

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

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## Biblical Christianity in Action

*Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort. (1 Timothy 6:1–2, KJV 1900)*

Often, when the New Testament uses the word "servant," it reminds us that a major portion of first century Christians were slaves. The employer-employee professional relationship of our time was rare indeed. Scripture presents a beautiful balance in its ethics on social issues. While our passage deals with the servant, the New Testament teaches "master ethics" with similar clarity. If either a master or a servant violated the clear Biblical rule, Scripture leaves no doubt as to God's frowning judgment against them.

The Barna Group and occasionally other Christian organizations publish the results of surveys they conduct, including both Christian and non-Christian people. It is sad to note how alike Christians are to non-Christians in the most basic moral issues that face our culture today. Clearly, far too many professing Christians view their faith as something that impacts one day a week in their life, a nice cultural diversion, but not by any means a permanent way of life. Based on New Testament teaching, the ethics of Christian living should govern a believer's conduct from the church room, to the board room, to the family room, to the recreation room.

What Paul teaches in our study passage, given to him by the Holy Spirit, is not grandfatherly advice that we may take or leave at will. It is a rule of conduct that comes with no less weight than God's "Big Ten," "Thou shalt..." and "Thou shalt not..." During my secular career, on occasion I encountered respected and successful business people who operated on a simple, but immoral rule of conduct. According to their view, they could do anything they chose to do, no holds barred, so long as their conduct remained private. It was only wrong in their minds if someone found them out. This idea is repugnant to the teaching of Scripture. The Biblical ethic builds on one simple foundation. It matters not what you do or who knows or doesn't know about it. God knows everything you do—even everything you think. If He tells us in Scripture that something is wrong, that settles the matter. It is wrong, and we should avoid it privately just as much as in public. If a reasonable percent of professing Christians followed this Biblical ethic, the survey results would reveal a very different situation than we see today.

The rule of conduct, what guides our choices and decisions, comes to the forefront in this study. If my or your personal opinion supersedes God's commandments in Scripture, why bother even read the Bible at all? If God simply bows out of the moral arena and permits each individual to choose whatever option creates the greatest ease or pleasure, human variable judgment, not God's fixed moral nature and commandments, rule. Can you imagine such a world? How frightening!

On the other hand, if Scripture is God's fixed revelation to us, we have a solid anchor with which to steady the course of our lives against all the tides and winds of fickle human drift. I've believed the teachings of Scripture and tried to teach them since my mid-teens. That is well over fifty years. As I look back over the many personal, moral, and career dilemmas I faced, and the choices I made, a Biblical truth stands out with increasing clarity. Often when I was faced with the tensions that pulled me in different directions all at the same time, a clear right choice seemed so very difficult to find. Looking back, the difficulty has vanished. Had I taken my problem to Scripture alone, ***even in some of my most challenging career decisions***, I would have seen two very different and very clear options. One carried the stamp of Scriptural example and approval as right; the other contradicted Scripture's teachings. I increasingly realize that, when we twist in the winds of pressure and uncertainty, our dilemma grows out of our avoidance of Scripture's teachings.

When Joshua led Israel across the Jordan River into Canaan, he and the people faced amazing difficulties. They were under God's clear commandment to "Take the land." God had given it to them, but the land was not vacant at the time. It was occupied. God had delayed the transition for centuries because the "...iniquity of the Amorites was not full..." (Genesis 15:16) With each new village, with each individual settlement, came a new complexity. But God gave Israel a simple directive. The land was theirs, but they would truly possess only the land that they walked over, that they touched with "...the sole of their foot." He didn't give them the land on a silver platter. They had to take possession of it one step at a time. Many of the same "giants" that frightened their forefathers

forty years earlier still occupied the land. In fact, Israel's taking of the land was checkered pattern of occupying and avoiding, a violation of God's simple, straightforward command to take every part of the land by walking on it and trusting Him to fulfill His promised gift. The many enclaves of native peoples, living in the midst of Israel, became a dreadful curse to Israel. Each of these enclaves promoted their own god, their own immoral lifestyles, and they constantly worked to entice individual Israelites to join them. Near the end of Joshua's leadership, God directed him to speak words of stern warning to the faltering people.

*Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*  
(Joshua 24:14–15, KJV 1900)

Joshua saw no impossible complexity whatever in the situation. God had given the people a simple directive, and He hadn't changed His mind. Put away the false gods and depraved morals of the culture, a culture whose long-standing sin had finally reached the bottom of the moral pit. Put away all of them. And serve the Lord. Sadly prophetic, Joshua sensed that this simple commandment would not satisfy some of the people. The choice between two untenable options was only for the people who had already chosen to ignore God's commandments. Only those who had decided that serving God, as God commanded them to serve Him was "evil," were told to make such a choice. The gods of the Amorites, whose iniquity was now full, or the gods of Israel's ancestors were equally false gods. One false god was no better than another.

Folks, this same clarity remains in the teachings of Scripture today for us. Whether we face challenges in the work place, the neighborhood where we live, our family, or any other part of our life, God gives us a sweet peaceful commandment to obey, and He shows us the dreadful evil of all other choices.

Consider just one such complexity that I faced during my secular career. In one of my positions, I inherited a hostile work force that was represented by a confrontational and aggressive union. My predecessor had mistreated and abused these employees, so they despised me the minute I walked in the front door. Over three years I tried to prove to them that I would be fair with them. About two or three years after I left this position, the employees voted to dismiss the union. They no longer felt that they needed its protection. I was so

very thankful to have played a part in proving by actions to these people that God's moral requirements apply to the boss no less than to the employee, the point of our study lesson this week.

In another career situation, I built a successful business working respectfully with both "labor" and "management." My success required that I build and maintain the respect of both. On several occasions, I would be invited to participate in rather tense negotiations in which the negotiators would call for a caucus, a brief halt of negotiations to discuss their options. I was honored that both sides would ask me to go into their private caucuses and share thoughts, recommendations, and ideas that would hopefully help them resolve their differences. I could not have done this apart from building a reputation for the kind of unbiased moral conduct that Paul commands in our lesson.

My experience changed me more than it changed anyone around me. I grew from a "pro-management" anti-union person to a helpful ombudsman who sought to help both sides of the work place find common ground for lasting, healthy relationships.

This pervasive attitude and behavior that Paul imposes onto both servants and masters carries grave consequences. What happens if a professing Christian fails to live up to this teaching?

*...that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed.*

When professing Christians fail to practice what God teaches, simply, clearly, and consistently in Scripture, they bring sad consequences onto their God and to His reputation. Both God and His doctrine will be blasphemed. People will ridicule the idea that being a Christian really makes any difference in the way you live, and offer your or my own failures as living proof that justifies their blasphemy.

I grew up in a small farming community. On one occasion I accompanied my father to the local feed, seed, and hardware store where Dad had to ask the owner for credit to make a significant purchase. The owner promptly agreed to sell Dad the items he needed to plant that year's crop, on Dad's promise that he'd repay the debt at harvest season that fall. In their subsequent conversation, the store owner told Dad about something he found in the store's archives. Years before he took ownership of the store, a man who lived in an adjoining county, several miles away, approached the prior store owner, just as my Dad did, for credit to buy seed, fertilizer, and supplies to plant his crop. The store owner had never seen this man before, so he asked the man to give him some personal background that might justify this extension of credit. The man talked about various things he'd done, about people he knew, and, in the process told the store owner that he was a member in good standing of a Primitive Baptist church near his home. With this

news, the store owner agreed to give the man credit. For a number of years, this man would travel to the hardware store in the spring, and buy his needed supplies on credit. Then in the fall of the year after harvest, he'd travel back to the hardware store, and pay his bill. The fascinating thing that I learned that day when Dad and I listened to the store owner was this. ***The prior store owner had no name and no address for this man. The ledger card simply read "Primitive Baptist from Itawamba County."*** People, this is the kind of godly integrity that our profession of faith should carry. This unnamed Christian man never gave the store owner reason to blaspheme either God or God's doctrine. Let it be so with us today.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church  
16434 Woodruff  
Bellflower, California

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