

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 32, Number 9

March 1, 2015



## Christian Ethics Based on the Resurrection

*If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die. Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners. Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame. (1 Corinthians 15:32–34, KJV 1900)*

When Paul made the point, "If in this life only..." in 1 Corinthians 15:29, he affirmed that our belief in the resurrection, specifically in Jesus' resurrection, is a crucial foundation for our Christian ethic in its entirety. Biblical belief in the resurrection is not simply about "Pie in the sky bye and bye," but it forms the energizing power of our whole Christian outlook and conduct. Repeatedly in First Corinthians 15, Paul underscores this point, as in our study verses.

As Paul emphasizes the present impact of belief in the resurrection on the way he lived, he also underscored the truth of a literal, bodily resurrection, not some kind of mystical gnostic "Spiritual resurrection." Paul's spirit faced no danger from beasts at Ephesus. While our Christian ethic begins within, it must express itself through our actions, actions that integrally involve the physical body. If the dead do not rise, why would Paul be willing to expose himself, specifically his physical body, to the mortal danger of wild beasts in the arena? As a Roman citizen, he could readily have avoided the arena, as he later avoided an unjust trial when he appealed to Caesar. (Acts 25:11) If there is no literal, physical, bodily resurrection, by all means protect your physical body. In fact, if there is no literal bodily resurrection, why not indulge the physical body? Eat and drink for tomorrow you die.

*Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.* The simplest and most literal interpretation of this statement challenges us with a truth that we often ignore. Inevitably, we pick up attitudes and habits from the people with whom we associate. Spend much time with an "Ill-mannered" person, and you will slowly desensitize yourself to that person's bad habits, picking them up yourself. You can see this principle at work in families, in the work place, and in churches. Let me give just one example. The internet gives Christian people multiple opportunities to enrich themselves by accessing recorded sermons from preachers across a broad scope of geography and time. We can download a sermon from a powerful preacher, past or present, and hear him preach in his own voice, far more communicative than reading a transcription of the same sermon. I have relished hearing several sermons by Martin Lloyd-Jones, the

famous British preacher who inspired his London congregation during the fierce German bombings of World War II.

The same internet that blesses holds equal potential for harm. We may just as easily download and listen to sermons from self-serving preachers who are frighteningly adept at smooth talk, deceiving their hearers into believing the worst of errors. Paul warns us that the deceiver skillfully knows how to cover his error with convincing words and attitudes. (Romans 16:17-18) Amazingly, the naive listener will pick up words, phrases, and attitudes from the deceitful teacher, and those ideas will slowly erode both sound faith and gracious, godly conduct, "good manners." A discerning person may often know who someone has been listening to by taking note of that person's attitude and words, especially little catch phrases that the unfaithful teacher uses repeatedly. These catch phrases are carefully framed to sound really good, but, upon examination, they appeal to our emotions and our good intentions far more than to Biblical soundness. We cannot avoid this link between the communications to which we expose our minds and the manners, attitudes and actions, that we practice. Jesus warned against this problem even more sternly than Paul. He taught the disciples to take care not only what they hear (Meaning that you simply avoid hearing some men whose teachings "...corrupt good manners"), but also to take heed how they hear (Be mindful and obedient hearers of good things, not forgetful hearers). (Luke 8:18, the "how;" Mark 4:24, the "what")

*Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God.* Paul's words follow in logical sequence to the points made. The naive or undiscerning hearer cannot awake to righteousness, for he/she has accepted ideas as true that contradict God's righteousness. What we believe as true has a powerful impact on our attitudes and conduct. By the basic meaning of the word, belief means that we accept as true, as fact, certain things, and that we act on our acceptance of what we have accepted as true. Thus our whole idea of belief builds on our presumption of knowledge. Belief and ignorance are antithetical. Anyone who thinks of himself as a believer so thinks based on what he believes to know. He truly

views that information as factual, and he sincerely holds it to be true. However, our sense of knowledge itself can be deceitful. What if we accept something as true that is false? Scripture deals with knowledge fully as much as with belief. Given that the two principles are corollaries, this must be the case.

1. *And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.* (1 Corinthians 8:2) Paul wrote these words in the context of correcting the confusion in the Church at Corinth regarding meat offered to idols. Given the tension between knowing and not knowing, it is no surprise that Paul chose two different Greek words for "Know" in this verse. The first word emphasizes seeing, perhaps one's personal belief that he sees this idea clearly. The second word emphasizes a full or thorough knowledge. Think. As soon as anyone thinks that he has a subject really mastered, he ceases trying to learn more about it. He thinks he already knows everything. In matters spiritual, this attitude reveals a self-centered smugness that deceives the person with pride. He refuses to hear what other people think. Why not? He thinks he already knows more than they or anyone else. Paul's point is clear and powerful. As soon as we cover our ideas and beliefs in the wardrobe of pride and smugness that we have mastered the idea, we factually fall into unbelief and ignorance. The word translated "Disciple" in the New Testament primarily means a "Learner" or a "Student." This word simplifies Paul's point. As soon as we think we have graduated, we cease to learn, and therefore we cease to be a true disciple, a learner or student of Jesus and of the gospel. And Paul's point becomes obvious. In fact, as we think ourselves to be experts, masters of the subject, we reduce ourselves to hopeless ignorance of it.
2. *Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.* (2 Timothy 3:7) We need to consider this verse in light of the full chapter in which it appears. Paul begins the chapter with a warning about perilous times and perilous people who exploit the times and people for their personal gain. In Christian circles, these folks know all the right words and feigned attitudes to appear humble and righteous, but watch them over time. Notice, as well, Paul's contrast in the chapter. Beginning with Verse 10, "But thou hast fully known...." He draws a sharp contrast between these people and his faithful and godly example of self-denial and service to others. Often folks in this category of ever learning--never knowing the truth memorize a lot of Scriptures and appear to know much. They confuse the reliable truth of Scripture with their personal interpretation of Scripture, so that their

interpretation becomes, to them, equal to Scripture itself. In this attitude, they magnify their mind and private interpretation to the elevated and authoritative posture of Scripture itself. In fact, this is a major reason they shall never come to rightly know the truth. After setting forth his personal example, Paul concludes the lesson with one of Scripture's most powerful appeals to Scripture itself as our source of knowledge, not to our individual private interpretation, but to Scripture itself.

Knowledge of God in this context likely refers to the knowledge of God that we gain when we wholly rely on Scripture, not Scripture plus our private interpretations, our inflated confidence in our private interpretation, or any other secondary and fickle source of information, for our knowledge of truth and of the God of truth. Paul's exhortation, "Awake to righteousness and sin not..." is directly linked to this lack of right knowledge of God. When folks lose their way and their reliance on Scripture alone, they typically rely increasingly on one rationalization after another to justify their pretense of knowledge. I recall a friend telling me about a Bible discussion he had years ago with a man on a given text and topic. During the conversation, the man specifically stated that at times we must ignore the actual text of Scripture to arrive at its meaning. How can we ignore the language of Scripture and thereby arrive at its truth? Bizarre indeed. In this case, the man magnified his private ideas and rationalized interpretation above the actual content of Scripture.

*I speak this to your shame.* Paul is not dealing with unregenerate sinners, but with confused believers who do not know the truth. If Paul's words shamed the Corinthians, there were some folks in the Corinthian Church who had this problem. Occasionally folks who have a narrow view of God's grace will use thoughts such as this in Scripture to give supposed support for their idea that only people who believe as they believe and act as they think a believer should act are "Really born again." If anyone wrests the passage in this way, they need to read Paul's inspired description of the Corinthians in the opening verses of the book. Where in that description do we find any grounds whatever for his letter being addressed to unregenerate people? It isn't there at all.

In instructive contrast to the pride-filled and confused ideas of those whom Paul here shames, let us take good heed to Paul's words, "Awake to righteousness and sin not." As long as we live in this world, we need the constant correction and instruction of Scripture. We need to ever learn and come to right knowledge. If we follow Scripture's clear and consistent teaching, we learn that service to others, not promotion of ourselves and our ideas, should occupy every moment and every ounce of energy that we have. Pastors often hear members in various settings ponder or question what their "Job" is, what they should be doing to serve the

Lord. They need to open their eyes and look around. Is there a believer anywhere in your personal "World" who is struggling with a problem, who may be discouraged or weighed down with a heavy burden? That person and his burden is your divine job assignment! What can you do to give them encouragement and help in their life? Do it and keep on doing it. You just might thereby accomplish both a personal awakening to righteousness and a personal avoidance of sin in your life.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church  
16434 Woodruff  
Bellflower, California

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