

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

Volume 27, Number 17

May 15, 2011



## Leadership Problems: A Two-Pronged Approach

*I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality. Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure.* (1 Timothy 5:21–22, KJV 1900)

The longer I live and the longer I study the Bible the more I am amazed at how thoroughly God covers the details and directs us in our Christian activities. The verses before us deal with two challenging problems.

**1. How do you deal with a man in ministry who at one time was faithful, but now he has in some way departed from the faith or from New Testament ethical conduct?**

Given our human brokenness, the most qualified and valuable of spiritual gifts is liable to failure. Even Paul described his own precautions to avoid such failure. "But I keep under my body, and bring *it* into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." (1 Corinthians 9:27 KJV) Anytime a preacher who was once respected for faithfulness fails, the name and cause of our Lord falls into disgrace. God forbid that any one of us should so bring reproach onto that worthy name by which we are called.

**2. How do you ensure that faithful and qualified men are ordained to the ministry in the first place?**

It is far less damaging to a church to prevent the ordination of an unqualified man than to ordain him and then realize that he should not have been ordained in the first place. The cliché well applies; "How do you unscramble an egg?"

Our study passage answers both questions with wise counsel from God. Let's examine them in order.

*...observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.* This instruction is quite clear—and quite simple. We'd have to work hard not to understand what it says. If a man in the ministry falls into error, be he our best friend or our sharpest critic, God requires us to deal with him according to his error, not according to his friendship with us or lack thereof. When a man falls into significant error, the question has nothing to do with friendship, with his personality, or with anything else. It has to do with his error.

A preacher who shows partiality or favoritism in dealing with error, depending on the man who errs, sets a deplorable example for the church he serves, as well as for all who observe his unbiblical example. Whatever our understanding of Biblical teaching, God requires us to apply Paul's teaching in this passage alike to any and all.

How do we weigh the gravity of a man's error? A man may hold to an unusual interpretation of a particular passage, but his view does not materially alter his belief in the essential doctrines of the Bible. If we examine our beliefs and interpretations carefully and thoroughly, we all fall into this scenario in one way or another. Another man may alter his beliefs of the essential basis on which God saves sinners from their sins and redeems them to eternal glory. Or still another man may corrupt his belief in the Bible's teachings regarding God's predestination, making God into a cosmic puppeteer and thereby, either directly or indirectly making God the responsible party for either sin or for the varied degrees to which we each obey the teachings of Scripture. Often this errant belief will appear under such generic terms as "God orchestrates all things for His glory." If God orchestrates sin, God is morally culpable for that sin and should face righteous judgment for its damages to divine holiness. Paul so teaches in the first ten verses of the third chapter of Romans, and so should we. Yet another man may symbolize the resurrection so as to deny the Bible's teachings regarding a literal, physical, bodily resurrection at the last day, and perhaps even deny Jesus' personal, literal, bodily resurrection.

I suggest that all of these beliefs cross such a major Bible teaching as to be wholly objectionable and are therefore not to be tolerated in a New Testament church, regardless of the man who teaches them. Friendship, personality, or popularity are all immaterial to the gravity of the error he teaches.

There is a basic tenet of Biblical interpretation that aids our weighing of the gravity of various aberrant beliefs. It is called the "Perspicuity of Scripture." Simply described, this principle appeals to the clarity with which Scripture teaches a specific doctrine. The more ink and the more clarity with which we see this teaching in Scripture, the more importance we should give it. The less ink and the

less clarity we see in the idea as Scripture teaches it the less gravity we should attach to it. Given the clarity of Scriptural teaching on the sample doctrines mentioned above, I cannot rationalize viewing them as optional or non-essential beliefs. I believe every conscientious and faithful believer should oppose such errors, regardless of who teaches them; "...doing nothing by partiality." What bizarre rationale can anyone fabricate that concludes that Elder Populist's teaching that eternal salvation is partly of God and partly of man, even if God effectually and irresistibly causes the man's response, is perfectly acceptable? However, if Elder Grumpy teaches the same thing, he should be marked and avoided according to the New Testament's teachings, for he advocates grave error and uses these errant teachings to divide God's children or to create a following to himself, and thus fosters a divisive party spirit? Paul's instructions in this lesson require an objective and impartial treatment of any and all based on the man's soundness in the faith, not on his personality or on our personal history with the man.

The second point from our passage deals with ordination. *Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure.* I am amazed at the strained rationale that people apply to justify ordaining a man who either does not qualify for the ministry, or who simply has not faced sufficient experiences to demonstrate—fully prove—his faithfulness under pressure. For example, "He is such a good brother, and he surely would never hurt anyone. Perhaps ordination would encourage him and thereby motivate him to preach better than he does now." Or perhaps you've heard this rationalization, "He really thinks he's called to preach. Why don't we just ordain him, whether we think he's called or not?" Where is the application of "...let these things first be proved..." in this sad lack of reasoning or wise thinking? Preaching does not grow out of motivation, or out of human ego. God calls a man to preach, or He does not call the man. Once the man whom God calls acknowledges his calling, he is responsible to God and to the church of his membership to apply himself and to remain steadfastly faithful to both in the administration of his gift. A man who happens to be married to an overbearing wife may yield to her insistent demands to force her influence over his ministry. Unwise; when the man forsakes God and the church of his membership for his wife, he may well realize that the only power remaining in his messages comes from his wife. God often manifests His displeasure by quietly withdrawing and allowing us to realize the full fruits of our ungodly choices.

Perhaps another man may foolishly conclude that God's calling is all he needs to preach. He neglects studying Scripture and meditating on what he reads, thinking that his calling means that God will simply pour the sermon into his head, and it will come out of his mouth. The man who follows this

foolish belief may occasionally boast that he gave no thought to the sermon, but he will trust God to give him the sermon. Quite soon the congregation will realize just how honest the man was; his sermon painfully demonstrates that he gave it no thought. God's calling is essential to preaching, but God commands—requires—that the men whom He calls saturate their minds and lives in Scripture, and in the exemplary practice of Scripture's teachings. The man who neglects either Scripture or its practice forfeits his privilege, loses his blessing, and quickly demonstrates that God is not well pleased with his patent neglect.

In my youth in the ministry, I encountered a man who was likely truly called of the Lord to preach, but he neglected his studies sadly. On at least four occasions, I witnessed this man begin his message before the church with an honest confession that he had not given proper study to the Scriptures in the days prior to the meeting. His equally superstitious strategy was to announce to the church that he would simply allow his Bible to drop open, and the first verse he noticed where the pages accidentally opened would be his text. Don't let the illogical and inconsistent points of this strategy to slip by your notice. The man confesses that he hasn't studied the Bible, so why would he think the Lord would bless him to randomly read a verse and preach a beneficial sermon from what he confesses that he has not studied? In every single instance, this man's Bible opened to the same page, and his eyes looked at the same verse, Second Chronicles 7:14. This is a delightful passage, but, even in my youth, I gravely doubted the man's strategy. If I had not so doubted, he would soon establish and confirm those doubts quite clearly. Each of these four times, the man preached the same exact sermon, almost word for word. He had one sermon memorized for just such occasions, but he tried to deceive the congregation into thinking he was mystically following the Lord's hand in opening the Bible to a certain verse for a fresh, God-sent message.

Ordination to the ministry should only occur when the man has demonstrated, both in the pulpit and in his personal life, through trials and blessings, "...in season..." and "...out of season..." that he takes his calling seriously and has devoted his life consistently and faithfully to God and to that ministry's edifying use.

...neither be partaker of other men's sins.... Not only must the preacher avoid premature or unproven ordinations, but he must not allow himself to be nudged into such ordinations by others.

... keep thyself pure. On a few occasions I have sincerely encouraged or participated in an ordination that subsequently proved to be a mistake. Such occasions created grief and repentance, but there was no way to "unordain" the man. It would be easier to unscramble an egg. Most often, unwise ordinations destroy the man's profitable life, and sometimes drive him wholly from

the church. However painful or difficult, I increasingly believe it far wiser to sit down with a brother who fails the qualifications and explain our reluctance to ordain him than to ordain him against our conscience and good judgment. Bad ordinations always end in a very “unpretty” way.

Our church requires a unanimous vote of the church’s members for an ordination. Some folks think this requirement is too extreme, though I like it. I would urge at least some form of “super-majority” in favor of ordination before the church formally calls for the man’s ordination. This requirement relies on the Biblical teaching that a man whom the Lord has called, and who makes full proof of his ministry; in study, in soundness, in lifestyle, and in consistent faithfulness shall be so blessed to teach and to feed the congregation with edifying spiritual preaching that the people respond with joyful support for his gift and, at the right time, for his ordination.

Here in two brief, simply stated verses, the Holy Spirit directed Paul to teach His truth regarding two of the most destructive and divisive questions that churches face. Ah, how much grief we’d avoid by following such teaching.

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Worship service each Sunday                      10:30 A. M.  
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