

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

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## Truth and Fear

*Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name. I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore. For great is thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell. (Psalm 86:11-13)*

Based on his conviction of God's goodness, David prayed for God to intervene against the proud hearted people who arrogantly exalted themselves against him. What a world of difference if we each took our frustrations with the proud folk who create problems for us to God instead of trying to "fix" them ourselves! Normally we try to "bring them down a notch" or otherwise manipulate them and their problems ourselves. David quietly took the problem to God. Divine goodness is not compatible with a silent God against proud hearts. He prayed for God to show His goodness by dealing with the proud people who opposed him.

If we revisit the Hebrew poetic style of rhyming ideas instead of rhyming sounds to this passage, an interesting parallel surfaces in the lesson.

1. Asking God to teach us His ways is equivalent to "uniting my heart."
2. Walking in God's truth is equivalent to fearing His name.

"Teach me thy way..." Tom Constable makes his usual insightful observation regarding this phrase. Verse 11, "...[D]oes not mean 'teach me how to get out of this trouble' but 'teach me, while the trouble still rages, to live your way'. *Undivided heart*, 'unite/unify my heart', deliver me from being double-minded, two-faced with God; give me 'a single, steady aim, unmoved by threatening or reward, to you and your great name'.<sup>1</sup>

In the midst of trouble have you ever tried to negotiate with God to help you get out of the

immediate problem without considering that God might be allowing the problem to grow you to greater maturity in your faith, to change your sinful or spiritually immature attitude? Our American pride—or perhaps our "Adamic" carnal pride—readily steps into our lives to hinder any objective consideration of our own culpability in the problems that often plague us. Especially when similar problems repeatedly occur, do we consider that God may be allowing those annoying problems to repeat themselves because we failed to learn the lesson He wanted to teach us the last time we encountered the problem? We readily point the finger at others whom we quickly blame for our pain and problems, but do we consider that God is greater than any other person or being, so He could step into the situation in a heartbeat and alter anyone or any circumstance if He chose to do so? Why did He not intervene? Why did He not deal with the proud hearts that we perceive as causing our troubles? Perhaps God is more concerned with our learning a greater lesson than with our desire for revenge against our adversaries. If so, we must prepare to endure those problems over and over again, till we finally shift out of our defensive mood and try to look at our problem from God's perspective, not ours.

I love Constable's point that we should beg God to "teach me while the trouble still rages, to live your way." I will not embrace the fatalistic idea that every single problem that I encounter is divinely sent or caused. Solomon makes the profound point that bad things happen to good people. Sometimes things happen that we cannot explain from our limited perspective (Ecclesiastes 9:11). Much to the chagrin of those who are inclined toward fatalism, Solomon dared to say that "time and chance" happen to all, even to the best of people.

That point noted, however, we should live life with a sensitive heart to God as we encounter the difficult people and seasons of our lives. At times

<sup>1</sup>Carson, D. A. (1994). *New Bible commentary 21st century edition*. Rev. ed. of: *The new Bible commentary*. 3rd ed. / edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970. (4th ed.) (Ps 86:7). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press.

God may indeed allow trials to come our way because we need to learn how more to live life according to His way than to defend and perpetuate our own.

“...[U]nite my heart to fear thy name.” This simple statement grabs at our minds. So much is intended, but not stated. Unite my heart with what? Some commentators interpret the passage as referring to a double minded inclination. In the above quote Constable makes that point. I cannot reject the idea, but I wonder if it answers the passage adequately. A broader view that would embrace this idea would interpret the prayer as seeking God’s direction and providence *to unite his heart with God’s heart*. Perhaps the play on words is too simplistic, but I recall that God called David a man after His own heart (Acts 13:22). Did God coerce and manipulate David to become the man after His own heart, or did God use the difficult people and seasons in David’s life to “unite” his heart with God’s heart in the crucible of life’s trials? This interpretation appeals to me significantly more than the simple thought of eliminating a double-minded disposition from David’s heart.

A primary paradigm of Western Christianity in the twenty first century seems to be that we make our own choices, choices that we perceive as serving our personal interests, and then we negotiate with God to “bless our mess.” Much of the disillusionment at life’s trials in our Christian culture, I believe, grows out of this faulty perspective. Perhaps the surprising success of the “health and wealth—name it and claim it” carnal Christianity may build on this errant view regarding the true character of Biblical Christianity. Why should anyone for a moment expect God to compromise His moral character to “bless our mess” when He has clearly set forth diametrically opposite conduct in Scripture as His commanded way of living? Does Scripture teach us to choose our own way and bargain with God to approve it? Or does Scripture teach us in our most basic prayers to ask, “Thy will be done, not mine”? We do not understand the compelling Biblical truth that requires us to alter our lifestyle to match God’s rather than seeking to alter God’s teaching to comply with our private and personal ambitions.

Scripture teaches us not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by a renewed mind (Romans 12:2). Somewhere along the way many sincere folks who claim Christianity view their life as a divine assignment to manage everyone else’s life, not their own.

If we build our most fundamental thought of our Christian faith in harmony with the prayer for God to unite our heart with His, we will begin to experience the transformation of which Paul wrote in Romans 12. We begin to think His thoughts regarding moral, ethical, and personal choices in our lives, in our families, in our careers, and in our churches. By reading—and living by—Scripture as God gave it to us, we are breathing the air that God breathed and repeating the words and conduct that God spoke when He inspired the writing of Scripture.

Which course does Scripture dictate? Should we make our decisions based on what we want and what best serves our personal preferences and subsequently ask God to bless? Or should we consider the challenges that lie ahead of us and take them to God, asking Him to teach us His way in advance of any choices or decisions that we make? Should we set our heart in cement and then plead with God to agree with us? Or should we pray for God to unite our heart—including radical, life-transforming change—with His so that we gravitate in our preferences more and more to His way, not our own?

I am convinced that Western Christianity has made a self-destructive paradigm shift away from Scripture, and away from the heart of God in favor of self-indulgence. Only to the extent that we shift our paradigm back to God’s ways can we regain vital, earth-shattering, life-changing Christian character. The Old Testament book of Hosea is one of the most unusual books in the whole Bible. God directed His prophet to marry a prostitute, live with her, suffer her betrayals, seek her return over and over again. Why? A full reading of the book provides the answer. Hosea was God’s man who had God’s message, but he was unprepared—unequipped—to deliver it to Israel. Only when Hosea had suffered the same heartbreak that God had suffered could he deliver the message to Israel convincingly. Israel, God’s Old Testament bride, had “played the harlot” repeatedly. She had broken God’s heart! Only after Hosea knew by personal experience God’s heartbreak could he deliver the message of God as God wanted it taken to the people. Are we prepared for such a radical change in our own Christian conscience?

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