

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Faithful Reminders

If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained. But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. (1 Timothy 4:6–7, KJV 1900)

We live in a human-centric age. The dominant social movements of our age focus on humanity, not God. We are taught to cultivate a healthy "self-image." We are taught that the primary agenda of a healthy church is to offer programs and self-help groups for every person with every kind of problem. Many modern "mega-churches" even make their Sunday collective worship almost secondary to a multitude of "small group" home gatherings and a near endless schedule of special interest or special need focus group meetings. The preaching of the gospel to the collective gathered body of a New Testament church is viewed as incredibly old fashioned and out of touch with our modern world and culture. I read or hear such attitudes and have to think. Did the first century Christian churches work at putting themselves in step and harmony with the world in which they found themselves? Or did they live with a firm and clear vision of the Lord's church as "Not of this world" and its mission, to call on God's children to steadfastly embrace an "Other-worldly" outlook?

If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things... What things? Did Paul consider only the list of typical departures from the faith by this thought, or did he also intend for Timothy—and us—to emphasize the foundational truths of the gospel that he outlined in First Timothy 3:16? I suggest that he taught us to make the bedrock truths of the gospel our first focus, and to round out that truth with reminders to our congregations that departures from these truths are to be expected and resisted. Sadly often, according to Scripture, departures from the faith occur within the churches, not from outside them. Paul reminds the Ephesian elders of this point.

Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. (Acts 20:30–31, KJV 1900) (Emphasis added)

By his choice of the words, "...some shall depart from the faith..." Paul emphasizes that his present teaching aims primarily at internal departures. You can't depart from an airport unless you were in the

airport before your departure, can you? The word translated "depart" makes this point clearly.

...to abandon a former relationship or association, or to dissociate (a type of reversal of beginning to associate)—'to fall away, to forsake, to turn away.' ... you have turned away from the grace (of God)^{6 1}

In a thoroughly practical sense, every day with every action we engage, we either "Join" or we reverse "...the process of joining..." the church of our membership (See footnote below). With every step, we move our lives into closer fellowship with our brothers and sisters, or we move ourselves away from them into dangerous spiritual isolation. As we begin 2011, let's avoid all the short-lived New Year's resolutions, and invest some time assessing what we did in the last year in terms of our fellowship with our brothers and sisters in our home church. Today are we closer to them or more distant?

We shall examine this point in detail at a future time, but let's touch it now. While the New Testament affirms that local individual churches must maintain respectful, loving fellowship with each other, avoiding isolation and departure just as individual believers should do, the New Testament never teaches the popular concept of denominational membership. What do I mean by this term? As individual believers, we belong to the church of our membership. Scripture teaches that we owe certain specific duties to that church. If necessary business calls us away from our home church on a given weekend, Scripture affirms that we should work to find a sister church to attend while there, but our presence at that church does not relieve our New Testament obligation to our

⁶ The meanings of παραπίπτω, ἐκπίπτω^c, ἀποστρέφωμαι^b, and ἀφίσταμαι^b appear to focus upon the initial aspects of dissociation. As such, they constitute a reversal of the process of joining or beginning to associate.

¹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., 448 (New York: United Bible societies, 1996).

home church. We may desire to donate to various ministries in other areas, but that donation in no way relieves our New Testament obligation to give regularly, systematically, and sacrificially to our home church. "...Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together..." (Hebrews 10:25) refers to our home church, not to any church anywhere within our fellowship of churches. And we should keep in mind that our home church holds a position of spiritual authority over us. It was the Corinthian Church of the man's membership that Paul directed to impose its discipline—in this case excommunication—on the man who fell into moral sin. (1 Corinthians, the entire fifth chapter)

For the people in the pew, this specific New Testament obligation to the church of our membership requires faithful attendance and service to our home church, not a loose "belonging" to our whole fellowship of churches, though such a fondness is altogether appropriate so long as we maintain our close and faithful relationship to our home church. For the men in the pulpit, this New Testament teaching, as well as the New Testament's teaching on the function of elder and pastor, requires that we carefully and consistently avoid thinking of ourselves as regional or fellowship-wide bosses or lords over other churches and preachers. A pastor's New Testament authority ends with the church that he serves as pastor. He can claim no—none whatever—New Testament authority over other churches in the city or region where he serves, much less over all churches in his fellowship. Notice that Paul described all spiritual gifts, even apostles, as being set "...in the church..." not over it. (1 Corinthians 12:28) When a preacher begins to think of himself as being over other preachers and churches, he has abandoned the New Testament's clear definition of his divine assignment. When they functioned in certain teaching roles, particularly toward churches that they had started, the apostles exercised wider authority, but, unless a man can make a case that the office of apostle remains open today—and that God has appointed him to that office—no preacher can claim such authority outside the church that he serves as pastor. For that matter, even within the church that he serves, a man's authority is conditioned on his teaching the truth of the gospel. (1 Corinthians 11:1. Notice Paul's condition, "...even as I also am of Christ." Had Paul abandoned Christ, he held no claim of leadership on the Corinthian Church)

Balance in preaching the model gospel that Paul exemplifies in our study context is essential to growing strong and healthy believers in Christ. We may preach nothing but positive truth and leave people well informed, but dreadfully naïve and therefore also dreadfully vulnerable to false teaching or false teachers. Let a winsome, convincing marketing expert preach anything remotely like the truth, and they will receive it without question. They effectively become

vulnerable to a skillful huckster. Conversely, preach nothing but the dangers of error to them, and they become experts at rooting out heresy, but they also will eventually become spiritually starved for nutritious gospel food. Jesus charged Peter to feed His sheep and His lambs. If we follow this imbalanced focus on nothing but error, we'll create well educated sheep who know the difference between good and bad sheep food, but their feeding trough will always be empty, and they will starve of spiritual malnutrition. Preach the truth to these people. Feed them with sound, Biblical New Testament spiritual food. In the process, remind them that we live in a broken world that is, at its very heart, hostile toward our God and toward His truth. Show them the irrelevant errors that Satan, the great deceiver of the brethren, so effectively uses to tease them into superficial passions that have little to do with the core truths of the gospel. Always bring them back to the glories of the good news of the gospel. Remind them that misguided and well-meaning believers, as well as not-so-well-meaning people inside their churches occasionally become ensnared by Satan's devices, and depart from the faith. Their allegiance is to be to the Lord Jesus Christ and the faith that He delivered, not to either a smooth marketing huckster or to a devoted heresy hunter.

It would be a wonderful world if we could live our whole life, focused only on the positive truths of the gospel that Paul summarized in First Timothy 3:16. However, even the smallest spoonful of reality reminds us that such is not the case. For every drop of inspired ink on the pages of our Bible, there is someone or some group that will cover over their objection with very tasteful wardrobes, altogether appealing to the self-focused appetite of our human nature. But once you strip away the cute wardrobe, underneath you discover the sinister smirk of the serpent, hissing the same words he said to Eve in the Garden, "Yea, hath God said?" And this questioning of what God said is always followed by a major misrepresentation of what God said. ***Will we ever learn that Satan never wrote an acceptable commentary on the Bible?***

...thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained. What does it mean to be a good minister of Jesus Christ? What traits define a "good" minister in contrast to a "bad" minister? The answer to this question does not appear in how well the man can "Schmooze" people or play the suave promoter of his latest idea. Nor is this goal attained by how many errors the man can find, while he ignores his primary divine assignment of feeding sheep. The preacher who politicizes his pulpit, turning it into a vehicle to promote himself, his latest ideas, or his latest friends fails the "Good minister of Jesus Christ" test. When Paul wrote, "We preach not ourselves..." (2 Corinthians 4:5), he set the bar for every preacher from that day forward. The man who fills the pulpit

can never, directly or indirectly, use his position to promote himself, for in direct proportion to his self-focus, he dilutes and clouds his focus on "...Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake."

The function of the gospel has to do with a nourishing of our hearers in the nutritious spiritual food of the gospel, addressed to their service to God in an unfriendly world. In the process, we must anchor our teaching on the positive truths that Paul set forth in First Timothy 3:16. However, the opening verses of First Timothy the fourth chapter are no less part of the New Testament message than that verse. Thus, our charge includes equipping and warning the people to whom we preach against the irrelevant and addictive departures that Paul characterized at the beginning of the fourth chapter. "Be thou faithful...."

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

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