

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

Volume 32, Number 44

November 1, 2015



## Two-Way Growth: Grace and Knowledge

*But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen. (2 Peter 3:18, KJV 1900)*

In his second letter, Peter laid a solid foundation for building a godly fruitful life as a believer in Jesus (Chapter 1), warned against inevitable unscrupulous false teachers (Chapter 2), and capped off his inspired letter with a unique lesson on the Lord's faithful promise of His return, the Second Coming and our resurrection to spend a joyful eternity with Him (Chapter 3). After completing his teaching on the Lord's faithful promise to return to claim and to glorify His own, Peter returned to his first chapter theme of fruitful and faithful discipleship. He builds the steadfast faithfulness that he exhorts believers to live on the Lord's faithful promise. The God who promised His Son's faithful return in keeping His promise shall no less faithfully keep His promise to be with and to stand by His beleaguered children as they trek their pilgrimage through this life, ever looking for that better country to come. And we can find the courage and insight to walk wisely and rightly only as we link our present pilgrimage with our hope of His faithful promise to return in glory for us.

Throughout this study on the Second Coming, our resurrection, and glory to come, I have repeatedly visited the Biblical point that links the Lord's return with our present labor to live our life to the Lord's glory and honor. We have visited the abusive servant more than once, the man whom Jesus carefully and specifically used to remind us: for a believer to think the Lord's return is delayed or not a real Bible truth at all, leads immediately and directly to that man beating and abusing his fellow-servants. (Matthew 24:48; Luke 12:45; read the full context in each passage) Truly believing that the Lord might appear at any time keeps His servants entuned to Him in their daily lives. They know that He despises servant abuse by other servants. If He returns soon, they sense that they must face Him in judgment for their sinful abuse of other servants. If the wicked servant can convince himself that the Lord's return is long delayed, he can conveniently put any thought of the Lord's judgment in the background and treat other servants any way he wishes. Such a wicked servant fails to read Jesus' "Story" to the end. In judgment, the Lord comes quickly and immediately judges this wicked servant. No servant ever gets away with abusing another servant of Jesus. Whenever His return, the Lord always injects Himself and His wise and righteous judgment

against abusive servants. In this judgment, He may not wait till His final return. He may tomorrow "Return" to bring the wicked and abusive servant into judgment and severe chastening. Such servants fail to remember Jesus' judgment principle. If you do something to one of His little ones, **you do it to Him**. So if you abusively mistreat one of His little ones, how can you ever think that He will ignore your abuse? In His warning, Jesus tells you that God will quickly avenge His elect which cry unto Him. Your abuse goes to Him in their prayers, and He hears and intervenes. (Luke 18:1-7) Oh, He may not intervene when they desire, but He has faithfully promised that He shall intervene in such matters. When we harm one of the Lord's little ones, we put ourselves immediately open to His judgment. Apart from profound repentance, that judgment shall come in His time and way.

Peter closes this second letter with inspired insight into our right course to avoid such grievous judgment. Notice the order of the two items in this list of exhortations. The Holy Spirit inspired Peter to command us to grow in grace **before** we grow in knowledge. When a believer tries to grow in knowledge before or wholly absent growing in grace, his presumed knowledge will be prideful and self-destructive, not to mention destructive to those believers close to him/her. It is such knowledge that Paul describes as puffing one up, not edifying the believer. (1 Corinthians 8; read the whole chapter. Paul uses one's presumed "Knowledge" regarding meat offered to idols in the lesson, but the principle of puffing up knowledge is far broader. Also take note of the primary trait of a "Novice." 1 Timothy 3:6)

What does it mean to grow in grace? What does this growth look like in a believer's conduct? Paul teaches a similar point that helps answer these questions.

*Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man. (Colossians 4:6)*

How do you "Let" your speech be "always," not just occasionally, with grace? First, notice that Paul used the word "Let." This is not a word that indicates any form of divinely orchestrated behavior. Paul didn't write that God will do the

“Letting” in you and for you. He exhorts us to do the “Letting.” That process requires self-examination, self-reflection, and prayer that is as “always,” as constant as the “Letting” is required in the verse. Scripture does not teach that our present conduct in discipleship occurs through any form of passivity in us. Quite the opposite, based on Scripture, we honor the Lord only as we consciously, actively engage the task of the faith-walk and strive to follow the Lord’s teachings to us in Scripture. (Luke 13:24; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20) “God does 100% of my obeying” is pagan fatalism, not Biblical walking by faith.

In this verse, Paul emphasizes our speech. Both in Scripture and in personal experience, it is readily observable that one’s speech powerfully impacts those who hear it. Both in what we say and in how we say it, we either manifest grace or abuse toward those to whom we speak. There is very little ground between these two impacts. The cliché of parents to their child who is being verbally teased on the playground to the point of abuse, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me,” is simply not true. Words, both the words themselves and the way in which we use them, hold the power to be far more damaging than any club held in the hand or bullet shot from a gun.

First, follow Paul’s emphasis, “always with grace.” An occasional kindness in our speech mocks this passage. It doesn’t fulfill it at all. Whatever Scripture defines as grace, Paul directs that that trait **always** accompany the words that we speak. God never—ever—looks the other way and gives us implied approval to speak with harshness or with cruelty, or, for that matter, in any way that fails the “Grace test” of our words and the sentiments that go with them out of our mouth.

...that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man. If we follow our natural expectation, we’d expect Paul to follow his admonition to “Grace speech” with the explanation, “that ye may know how ye ought to speak to every man.” A couple of obvious points surface from Paul’s words. Quite often in dialogue, believers forget grace and turn to harsh abusive words or attitudes when they are discussing a Biblical point and disagree on its meaning. So your brother uses his words to frame a point that you disagree with, and you “Answer” him with harsh put downs or with mindless logical fallacies. Paul forbids this reaction; you failed to answer with grace.

What do I mean by “Logical fallacies”? A logical fallacy is a misrepresentation of another person’s idea or argument, intended to demean it or to put it down. A couple of examples.

1. **Straw man** logical fallacy. You are talking with someone about a Bible idea or passage, and he explains a different view to yours. Biblical integrity and Biblical grace require you to honestly interact with his idea and give him your thoughts. First, you can’t ignore his thoughts

and try to steamroll him with yours. Biblical integrity requires you to acknowledge and interact with him and with his idea. Read Romans or First Corinthians to see how consistently Paul exemplifies this practice. The straw man logical fallacy misrepresents your brother’s idea. You recreate a false form of his idea, pretend it is what he really believes, and then you attack and “Torch” the “Straw Man” misrepresentation that you made of his idea. In so doing, you have been patently dishonest with your brother. You didn’t interact with him or with his idea at all, but with your own fabricated misrepresentation of his idea. No surprise, you may browbeat your brother into submission with this dishonest tactic, but you will never win your brother to your view. You miserably failed to speak to him in grace by your use of this dishonest and logical misrepresentation.

The Book of Romans and much of Paul’s New Testament writing is written in a literary form, known today as “Dialectical.” In a dialectical writing, the author identifies contrary views to his own, clearly and rightly states those views, and then he honestly interacts with those views, hoping thereby to gain his brother, not browbeat him into reluctant submission. If you succeed in this literary form, the person with whom you disagree will congratulate you on rightly understanding and stating his view. He has no ground to charge you with the dishonest “Straw Man” misrepresentation. Notice in Romans how Paul occasionally actually refers to those who hold a contrary view to his in second person pronouns, “you” or “ye.”

2. **Horns of the Dilemma or Excluded Middle** logical fallacy. If you hear your brother’s explanation and try to make it as different from yours as possible, to the extent that you leave the impression that your idea is quite reasonable and his is idiotic, and then you say, “There is nothing between your idiotic idea and my reasonable idea” or words that effectively say this, you are guilty of this dishonest logical fallacy. In fact, you have consciously and deceitfully ignored any number of other ideas that fall between your idea and your misrepresentation of your brother’s thoughts. Example; more than once in discussion with a fatalist on the question of Biblical predestination, I have heard the fatalist say, “You must either agree with my view, or you are a ‘Virtual deist’ who believes that God does nothing whatever in the lives of His people while they live.” The fatalist in this comment exemplifies perfectly this dishonest fallacy. He says there is no other way to see things. You must either agree with his fatalism, or you must confess that you are a “Virtual deist.” Sorry, Scripture overflows with its truth that rejects both extreme ideas, fatalism and deism. And I

choose to believe this excluded middle ground of Scripture's teachings, not either of the "Horns" of the false and dishonest dilemma my fatalist brother tried to poke at me.

If we are to obey Paul's and Peter's inspired teachings and grow in grace, always speak with grace, we must learn to speak to our brothers and sisters in Christ far differently than often occurs. A few thoughts for change.

1. **God gave us one mouth and two ears.** Make it your goal to listen to your brother or sister twice as much as you speak. Never engage a brother or sister in conversation and try to dominate the conversation. Try to listen, truly listen, to your brother's or sister's thoughts. They just might teach you something that you do not presently know. And, by all means, face reality. You do not know all there is to know. You just might be in error. If you look up the definition of the word "Disciple," you'll discover that the primary meaning of the word means "Student, learner." When you deceive yourself into thinking your ideas are infallible, that you presently know everything that you need to know and that what you know is absolute truth, you by definition cease to think of yourself as one of the Lord's disciples. If this mindset fits, pray and ponder. Your present status more matches the puffed up knowledge that Paul described than the disciple's seeking, humble, and learning heart that Jesus commands. Listen to your brother or sister. Listen with your heart. **Listen twice as much as you speak.** Try to understand what they believe. Ponder it honestly and thoroughly before you reject it. And, even if you disagree in the end, respectfully state your disagreement. Never put your brother or sister down or ridicule them for their idea. Seek to win that person, not "Beat" him/her with words.
2. **Face your own limitations.** Sincerity is an honorable and Biblical frame of mind. Sincerity rightly accompanies humility, not arrogance. Instead of thinking yourself infallibly enlightened, follow Scripture's instruction. Regard your brother or sister and respond to him/her "...in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." (Galatians 6:1-6) Your own pride will blind you to your faults. It will also convince you that everything you believe is flawless. You think that you have no need to hear or consider anything that your brother or sister says to you. Ponder Paul's warning against novice pride. (1 Timothy 3:6; what is "...the snare of the devil"?)
3. **What does the word "Grace" mean in Scripture,** especially when Scripture uses this word to teach us how God saved us from our sins? What did God do to you that makes His saving work in you a thing of "Grace"? Did you mostly deserve His saving, but He added a little

portion of grace to ensure your salvation? No? You believe that you were wholly undeserving and that God in undeserved grace showed you incomprehensible kindness in saving you? Good! Now you have your model for every dialogue you have with other believers. Show them "always," Peter's word, that same kind grace that God showed you in saving you. No, you'll never rise to that noble degree of grace, but strive to grow in grace, even before you strive to grow in knowledge. To grow in something means that you are still advancing, not that you have arrived and know all.

4. **Before every conversation with a believer, think consciously and prayerfully of the word "Grace."** Strive to flavor every word and every sentiment you speak or show to that person with true grace. Would you like a reliable test to show you if you succeeded in "Grace speech," in your growing more grace in your conversation? You have it. Carefully observe the person whom you engage in conversation. That person will mirror your attitude back to you. If that person mirrors grace back to you, you did well. At the end of your discussion, if that person is closer to you and shows comfortable grace toward you, you showed grace. If he/she is edgy and tense toward you, you failed the "Grace test." Stop and prayerfully ponder your speech. Ask the Lord to show you how to replace your vinegar with His grace in your speech.
5. **Never hide behind "Preacher, this is just the way I am. Take it or leave it."** This would be an ideal time to study what the Bible doctrine of repentance means and begin to practice it. Faithful, Biblical discipleship involves life-transforming change, not stubbornly hanging on to "How I am." Jesus gave James and John a nickname when He called them, "Sons of Thunder." (Mark 3:17) Did John strive to live up to that nickname by repeatedly say, "Jesus, that is just the way I am. After all, you gave me the nickname. I'm just living up to it"? No, a "Son of thunder" followed Jesus and was transformed into the apostle of love, the man who wrote more about Christian love than any other New Testament writer. We all need to live with an abiding knowledge that we need to repent in order to grow more like our Lord, and that repentance must involve our speech.

I close this study with a personal note, a note that should touch every preacher and every person who speaks before/to or in any way holds responsibility in a church to lead or guide it.

*My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. (James 3:1-2)*

I've been speaking to the church for sixty years. I look back over this time and recall with significant pain occasions when I now realize that I spoke my thoughts in a way that unnecessarily, though not intentionally, offended someone in my audience. And I grieve. I lose sleep over my failures. I suppose that is part of the "greater condemnation" of which James writes. Whenever anyone speaks to another believer, he should ponder and pray that his words be spoken in a way that leaves no doubt that they were strongly seasoned with grace. If we follow Scripture's example, we have no excuse to speak harshly or rudely to a brother or sister in the faith. James goes on in this chapter to make the point quite clearly, a point that we all need to take to heart and to practice every time—no exceptions—we open our mouth to speak to a brother or sister in Christ. In the opening verses of Matthew 18, Jesus quite clearly warns us regarding the judgment that He sends on anyone who offends one of "these little ones." If you wait till the words have been spoken and the damage done, the offense has occurred, and you shall surely find yourself under the Lord's righteous and severe judgment for the offense. Pray for grace and for self-control—for ego control—to prevent such words or attitudes escaping your lips. Pray to avoid the "greater condemnation" that the Lord surely sends upon anyone in His church who speaks to another believer with any tone or sentiment short of true Bible grace. This, my friend, is true, Biblical "Resurrection Ethics."

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church  
16434 Woodruff  
Bellflower, California

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