

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

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## Gospel Consolation is God's Personal Consolation

*Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work. (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17, KJV 1900)*

If we follow our human inclination, we might think that Paul was angry with the Thessalonians for their failure to learn and hold fast to his teachings, but these verses tell a far better story. By refreshing the Thessalonians' minds in the truth, Paul opened the door to them for the very blessings that he describes in these verses. When we listen to the gospel and think first and foremost of the messenger, we are liable to criticize his style, his choice of words, his clothing, or just about anything else that we can imagine about the man. However, if we focus on the message that he delivers, especially on the God whom he preaches, the messenger becomes far less important than the comfort of God's personal consolation and hope that comes to us through the gospel.

Folks who deny or diminish the supernatural in preaching may fail to see the supernatural that is also present in the message. Preaching the gospel is not about a man standing on a podium in front of a group of people and merely rambling his thoughts to them as they surface in his mind. Neither is Biblical preaching delivering a well-researched lecture. I once heard about a preacher who routinely took Gill's commentary and various other books with him into the pulpit, often reading extensively from those books as part of his sermon. He may well have delivered a good lecture that a college professor would be happy to present to his students, but he didn't preach a sermon, not a truly Biblical sermon with God's power, scented with the sweet perfuming reminders of God's love, everlasting consolation, or good hope through grace. When Paul shifted his emphasis from the man of sin and God's victory over him at the end to the Thessalonians in the present, he started the theme that forms the foundation for this consoling passage.

*But we are bound to give thanks always 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)*

Paul's point in these verses is not dealing with how the Thessalonians were born again, but how they

came to the knowledge of the gospel, "...whereunto he called you by our gospel." God's rich provisions for His people in the gospel frame a vivid contrast to the devious workings of the man of sin. We arrive at a firm conviction of the Lord's love for us, everlasting, not fickle, consolation, and good hope through grace through the gospel. This passage deals with the life of the child of grace in the gospel, not with how he was born again. The child of grace who falls prey to false teachers such as those who misrepresented Paul to the Thessalonians and refuses to escape from error shall fail to find the assurances that Paul sets forth in these verses. Assurance of one's eternal salvation and the rich joys described in our study verses are never under the control or administration of a preacher or any man. When you hear a preacher say, "Unless you do thus and so, or unless you believe thus and so, I can't give you any assurance of your salvation," beware. The man is boasting of ability that he cannot deliver and that Scripture does not attribute to him. Notice the language of our study verses. Is it the preacher, even Paul, who gave the Thessalonians consolation and hope, or is it God? The actual word "assurance" appears five times in the New Testament, and each appearance is closely linked to the Lord's direct and personal dealings with His children, not with the intervening control of a preacher who uses the promise of his assurance, or withholding of it, to control people. Likewise, when an individual believer makes assurance his prime objective, he will fall short. Assurance comes to the believer as a result of a deep and abiding belief in the gospel and one's application of its truths in his life. Think in simple terms of motive. According to Scripture, should our motive in our conduct be to glorify the Lord or to gain personal assurance of our salvation? One objective denies self and seeks the glory of God. The other focuses on self and effectively downgrades glorifying God to a lesser motive.

That God could actually love such a one as you or I, given our sins, especially prior to His work of grace in us, is one of the Bible's greatest miracles. It is no mystery that the word chosen for love in the New Testament that refers to God's love for His children includes the nuance that the love identified focuses on the heart of the one who loves, not on the merits of the one being loved.

*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. (Romans 5:8-10)*

The grand dynamic that takes our gospel assurance out of the realm of fantasy and equally out of the control of a manipulative preacher who offers or withholds it to influence people as he wishes resides in God alone. And the fact of God's love refuses to stop until every one so loved by God is "...saved by his life." God's love for His people doesn't simply give us an opportunity to join the family of God. It strips our sins away from us, changes us at the deepest level of our being, and shall not stop its work until we fully realize our reconciliation to God by the death of His Son, not by our decision or good intentions.

The gospel reports this good news to the child of grace and shows us the riches that our God and loving Savior has in store for us. The more we become truly convinced of His love for us the more we experience "*everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace.*" The child of grace who turns the deaf ear to the gospel, often the gospel that confronts his errors and urges repentance of life and change of belief, shall not realize the joys of grace in this life. God sent Paul to confront and to correct the errors that the false teachers used to confuse and to gain control over the Thessalonians. He may send the gospel to you for similar reasons.

2 Peter 2:1 and context reminds us that false teachers have existed in every past generation, so we should not be surprised when we encounter a false teacher in our own time. It is the gospel's function to drag the false teacher and his errant teachings out of the shadows into the bright light of Biblical truth, and to call the child of grace under error's dark cloud away from that darkness into the bright light of gospel truth.

"*For the perfecting of the saints...*" (Ephesians 4:12 and context) categorically reminds each one of us that we are not presently perfect. We may be quite sincere and even zealous about what we believe, but none of us is so well informed or so fully purified in our beliefs that we can—or should—attempt to coerce all other believers to agree with our private interpretations and beliefs. Every time we hear the gospel we should be reminded that we yet lack and we yet need correcting, the "Perfecting" of the gospel to instruct us to a better way of thinking and living than we have known to this point in our lives. The work of the gospel should continue this process till the day we die. Growing in grace and in the knowledge of the truth is a lifelong process, not a finite college curriculum that we study and earn a diploma in. One of those false teachers may slip by our guard and plant his

error in our minds, quite adroitly masking his error as if it originated in an inspired letter written by Paul, no different from the error of the false teachers in Thessalonica. If a false teacher announced that he intended to teach falsehood, who would waste his time to listen, much less believe. The false teacher, according to Scripture, will veil his errors in the clothing of Biblical truth. He will cite Scripture and carefully twist it to mean something wholly different from the Holy Spirit's intended meaning. Like the false teachers in Thessalonica, he will even claim that he is drawing his ideas directly from Paul or another of Scripture's inspired writers.

"*For the perfecting of the saints...*" The strongest motive possible for preaching appears in this verse. No gospel preacher has grounds to stop preaching so long as either he or the sheep under his care are in any point less than perfect in their faith and life. For those folks in the pew, when a preacher happens to shine the light on one of your private sins, do not try to hide it or to deny it. If God is the director of the gospel, it could well be that He directed the man to preach that point specifically because He loves you enough to confront your sin and to urge you to repent. Many times I've preached and had people tell me later about thoughts they had during the sermon. Their thought was not remotely in my mind as I preached, but their confession encouraged me that the Lord was using my preaching to do precisely what this verse teaches that the Lord intended for His gospel to do, "Perfect" the saints.

Many years ago I was working with a preacher who had turned away from what I and the church believed to be Biblical truth. The man mentioned preaching his errant beliefs at a church that had a reputation for being sound and conservative in its faith. The man boasted, "Joe, I preached my views at this church, and the deacon told me afterwards that what I preached was what he had heard preached and what he had believed from his youth." I responded, "Did you preach your ideas clearly so that he knew precisely what you believe, or did you frame them in words that sounded like his lifelong belief?" I was shocked when the man actually laughed and fully acknowledged that he had spoken deceitfully in his sermon. This, my friends, is the glaring mark of a false teacher.

Paul and other New Testament writers refused to write or preach anything with deceit. (2 Corinthians 1:17-19; Colossians 2:8; 1 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 Peter 3:10; Revelation 14:5) Deceitful preaching shall never lead the child of grace to stronger conviction regarding the Lord's love, everlasting consolation, or good hope through grace. It will inevitably create a slavish reliance on the deceiver that compromises the believer's faith and consolation in the gospel. My God's gospel conveys God's assurance of His love for the hearers, along with "*...everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace.*"

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Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor