

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Beware Your Personal Vulnerability

Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. 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 3:17-18, KJV 1900)

We'd like to think ourselves so well-studied in the Scriptures and so wise in our knowledge of people that we could not possibly be deceived and lead away from Biblical truth. If Peter, one of the Lord's chosen apostles, fell into blameworthy conduct for a time (Galatians 2), what makes you or me think that we are immune? Carnal sinful pride loves to insulate us from Biblical humility and godly caution, aimed at self, not at some mysterious conspirator. If Paul and one of his closest and most faithful allies in the faith, Barnabas, fell into a heated controversy that separated them for a time (Acts 15:37-41), why are we so sure that we live above such things? You see, pride that keeps us smugly in the cloud of self-magnification, blinds us to our own Biblical vulnerability. The greater point of Scripture's warning is not to insulate us from our own weakness, but rather to make us aware of it and sensitive to it so that we may learn wise lessons, even when we err. If we fail to learn from our errors (Call it what Scripture calls it, "Sin"), we doom ourselves to constantly repeating those sins and doing lingering damage to our own faith and to our "Faith-relationships" with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Consider Paul and Peter or Paul and Barnabas as wise Biblical examples. Only by confronting and acknowledging our own prideful sins can we confess them and repent from them.

...seeing ye know these things before. Peter will close this letter with a strong exhortation to grow in grace and in knowledge, specifically, "knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Human pride and the model of education in our culture work together to cultivate ignorance, not ever-growing knowledge. Think. If you attend college, your formal education continues for over twenty years. At each plateau along the way, you receive a certificate or diploma that affirms your accomplishment. Then finally you walk down the aisle for that last diploma. In your mind, the culture tells you that you have arrived, that you now know everything that you will ever need to know. Wrong! A wise and Biblical education never ends. From the first step in your discipleship till the day you tell this world goodbye, Peter's words look you squarely in the eyes and command, "*But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*"

I have known a number of people who allowed themselves to be deceived by this cultural model

regarding their time with the Bible. They reach a certain point in life where they seemingly think they know enough about the Bible, so they slack off in their study of Scripture. Please take serious note. I intentionally use the word "Study" of Scripture, not merely reading the Bible. Their working knowledge and insight into Scripture will begin to dull and fade. If they are a preacher, their preaching will clearly show this erosion. They will increasingly preach about themselves and their accomplishments, or they will parrot ideas that they have learned from other men, but they will display less and less fresh and edifying insights into Scripture, something that only continues with a man's constant time in serious, prayerful study of Scripture. Two examples will suffice. I knew a preacher who, in his early ministry, spent several hours a day truly studying his Bible. When he entered the pulpit to preach, he could quote large portions of any text he happened to think about in his sermon, and he quoted it accurately. The pride of carnality slowly convinced him that he knew enough, so he slacked off in his study of Scripture. In his preaching, pride pushed him to continue trying to quote Scripture from memory, but he increasingly stumbled at the words and often misquoted the passage that he wanted to cite. And pride blinded him to the problem. He apparently never thought about his own neglect. In another example, a man who was a powerful preacher in his younger years increasingly started "Borrowing" ideas from other people. Instead of quoting John or Paul or Peter as his authority for what he believed and taught, he would either simply parrot the other man's ideas, or he would identify the other man and tell people how he agreed with that man's ideas. And his preaching that was once so edifying and powerful became dull and anemic. At one time both of these men were close to me, so their sad example had a strong influence on me. Lord, please stir my complacent nest and keep me hungry for Your Word till the day I see you in glory. The more we know about Scripture's teaching, including wise warnings such as we see here in Peter's closing admonitions, the more we will strive to remain diligent and faithful to the end.

...beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. God constantly displays His wise grace in the language of Scripture. In dealing with

error, we often focus on one extreme or another. In Scripture's teaching of truth, God uses words that establish truth while also excluding error in either extreme direction that sinful "Wrested" minds might go with the ideas set forth. One error related to these words holds that God micromanages all human actions. He either causes every event, or He "Permits" every event, even the most evil and twisted of sinful actions, with the intent of using the event for an eventual greater good. If this were the case, why would Peter use the cautionary word "beware"? No need to beware; if God causes or micromanages every action, just do what you wish. God will cause you to do what He wants you to do. Forget any thought of caution or beware. Occasionally folks who hold this fatalistic view will attempt to dodge the inevitable implication of the idea, that, if God causes everything, the errant idea must embrace the abominable idea that God causes sin. Paul confronts this very error in the first eight verses of Romans 3 and calls it a slander against the truth that he preached. I agree with Paul. The dodge will say something like this, "I'm 100% responsible for my sin, and God is 100% responsible for my obedience." The Biblical error of this idea, the fatalistic quicksand of it, lies in the unbiblical notion that our faith and gospel obedience are wholly passive by us. From Genesis to Revelation, Scripture abounds with frequent exhortations similar to Peter's words in our study passage. If God is 100% responsible for your obedience, why bother to beware? Just live your life on mindless auto-pilot; God will puppeteer you to do every good thing you'll ever do. If this idea were true, there is one glaring problem that no one who holds this view has ever explained to me. If God does 100% of the doing when you do good, and you are wholly passive, will you please explain why your very best obedience is so mixed and flawed with sin? Surely, if God put Himself 100% in charge of your faith and obedience, He'd do a better job at it. Thank you, Brother Paul, for such clear words in Romans 3 to refute this slander. The faith and obedience commanded in Scripture is not "100%" passive by us. God commands 100% engaged activity by us, and, if we trust Him and obey, He will supply His grace and guidance to aid our service.

Our human pride gladly makes us eager to beware of another believer's frailty or vulnerability to error, but Peter's words are addressed to each of us about ourselves. "...beware **lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.**" Peter warns us to keep our eye on ourselves, not on everyone else.

...fall from your own steadfastness. Just as Peter's inspired words refute the fatalist's idea of passive obedience, they also refute all ideas of relativistic belief that abounds in our day. God establishes His measure of truth and of godly conduct in Scripture. We either reshape our lives to that form, that "Mold," or we must confront the

reality that Peter affirms; we shall be led away with the error of the wicked from our own steadfastness. Peter leaves no ground whatever for the New Age relativism of "Well, that is your truth, but it isn't mine." Jesus, with everything that He taught and everything that He represents in Scripture, is God's one and only "Truth." (John 1:14; 14:6) If we fail to reshape our beliefs into His mold, we are in error, not in our own version of relativistic truth. Ah, wonderful Romans 3; Paul deals with this error as well.

For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged. (Romans 3:3-4)

"New Age" relativism is actually very "Old age" error. It goes all the way back to Genesis 3:1 with the serpent's "Yea, hath God said?" Do not miss the obvious point. The source of this question is a being who only lies; he never speaks truth. (John 8:44)

...fall from your own steadfastness. Again, Scripture supernaturally admonishes us and simultaneously refutes error. Here the errant idea that every born again child of grace shall persevere in faith and godliness falls before Scripture's warning. If God programmed every born again person to persevere in their faith and obedience, why warn them against falling from their steadfastness? No warning would be necessary if God has "Hard wired" you to persevere. Peter adds more refutation to this error.

But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. (2 Peter 1:9)

If it were not possible for a believer, one who has in fact truly been "purged from his old sins" to fall from his steadfastness, why did Peter write these words at all? In fact, based on this verse, it is not only possible, but this state of failure in a person whom Scripture describes quite specifically as having been purged from his sins (Not a pretender, but a true regenerated child of grace and vessel of mercy) remains in that sinful state so long that he eventually forgets that he was purged from his sins. Forgetting that you were purged doesn't occur with one act of sin now and then; it occurs through a prolonged practice of deceitful sin.

Scripture's warnings confront each of us to beware of our own vulnerability to failure. In this context, each of us needs to be diligent in our self examination and very cautious in our disagreement with our brothers or sisters in the faith. We should remind ourselves frequently of Jesus' caution about motes and beams in the eye. (Matthew 7:3 and context) When any one of us neglects this self-

examination, Satan feeds our pride with thoughts that we know more than any other brother or sister whom we know in the faith, that we are more righteous than any other believer, so we refuse to examine ourselves, and we also refuse to solicit, much less heed the wise counsel of our brothers and sisters in the faith. This is a dangerous state of mind. We put ourselves in a vulnerable state of accusing them while we slowly drift into forgetting that we were purged from our sins. In 2 Peter 1, Peter warns us that this state of mind leaves us barren and unfruitful in our knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We need a daily nudge with Peter's words.

...beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.

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