountered the sinful and irresponsible idea in people that states either directly or by implication, "If it is God's will, I will not fall prey to this sin. If it is His will, I can't resist." When challenged, folks with this immoral idea will often appeal to the myth of "God's secret will." Think about the moral and logical absurdity. In His revealed will, God prohibits you from sin, but His "Secret will" irresistibly causes you to commit that same sin. The idea reduces God to a diabolical schizophrenic demon. Think further. If God in His revealed will prohibits a given sin, but in His secret will He irresistibly decrees that you commit it, whatever you do, even in committing the sin, you are obeying God. Therefore, God has no grounds on which to chasten or to judge you for committing that sin. In either behavior, if this absurd idea were true, you actually obeyed God! Occasionally advocates of this diabolical error will protest, "But do you know all of God's will?" The question itself is a logical fallacy. None of us can or does know all of God's will, but we distinctly do know God's will regarding sin as set forth in Scripture, and God never contradicts His moral character. He is in one mind, not in multiple schizophrenic minds. The actual belief in God's secret will holds that God has two distinct wills, one that He reveals to us in Scripture, and the other secret will that He never reveals in Scripture, but supposedly follows in moral contradiction to His revealed will. This errant belief in no way respects God's one will that He reveals to us in Scripture; whether we know it fully or not. It alleges that God has two distinct wills that always contradict each other. If you talk with these people long enough to get into the details of their belief, you will discover that they claim to be highly informed experts on God's "Secret will." If it is secret, they wouldn't know anything about it. In their diabolical view of things, God does a really poor job of keeping a secret. Factually, this idea is a very thinly veiled error that its advocates use to rationalize their own sins, following Adam's habit of shifting the blame for their sin off themselves and onto God. "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of

the tree, and I did eat." (Genesis 3:12) Simply stated, Adam tried to blame God for his sin. If you want to assess this unbiblical idea in light of Scripture, simply ask yourself "How did God respond to Adam's blame shift?" He didn't! He held Adam personally responsible for his choice to sin. Sometimes folks will try to magnify Adam above his conduct by trying to draw a parallel between Jesus and Adam. As this story goes, Adam so loved his wife that he ate the fruit to be with her, and Jesus loved his bride so much that He came to where she was to redeem her. First and foremost, Scripture never gives us a motive for Adam's sin. All we know from Scripture is that Eve ate the fruit, gave it to Adam, "...and I did eat." Secondly, the Biblical revelation of Adam and Jesus is a study in contrast, not a good comparison. Adam ate the forbidden fruit and joined his wife in hopeless and broken sin. He could neither retrieve himself or Eve from their broken and fallen state. Adam did nothing to help Eve by eating the forbidden fruit. Jesus didn't join His bride in her sin, never, but He came to her low estate with the distinct intent to die for her and to thereby redeem her from her sin and return her to Himself. The two men are a Biblical study in contrast, not a right or Biblical comparison.

Paul clearly qualifies God's will in moral and responsible terms, "that ye should." If you refuse or fail to comply, you sin, and the responsibility for that sin, rests solely on you, never on God. We may not know all of God's will, but Scripture reveals that we know with certainty that God's will never involves favoring or causing sin, either directly or indirectly, so no moral being, man or angel, can ever point the finger of blame at God when he sins. This we do know from Scripture.

Historical churches develop their various traditions over time and often respect those traditions and insist on holding to them. More often than not, it is their sincere and collective effort to apply a Scriptural principle to their situation that is not specifically addressed in Scripture. In my youth, I occasionally questioned these traditions. Today I view most of them with sincere respect. I trust the Lord's collective body of believers, the church, far more than I trust one man's contradictory opinion, even if that one man is myself. I might offer a different tradition that I think would work better in applying the principles of Scripture to the situation, but it might not work better at all. In the varied mix of human experience and contemporary situations, it might well prove disastrous. My wiser course is to respect these traditions unless I can find a clear and convincing Biblical principle that the tradition violates, in which case I should indeed challenge the tradition. Example; I grew up in an era and in a region in which churches occasionally intruded their will onto other preachers and churches in their region. If you wanted to remain in fellowship with other churches in your area, you followed the "Boss church and

preacher.” I thankfully lived long enough to see that very bad and unbiblical tradition for the most part die. If a larger church or a church with a more distinguished pastor work to force their will onto other preachers and churches around them, they should be confronted and rebuked, not feel intimidated or bullied into falling in line. Preachers and churches have one Biblical and legitimate responsibility, and that responsibility resides within that church, ***never over other churches***. Let this tradition that has mostly died take its last indignant breath and die. It is not only, not Biblical; it contradicts Scripture and is therefore not a “Biblical tradition.”

Within the clear parameters of Scripture’s teaching, a tradition is good so long as its application to a contemporary situation remains faithful to Scripture and so long as it serves the church well. If ever the church begins to serve the tradition, effectively viewing the tradition as equivalent to Scripture, it is time for the tradition to die an overdue death. The four gospels in the New Testament abound with examples of first century Judaism’s excessive worship of tradition over Scripture, and Jesus consistently rebuked them for this error. Let us follow Jesus’ example and New Testament teaching for good tradition (Jesus specifically focused on those Jewish traditions that contradicted Old Testament Scripture, not on all of their traditions), as well as rejecting the bad traditions that contradict Scripture’s teachings.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
Joseph R. Holder Pastor