

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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God's Better Way

But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, KJV 1900)

In the first twelve verses of this chapter, Paul gives us a detailed description of the man of sin, including his wicked character and his equally wicked works. By the time we reach Verse 13, Paul's transitional "But" is quite welcomed. The human inclination to seek out and to dwell on the negative appears vividly in many Bible teachers' explanation of this chapter. They flush out and describe far more dark details about the man of sin than the passage mentions or even intimates, but they say very little about the other part of the chapter and what God has done and shall do. Wild speculation dressed up as facts will sell books far better than the soothing truth of God's wise and righteous judgment. Our twisted human inquisitive nature seeks to know the mysteries of Scripture, while we blind our minds to its simple and comforting truths. Be wise and strive to know and to be faithful to the "...simplicity that is in Christ Jesus." (2 Corinthians 11:3)

But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you.... Rest assured; when the Lord does something in or for His people, there is ground for thanksgiving. Take further note that Paul's thanksgiving was personal. He didn't merely thank the Lord for truth revealed or known. He thanked the Lord for the Thessalonian believers. Sometimes the most troublesome of believers (And perhaps also the most troubled believers) are those folks who become so obsessed with ideas, with knowing precisely every detail of the truth, that they diminish and belittle their personal relationships with other believers. Take wise note. No believer can be right about the Lord and His truth while being in any way ungracious to another believer. You can't demean another believer and please the Lord. In the sheep-goat depiction of the final judgment, Jesus emphasizes this truth. How both classes of people treated others in their life becomes the basis of His announcement. Whatever they did to other believers they in fact did personally to Him. The next time you are inclined to speak harshly toward another believer pause and pray. When those harsh words pass your lips, Jesus shouts that you said the words against Him, not just against that lowly esteemed brother or sister who must endure your sharp words. Scripture emphasizes that knowing and believing

the truth of the gospel and not a false gospel is important, highly so, but Scripture equally emphasizes that our kind regard for our brothers and sisters in Christ is just as essential to Biblical soundness in the faith. The person who claims to believe in God's kind grace for eternal salvation is commanded to apply that same kind grace toward his brothers and sisters in Christ. (Colossians 4:6; "...always with grace" isn't fulfilled by an occasional kind word. "always" means "always")

*If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this **commandment** have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also. (1 John 4:20-21; emphasis added; the ideas of love and hate in Scripture refer to conduct, not to emotions or feelings. We either love or hate a brother or sister in Christ based on how we act toward them, including how we speak to them, not based on how we happen to feel about them)*

...because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation.... Scripture uses the various forms of "save" in many different ways. Sometimes the context of the word will associate it with our eternal standing and future in and because of what Jesus did for us. Sometimes it appears in a wholly temporal context, related to some form of safety, spiritual or otherwise, in the here and now. Example; "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved." (Acts 27:31) A careful reading of this context indicates that Paul associated the shipmen, the ship's crew, with the safety of all who were on board. Many foolish sermons have been preached from this passage that attempted to associate "ye cannot be saved" with eternal salvation, when in fact, physical deliverance from the storm is the simple meaning of the word in its context. Just as we may use the word "Save" or "Safe" to refer to any kind of danger and to avoidance of that danger, Scripture uses the word in a wide variety of ways. We should carefully seek the guidance of the passage and its context to inform our interpretation of the meaning of safety or salvation in any given Bible passage.

To apply a logical framework, we sometimes classify the various savings found in Scripture based on the implications of the saving named. Does the passage deal with our eternal salvation by God's grace alone, or does it deal with any of several temporal savings that more relate to our present discipleship? I believe this distinction into eternal and temporal is a wise way to distinguish the various savings found in Scripture. Sadly, many sincere believers confuse the distinction, along with confusing how God produces the new birth versus how we are converted and transform our lives as we become godly disciples of our Lord. This simple distinction would avoid many theological stumbling blocks and errors.

When Scripture uses saving to refer to what God does in, to, and for us through Jesus Christ's finished work alone, it carefully avoids attributing any role in that saving to our actions. Read the first seven verses of Titus 3 as an excellent example. All of the grace that God gives us in these verses comes to us "Not according to works of righteousness which we have done." And in the very next verse Paul teaches us to be faithful as believers in God whom He has already saved by His merciful grace and not by our works.

*This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might **be careful to maintain good works.** These things are good and profitable unto men. (Titus 3:8; emphasis added)*

As we examine the passage before us, what clues direct us to an answer to the question regarding the saving intended by Paul, indeed by the Holy Spirit with these words?

1. God is at the heart of the activity, a point that equally applies to both temporal deliverance and to our eternal salvation. In our temporal salvation, our discipleship, the Lord often adds blessings and/or people to guide us or to aid us in the journey. He does not effect our temporal deliverances wholly independent of us or irresistibly by Himself alone. We are active and willing participants in the process of our discipleship. Our new birth and all of our eternal salvation is monergistic; God alone works to bring it to pass. Our discipleship is synergistic; God and we work together to transform our lives from self-focused to God-focused, from self-glory to His glory. Otherwise, it would not be discipleship, learning and growing, but merely involuntary reactions to the puppet strings dangling us around.
2. The saving of which Paul writes is accomplished instrumentally by things that we do, belief of the truth. This point alone

urges the conclusion that Paul is dealing with temporal deliverance, not with our eternal salvation. In the new birth, God in no way uses any other means or person to aid His work. He performs the new birth exclusively Himself. Jesus emphasized this truth to Nicodemus by His blowing wind analogy. We may hear the sound of the blowing wind, we may see leaves waving in the breeze, but we in no way direct the wind, or even for that matter know where it last blew or where it will next blow. Jesus emphasized the point to this Jewish teacher, "...so is **every one** that is born of the Spirit." (John 3:8; emphasis added. God doesn't have multiple ways to accomplish the new birth. His one and only one way, the exclusive work of the Holy Spirit, is wholly effective in that work)

3. God uses the gospel as an instrument in the process. Pseudo Arminian beliefs will gladly accept all of these features as part of their belief in eternal salvation by works. Our age and culture have split many hairs to rationalize various beliefs that impose requirements onto people for salvation, even as they pay empty lip service to their claim that they can require you to do something for salvation, but simultaneously tell you that you are saved by God and not at all by what you do. If God saves you wholly and if this thing you do is not a necessity for salvation, logically you can't avoid the obvious question. Will God save anyone who does not do this thing that you require? If so, your requirement is not a real requirement; if not, your requirement becomes a necessary work that you must perform for your actual experience of salvation, making your salvation by your works, not by God's grace alone. Confusing; beyond confusing. Another contemporary idea will identify an action that advocates require of you for your eternal salvation, but they call it an instrument and not a cause. But if you do not take advantage of their "Instrument," will God save you anyway? Most advocates of this idea boldly tell you that avoidance of the instrument ensures loss of the benefit. So their idea of an instrument is no less a human condition for salvation than the long list of requirements imposed by the most demanding of folks who openly teach salvation by works.
4. In the context of our present study, Paul makes one point that strips away the imposed confusing and artificial requirements of people who believe in salvation by works, even as they claim they do not so believe. "...whereunto *he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the*

glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Given that Scripture refers to our eternal salvation as new birth, the imparting of a new life, it is significant that **Paul does not write** that God called us to obtain the life of the Lord Jesus Christ by the gospel, but to obtain His glory. Had Paul intended to teach how we become born again and how we obtain this new eternal life, he would have so stated in the verse. He did not. He identified what he had in mind, the glory of the Lord Jesus, not the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, not eternal life but the glory of a life of faith that praises the Lord for His grace. The passage deals with our present discipleship, not with how lost sinners become born again.

If we step back and try to assess why Paul wrote these words to the Thessalonians at this time, the point becomes clearer. Despite the present confusion of false teachers who fabricated a fake document and claimed that Paul had written it, Paul refuses to abdicate truth or surrender the Thessalonian believers to these false teachers. In this process of teaching His children the truth of the gospel, the Lord designed a better way than the deceit and guile of false teachers and forged documents. Despite their present confusion of belief, God yet loved the Thessalonian believers dearly, and He sent Paul to expose the forgery and to restore His beloved Thessalonians to the truth as Paul had first preached it to them.

Perhaps the single most significant point in this passage is the closing trumpet note. In the gospel of grace, the Lord calls His children to His glory. The more a child of grace comes to understand and believe this gospel the more he will be devoted to living a life that glorifies the Lord, not to gaining glory for himself. When a believer ignores this gospel, do not be surprised if you see them acting out various behaviors that quite clearly say, “But what about me?” In some, the objective may be stars in their personal heavenly crown—gained for self supposedly while they utterly ignore the crown on their Lord and Savior’s head. In others, the objective may be glory to self for all their sacrifices and hard work, gained in the form of praise from other believers. We should kindly recognize and voice appreciation and encouragement to other believers for their service, but we should also carefully avoid expecting or effectively demanding recognition for what we do. Both attitudes reveal more focus on “What about me?” than on “I will glorify my Lord and Savior alone.” Paul reminds each of us in this passage. Our Lord and Savior has called us in His gospel to a path of life that joyfully denies self-praise and that shines His glory brightly in the life that we live. Hear Jesus’ words on the question.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

Take careful inventory of your words and actions over the last week, month, or year. How much of what you have said and done communicated to those around you? “This is all about me. You owe me.” And how much of what you spoke and did said, “Forget me. This life affords each of us a grand privilege to glorify our Lord. Lord, give me grace to forget myself and do all of what I do in a way that glorifies you.” It is this call to glorify the Lord that the gospel calls us to seek, to “obtain.”

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor