

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Undivided Devotion

Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. (1 Timothy 4:15, KJV 1900)

We see something of a contrast between the first words of verse fourteen and fifteen. Paul begins the sentence in Verse fourteen with "Neglect." He begins the sentence in Verse fifteen with "Meditate," a word that requires painstaking attention, opposite of "Neglect." By putting the two verses together, we see a clear image of the model minister of the gospel. Paul is not satisfied for Timothy to be a part-time preacher, a hobby preacher of sorts. A preacher of the gospel must live with a challenging diversity of demands on his time and life. If he is married with children, he must fulfill the Biblical requirement to provide for his family. Provision here refers to their personal, emotional, and spiritual, as well as their material needs. All the while, he must keep his ministry in focus—and in a priority position in his life. If he neglects his family's needs, he fails the qualifications of his office in ministry. Further, he may well fail his Biblical responsibility to his family. Sadly, I have seen too many preachers' families who turned bitter at the neglect their husband/father heaped on them under the guise of ministry. People admired him for his devotion to ministry, but his family felt forsaken. A minister should consider that his family is his first "pastorate." He is to be their pastor no less than he is pastor to anyone in the church he serves. If he forsakes family, he fails a major element of his ministry. Maintaining Biblical balance in his life is a constant task. Whether in his home or in his church, the best way to maintain this balance is to prayerfully labor to serve, not to be served. He is to serve his family just as he is to serve his church. In this way, the man may well risk losing himself, but in a way that the Lord promised will restore him in a far richer way.

He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. (Matthew 10:39, KJV 1900)

If we follow our natural human reaction, we will see "...loseth..." and plunge into a cold sweat. Our human fear is liable to blind us to the second half of the lesson, "...shall find it." When a believer, preacher or not, applies the principles of this lesson to his/her life, what does he/she find? Jesus makes the point quite clearly. We must lose before we find. If we fall into spiritual paralysis at the thought of loss, we will never know the joy of finding

ourselves in our Lord. Consider a dominant Biblical principle. Every time the Lord's servant gives up or sacrifices for God, God ensures that he gains far more than he lost.

One of the first steps in Eastern meditation is to empty your mind completely. In stark contrast, Biblical meditation requires us to fill our minds with the things of God. To fully define "these things," we must go right back to the beginning of this study in the third chapter, proper, godly behavior in the church. (3:14) The more we focus—meditate—on all of these things, the more the Lord will give us fruitful reflections on how these things interact in our lives for the better. Over time we experience a transformation. From the perspective of sitting in an empty, unfurnished "house," we slowly learn just how fully furnished and glorious this "house" that the Lord gave to us really is.

It would be difficult to find any Christian since the apostles who more fully gave himself to the things of God than John Warburton, author of ***Mercies of a Covenant God***. As you read this auto-biographical sketch, you discover time upon time when Warburton's desperation and emptiness was filled to overflowing with the Lord's richness. The exciting reality is that, if we follow the instruction of this passage, the fullness of God's protection and spiritual enrichment will overflow in our lives no less than in Warburton's.

... *that thy profiting may appear to all.* What kind of profit does Paul here intend? Did he suggest that Timothy would become financially independent overnight? No, the profit is spiritual profit, not money in the bank. Consider what Paul ***did not say*** in this verse. The exercise will add emphasis and clarity to Paul's intent.

1. He did not suggest that Timothy's ego would appear to all. When a preacher allows his ego to dominate his life and ministry, he shall lose everything. Go back to the passage from Matthew. *He that findeth his life shall lose it....* The more a believer, preacher included, works for personal gain the more personal gain and spiritual maturity slips away.
2. He did not teach that Timothy's reputation would appear to all. A godly, faithful minister must earn a godly reputation, but he must never choose his actions solely for

the impact those actions might have on the minds of others toward him, his reputation. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus repeatedly warns us about doing the godliest of things with the wrong motive, "...to be seen of men..." (Matthew, chapters five through seven) Cryptically, Jesus warns us that, if we do the business of godliness with this theatrical performance mindset, we shall have our reward. People will see and applaud our performance, but God will not be so impressed. We receive nothing from Him for such self-serving conduct.

3. How many attitudes or behaviors can you think of that expand this list? The list is long indeed. In fact, the list includes both actions and motives behind those actions. We cannot know the motives behind another person's choices and actions, but God fully knows them. We may see a believer who, by all appearances to us, is strong and faithful. Yet this person eventually manifests spiritual drought and loses all fruitfulness. We scratch our heads and wonder. What happened? In reality, the person may have been doing the right things, but permitted wrong motives to drive his engine. Never doubt; that engine is doomed to run out of fuel.

Think of "profit" as Paul uses the word here in terms of honor to God. Whatever we do that honors Him shall surely bless us in one way or another. Our task is to keep both our motives and our actions aimed at honor, "profit," to Him.

The thought occurs to me that the focused devotion to God that this verse requires leaves the believer vulnerable to a harsh and unfriendly world. Indeed it does. I recently heard an excellent sermon from several verses in Psalm 37. Although the whole psalm addresses this question, here are the opening verses that instruct us and promise the Lord's blessings as we serve Him.

A Psalm of David. Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. (Psalm 37:1-3)

At no time in the psalm does David direct us to stoop to the swamp of sinful, self-serving actions that characterize the wicked who threaten us. However, neither does David instruct us to be fool-hardy and give the wicked occasion to harm us. Trusting God does not mean tempting Him by throwing ourselves in harm's way with such people and hoping for a miracle. The psalm directs us to be faithful and prudent as we serve God. Scripture

directs faithful believers to **avoid the wicked**, not become their best friend. Take note of wicked people in your life, and, once you see the fruits of their wickedness, take wise steps to avoid them. Once you have done these things, do not allow the danger of the wicked to invade the peace of your heart. David's words remind us that the wicked cannot escape God's sure and righteous judgment. Until the time when God shall judge the wicked, David instructs us to abide in two activities, "Trust in the LORD, and do good..." He also reminds us that these two activities result in two blessings from the Lord, "...so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." Though the wicked might try to drive us out of our land and away from our blessings, we live with the Lord's promise that godliness protects us in the "Land of Promises."

After forty years of wandering in a hostile wilderness, God directed His people to go into the land of Canaan and "Possess" the land. As the people discovered forty years earlier, many powerful, hostile people lived in that land, people that caused the ten unfaithful spies to think of themselves as mere grasshoppers. As the people entered the land and obeyed God, He brought these powerful adversaries to their knees. When Israel turned from the Lord, those same adversaries prevailed.

In a long business career, I found myself at times faced with formidable obstacles that threatened my career and my family's financial security. I tried to follow a godly path, not that it was always the easiest way. The Lord preserved me from these people and problems. He proved in that arena that He was faithful to His promise in this passage. I must confess that at times I did fret, but each time the Lord delivered me, I found it easier the next time to fret less and trust Him more.

On occasion I have found myself in the presence of people who allowed sinful appetites and rage to control them. Did I fear those situations? Yes, I did. However, I took decisive steps to distance myself from such people and to continue in the path of faith and obedience. To this point, I can bear witness that the Lord has faithfully protected and delivered me. As I face the remainder of my life, I can only abide in the trust that He can do more to safeguard me and my family than any other power imaginable. Thus, I must confess to my own fears at times, but I can also witness that God's kind, loving grace has delivered me from my own fears, and from those who would do me harm. This assurance serves to steel me all the more to meditate on God's word and promises, and to give myself to Him, to His people, and to working till the end to implement more of His teachings into my walk. Perhaps I will fear less and trust more. My friends, you can safely trust the Lord and turn away from fretting because of the evildoers in your life. He is stronger than the most formidable of evildoers, and He is on your side.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor