

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

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## Discerning Truth and Rejecting Error

*If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. (1 Timothy 6:3-5, KJV 1900)*

A few weeks ago we examined Paul's instruction to Timothy that forbade the young preacher from applying Paul's teachings with partiality, being strict with some and lenient with others. Here Paul strongly reinforces that point again. "...any man..." clearly says that anyone who either teaches or consents to others teaching error is motivated by one or more of several carnal, sinful forces and is to be avoided, "...from such withdraw thyself."

Without question, at times well-meaning people have been far too divisive and far too aggressive in their designs to avoid error, at times attacking shadows instead of factual error. However, the solution to the problem is not a blind avoidance that refuses to acknowledge or reject any and all errors. It is a return to the New Testament model that accepts New Testament teaching as the exclusive measuring rod for all ideas and teachings.

There are times when historical Christianity has created a unique word to encapsulate an accepted and Biblical doctrine. For example, you will never find "Trinity" in the Bible's text, but I unreservedly believe the doctrine that this historical term identifies. With this caveat, I also observe that teachers of error must often invent an ever-growing number of non-Biblical terms, or, at times, redefine words that appear in Scripture with meanings that clearly violate the Biblical use of the word. Consider just a few such terms that are often used to hide the error or make error appear to be non-offensive and palatable.

1. The "universal appeal of the gospel." Advocates of various doctrines that reject or effectively compromise God's election of a particular people use this term to make their idea sound winsome and broad-minded. In fact, they either reject the Bible doctrine of election, or they reject the Bible doctrine of the immediate and effective work of the Holy Spirit in the new birth. If they continue to accept Biblical election at all, they compromise its implementation by teaching that the Holy Spirit must use the gospel to reach, convince, and woo the sinner to accept and believe the gospel. Otherwise, according to this teaching, the

new birth could not—and would not—occur. So a rational, intellectual "appeal" in the gospel must convince a person whom Scripture describes as "...dead in trespasses and sins..." (Ephesians 2:1) to accept and believe the gospel. Occasionally advocates of this error will try to further hide their error by saying, "Yes, I do accept the necessity of the gospel for the new birth, but I also believe that God irresistibly and effectually causes every one of His elect to respond to the gospel, so what I believe is not really very different from what you believe. Why should my belief bother you?" Theoretically, advocates of the "universal appeal of the gospel" will also assert that God's "offer" in their sinner's-appeal unbiblical gospel is quite sincere. According to their teaching, if ever an unregenerate, non-born-again, sinner actually heard and accepted the message of the gospel, God would actually save that person, despite his not being one of the elect. You see the depth of truth's compromise by this milk-toast term.

2. God's "secret will." Advocates of this error will often appeal to Deuteronomy 29:29, despite the obvious point that the passage doesn't use the term at all. They protest, "Well, do you believe you know all there is to know about God and His will?" is a blatant logical fallacy, something of a red herring, to divert your attention away from the error. In most discussions that I've had with advocates of the "secret will" error, their real objective is to attempt to make God the cause of sin and of every single wicked event that occurs. The premise is that God always follows Biblical morality in His "revealed will," but He also has a "secret will," from which He causes all sin and wickedness, but He does so in some mystical way that avoids making Him the cause—of what He caused. We may have good dialogue regarding this passage, but neither this passage nor any other in the

Bible ever teaches that God ever in any way contradicts His righteous character.

3. "Perseverance" is an increasingly common term that falls into this category. The word appears once in the King James New Testament. (Ephesians 6:18) In this passage, Paul through the Holy Spirit directs our wise, consistent, and faithful wearing of the "whole armor of God," to maintain "perseverance" in prayer. In clear contradiction to the New Testament's use of this term, advocates of error who make this term a near-hobby-horse for its frequent appearance in their vocabulary, redefine the word to mean that everyone who is "really born again" will grow in righteous behavior and will become better and better till they die. A brief, cursory review of several major Bible characters, men and women of unquestioned faith, soundly disproves this false doctrine. Read Genesis 25:6, the verse immediately prior to the inspired record of Abraham's death. Abraham fell into the pagan cultural habit of maintaining concubines prior to his death. Does that sound like he continued to improve after the earlier record of his godly faith? Read the life of Lot in Genesis. The final chapter finds him isolated in a cave and fathering children through incestuous relations with his two daughters. However, when Peter in the New Testament refers to an earlier episode in Lot's life, he describes Lot as a "...righteous man..." whose righteous character was "...vexed..." by the filthy lifestyles he saw in his fellow-citizens of Sodom. (2 Peter 2:6-9) Did Lot "persevere" based on any reasonable definition you hear or read from advocates who make "perseverance" their constant doctrinal hobby? Please! Help me understand.

This list could go on at length, but these three examples will give you a good taste of how purveyors of error often appeal to non-Biblical words, or redefine good Biblical words in contradiction to the Bible's meaning, to give credibility to their errors.

Paul gives us two rules by which to assess any word a man uses or any doctrine that a man teaches.

1. ...the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and
2. ...to the doctrine which is according to godliness.

Although we may well encounter people who advocate significant error in violation of these two rules, we may not always know what specifically motivates a given man to teach his particular flavor of error. However, Paul followed the Holy Spirit's

inspired direction to tell us the kind of motives that predictably drive well-informed men to teach error. Take your choice.

*...He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.*

I'm content to allow the Holy Spirit to know the man's particular motives from this list that He gave us in Scripture. We often face severe limitations that preclude us from knowing precisely what motivates someone to do what he does. However, some of these sinful motives tend to make themselves known more clearly than others. For example, look at the last item in this list of infamous sinful motives, "...supposing that gain is godliness..." This line could have come directly from the health-and-wealth-heresy's playbook. The more right you are the more you prosper. If counting the noses of one's supporters or measuring the financial resources of a group of people are valid measures of what is right or wrong according to God's measure, the Church of Rome just won the prize. And perhaps the good people in Salt Lake City come in second in this country. Really!

We need not force one of the various motives onto a given individual who is teaching error. However, the passage requires one simple action from us; "...from such withdraw thyself." Paul doesn't tell us to withdraw ourselves and to demand that everyone else do the same. He is teaching Timothy specifically how Timothy should deal with such errors, and that lesson rightly applies to individual preachers and pastors in our day. Once I have engaged a man sufficiently to know that he advocates grave error—that he rejects the truth of Jesus' words and doctrine—Paul requires me to "...withdraw..." myself from this person. How do I do that? Simple. I will not invite that man to preach at the church where I serve as pastor. I will not defend or promote that man to others. And I will teach, with as much conviction and clarity as I can, the Biblical truth that refutes and contradicts the error that the man teaches.

This challenging lesson is no less part of inspired Scripture than the first two chapters of Ephesians or the ninth chapter of Romans. Paul didn't present the information with a take-it-or-leave-it attitude. He emphatically commands it. Rest assured, when godly people close their eyes to error and tolerate it, Satan and error will rule the day, and godliness will fall to the ground. The man's personality is irrelevant. The man's past history is irrelevant. Based on Paul's inspired lesson, how does the man's teaching compare to Jesus' words and doctrine?

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Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
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