

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Resurrection Ethics

And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. (1John 3:3)

A young elder recently visited our church and demonstrated a Biblical habit far wiser than his years. When you read a passage in the Bible, your first thought should be to determine who wrote the passage and to whom he wrote it. Your next step should be to search the passage for any action the passage requires of you. The Bible does not teach "Passive obedience," a concept of fatalistic folks who believe that God causes everything that occurs. Some of these folks understand that their belief imputes the cause of sin to God. Inconsistent with their stated belief, these folks believe that God actively and irresistibly causes all our good works. If God directly and irresistibly causes our good works, why are our best efforts often so anemic and misguided? Is God also responsible for our less-than-perfect obedience? I have never seen a single believer whose faith-walk remotely attained the degree of obedience that God would claim. This idea is fully as errant as the primary fatalistic belief that God causes everything, including sin. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible teaches believers to take specific actions that glorify God. Yes, Scripture always teaches that the new birth and God's work that translates (Colossians 1:13) us from the family of Adam to the family of God is performed wholly of God. In fact Scripture teaches that prior to that work of grace performed wholly by God in us, we were dead in trespasses and sins. (Ephesians 2:1, 5) Dead people cannot do things. They are wholly beyond the realm of personal action. The people who hold to this errant idea of "Passive obedience," gospel obedience wholly and irresistibly caused by God, ignore Scripture's teaching regarding the profound effect of the new birth on a person. They view the regenerate child of grace as being just as depraved as the wicked unregenerate who hates God and all things holy. However, Scripture teaches that after God gives us life in Christ in the new birth, God in Scripture commands us to actively use that life in our personal conduct wholly for His glory. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) No Scripture ever teaches us that God does all the doing in our faith-walk, not a one. Whenever you read Scripture's teachings that command our obedience, you always find certain specific actions that God commands us to perform. He encourages, convicts, and provides assisting grace, but He does not do the obeying or faith-walking for us. He commands us to "Trust and Obey" Him.

Our study passage is such a lesson. After simply outlining our hope of the Lord's return at the Second Coming when we shall be like Him and see Him as He is, John follows that comforting truth with this exhortation to purify ourselves, "...even as he is pure." If we shall rise in His likeness at the Second Coming, He teaches us to work to live in His likeness now, not to coast passively through life expecting Him to do all the righteous living for us.

How does a believer in Jesus and in His return purify himself? New Testament passages abound, but two will quite clearly show us the way.

But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. (James 4:6-10)

Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. 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. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his Holy Spirit. (1 Thessalonians 4:1-8)

James communicates both a warning and a promise to us. When we become self-centered and self-assured in our selves, thinking ourselves above our brothers and sisters in Christ, we may occasionally get some "Pushback" from them, but our greater fear should be the Lord Himself. He

always reveals His stern disapproval of this attitude in Scripture. He may not strike in severe chastening the moment we so sin, but rest assured by Scripture, He shall stand up in His time and way to resist us when we allow our pride to control our attitude and action. Friends, you've never experienced resistance until you have faced the Lord's resistance!

At the same time the Lord resists the proud, He also reaches out with tender grace to strengthen the humble. In this James passage, the Greek word translated "humble" is defined as "Of the mind, meaning lowly, humble, modest, including the idea of affliction." ***It is the mirror opposite of proud.*** The proud arrogance of "I know more than you; I'm more righteous than you" grows in the fertile soil of carnal pride, however covered up with religious clothes. When the Lord brings the proud down, He does so in dramatic fashion.

James not only comforts us with the fact that the Lord gives grace to the humble, but he begins the thought with "***But he giveth more grace.***" Borrowing the wise strategy of identifying verbs in the passage that require action by us, let's see how many action verbs James uses in this passage.

1. *Submit yourselves therefore to God.*
2. *Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*
3. *Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.*
4. *Cleanse your hands, ye sinners.*
5. *...purify your hearts, ye double minded.*
6. *Be afflicted.*
7. *...and mourn.*
8. *...and weep.*
9. *...let your laughter be turned to mourning.*
10. *...and your joy to heaviness.*
11. *Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.*

On the other side of the action, what does the passage tell us that God does?

1. *But he giveth more grace.*
2. *God resisteth the proud.*
3. *...but giveth grace unto the humble.*
4. *...and he will draw nigh to you.*
5. *...and he shall lift you up.*

All told, James just gave us sixteen reasons not to believe the fatalistic idea that God does all the doing in our obedience. And this is one of multiple passages in the New Testament that teach the same powerful truth.

Why don't you take a few minutes and apply the same exercise to the quote from 1 Thessalonians? Notice in your study of this passage what Paul teaches us about sanctification.

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.

Scripture teaches two aspects of sanctification. In the work of Jesus that redeems us from our sins and secures our eternal inheritance with God, Jesus sanctified every one of His chosen vessels of mercy by His atoning sacrifice.

By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified. (Hebrews 10:10-14)

In this sanctification, Jesus wholly performed the work by His priestly sacrifice of Himself to God for our sins. We contribute nothing whatever. However, in Paul's admonition to the Thessalonians, the work of sanctification rests squarely on us to "...know how how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor." Paul reminds us that God's will, His stated commandments to us in Scripture, is our sanctification. Based on Paul's reasoning, no believer in God can attain this sanctification in ignorance of the teachings of Scripture. It builds on the secure foundation of our knowing what Scripture teaches us. Does God care whether we study (Not mindlessly read) Scripture? Paul's words, "For this is the will of God..." make the point emphatically.

In his brief point, John sums up these teachings and more regarding how the Lord commands and convicts His born-again children to order their lives in the here and now. He also specifically associates our "Self-purification" with our hope of the Lord's return and our resurrection to be with Him and like Him at His return. Study 2 Peter 1:5-11. As you study this passage, ask yourself, "Do I want to be a forgetful believer or a fruitful believer?" Imagine the turmoil of a child of grace who is so negligent of his divine obligation to add the seven godly traits that Peter names to his faith. What would it be like if you actually forgot that the Lord purged you from your "...old sins"? Every believer is liable to just such an ungodly state if we fail to add those qualities, all actions that Peter teaches us to "**add**" to our faith. The Lord gives us faith in the new birth, but He doesn't orchestrate or puppeteer us to add these qualities to our God-given faith. He commands us to do so. You believe the Lord shall return at the end? You believe that He shall raise your mortal body and glorify it to spend eternity in glorious fellowship with Him? Praise the Lord. How do you manifest that belief to other believers? To yourself for that matter? We cannot claim any more hope of His return than we manifest in purifying ourselves, "even as he is pure."

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Worship service each Sunday
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10:30 A. M.
Pastor