

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

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## What Jeopardy?

*And why stand we in jeopardy every hour? I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die. Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners. Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame. (1 Corinthians 15:30–34, KJV 1900)*

These verses provide a lively example of context defining and explaining a verse. Our study verses raise the question of imminent jeopardy that threatened the Corinthians, contextually related to what immediately preceded these verses. If we interpret Verse 29 as surrogate baptism, we are obligated to probe the potential jeopardy of the action. Surrogate baptism was supposedly practiced by one pagan religion in the Greek peninsula with no objection in the pagan or civil community. In fact, no logical jeopardy could reasonably fall upon anyone who refused to be baptized for another person who previously died. Most of those who read this piece, and the writer, do not believe in surrogate baptism. Have you or I encountered any kind of jeopardy recently because we do not believe in or practice surrogate baptism? None whatever.

The point of our study verses clearly associates some form of jeopardy with the right interpretation of Verse 29. Paul even gives a personal example, his fight "...with beasts at Ephesus," likely being thrown in the arena with wild animals, something the Lord obviously delivered him from. Paul broadens the question. For their belief in Jesus as God's one and only Son and Savior, including His death and resurrection, Paul and other first century Christians faced constant "Jeopardy" for their rejection of the endless array of pagan religions and false deities. It was the Christian belief in one and only one God and in Jesus and His resurrection that jeopardized these believers, and their belief in Him and in His resurrection was the basis for their baptism.

*I die daily.* In this comment, Paul reminds us of an often ignored reality of a true Biblical faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our faith is not all about us. It should be all about Him! When Jesus defined following Him, His primary criteria included two behaviors, 1) denying self, and 2) taking up one's personal cross. We must do both before we can truly follow Him. To take up one's cross in first century Roman culture referred to the Roman practice of crucifixion as a primary means of capital punishment. The convicted criminal was traditionally required to carry the cross piece of his cross to the place of final crucifixion. We see the

Romans imposing this odious task onto Jesus. Obviously, a professing believer does not literally die by crucifixion. However, the symbolism is undeniable. Self must die if we are to ever realize the power of God in our lives. We do not practice self-denial and cross-bearing by promoting ourselves and denigrating anyone who dares to question or disagree with what we think. The Biblical attitude in correcting another believer is not brow-beating or insulting the other person. It rather requires us to approach the erring believer "...in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." (Galatians 6:1-6) Only to the extent that self "Dies" can we reach out to others in this godly spirit and help them if they indeed are in error. The spirit of meekness and self-consideration means that we approach those with whom we disagree with the mindset that we might be the one who is wrong, so they might correct us rather than we correcting them. We reason with them; we do not browbeat or verbally abuse them. Christian dialogue is not an uncivilized contest whose winner is determined by who speaks the loudest or who is the most overbearing, more a pagan "Might makes right" attitude that a Biblical attitude that functions on the foundation of words well seasoned with grace. (Colossians 4:3-6; in this lesson, Paul asks the Colossians to pray for him that he may be able to speak as he "...ought to speak." And he shortly follows this point with an exhortation to the Colossians to strive to ensure that they speak words accompanied by grace, grace toward the brother or sister with whom they speak. In this context, grace is not a trait that we practice toward ourselves, but rather something that we are commanded to practice toward others when we engage them in dialogue)

Much of contemporary Christianity strains to contradict or to ignore this fundamental premise of New Testament Christian conduct. While belief in the Biblical doctrines of grace sets a sound basis for "Grace-speak and grace act," all too often even those who strongly profess to believe in Biblical grace ignore its ethical (Moral) obligations to their personal behavior and interactions with other believers. And then they wonder why their words and actions do not evoke respect and imitation in

the people around them. The power of the gospel only appears when we practice the gospel in thought, word, and deed, not when we ignore its ethics toward others. We can find a "Me-first" person anywhere any day of the week. And most folks who have a reasonable sense of Biblical character are looking for someone different, more akin to self-denial and cross-bearing than to self-centeredness and a stronger penchant for imposing crosses on others than on bearing our own cross.

Both in Jesus' discipleship criteria and in this passage, the death process is marked as "daily," not as an occasional or a once in a lifetime event. (Luke 9:23) Until dying to self becomes a habit in us, we have not attained the true "Habit" of New Testament Christianity in practice. Once many years ago I had preached on the habit of self-denial. After the service, I happened to overhear some of the folks talking about the sermon. One person mentioned this specific point and then proudly told about an occasion several years earlier when he denied his wishes in a mundane issue in the church and went along with others rather than insisting on his preference. One such act does not earn "Bragging rights." One such act does not establish a lifelong habit, and this dying daily demands just such a constant habit of thinking and acting. I fear that all too many contemporary professing Christians embrace a similar attitude. As a pastor, I have often heard people respond to various New Testament commanded behaviors with "Well, this is just the way I am, and you can either take me the way I am or forget it," when the way the person is does not remotely resemble the Biblical behavior. This self-serving attitude has become so commonplace that many pastors quietly whisper the effective outcome of the dominant attitude, "It is easier to ask forgiveness after the fact than to ask permission beforehand." The attitude seems to prevail; do whatever you wish to do, regardless of what Scripture teaches. If no one is upset or challenges you, you "Get away with it." If anyone reacts or becomes upset, then pretend humility and ask their forgiveness. This attitude proudly ignores and contradicts the Biblical teaching that we here study, especially Biblical repentance and life changing reform.

The idea of dying **daily** confronts a reality that we need to regard seriously. Even if you and I today face down our self-indulgent carnality and keep it in check today, we'll awake with it revived and ready to do battle with us tomorrow. The dying process, the self-denial and bearing one's cross must occur constantly, not once in a lifetime or once every year or two.

And what does this in-your-face discipleship issue have to do with baptism "for the dead," for the Jesus who died, but who now lives? Based on Paul's framing the lesson, it apparently has everything to do with baptism. If we acknowledge our commitment to the Lord Jesus as Scripture requires, self-promotion and the related putting

down of anyone who dares contradict us or think differently than we must be "Killed." In fact, it must be killed over and over again, daily.

*I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord....* Paul did not commit a word stumble here. He wrote his point with careful precision. While each of us must accept personal responsibility for our choices and conduct, the true Christian lifestyle demands a comprehensive community relationship. When the Corinthians rejoiced, Paul rejoiced. When they suffered for their faith, Paul suffered with them. In neither situation did Paul stand on the sidelines and observe the Corinthians. He was intimately and personally involved and intertwined with them in their faith.

Recently our church has suffered several difficulties. One of our members lost his mother and father-in-law in one week. He works with a man whose young adult son was killed in a biking accident. Another person suffered in remembrance that her mother passed away a year ago, and she struggled with the reminder of grief. A young mother is soon to deliver her second child; we should hold her and her family up in prayer for deliverance and kind, wise grace as they raise their children. Several of our folks all contracted the latest raging respiratory virus at the same time. As I pondered our many difficulties, I felt a compelling and abiding need to pray for these folks and to ask the church to jointly pray for them as well. This is part of the Biblical sense of community that characterizes a godly New Testament culture in a church. We must not forget that the faithful Church of Ephesus, one of the few churches to whom Paul wrote a recorded New Testament letter with no rebukes included, though sound and strong in her doctrinal posture, faced the Lord's solemn warning just a few short years later because she had left her "first love," the Lord Himself. We may attain near impeccable doctrinal soundness, but if we fail to show a Biblical attitude toward our brothers and sisters, showing them the love and grace that the Lord showed to us, we are no different from that Ephesian Church. In his first letter, John repeatedly makes the point. Our attitude toward our brothers and sisters cannot be contradictory to our attitude toward the Lord. We can't claim to love the Lord while showing spite and disregard or even contempt toward our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Paul's point is powerful and convicting. Though we live in a culture that does not condone outright persecution of Christians, our culture is rapidly growing hostile toward anyone who takes the Bible at all literally and faithfully holds to traditional Christian values. The jeopardy a believer faces for living out his baptism commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ, especially His death and resurrection which makes Him our living God and Savior, not our remote philosophy, may be closer to our lives than we think. If that jeopardy falls upon us, will we face it, or will we compromise our faith? That, my friends, drives us to the heart of Paul's question.

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Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor