

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Significant Discipleship

And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight: If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister.... (Colossians 1:21–23)

From Paul's thanksgiving prayer that begins in Colossians 1:12 through his affirmation of our redemption and forgiveness through Jesus' blood and on through his account of the creation, Paul keeps our minds firmly anchored in the perfect work of the Lord Jesus Christ. There are no contingencies, no unfulfilled conditions, and no doubt as to the outcome. As we move into the mental state of God's children, Paul introduces a clear contingency, a condition, onto the outcome he here describes, "If ye continue...." Our peace of mind does not rest solely on our high and holy behavior, though how we act serves as the distinct condition to the peace and joy with God that Paul here describes.

If we attempt to view all salvation as conditional on what man does, we end up with salvation by works, not by grace, and we contradict the consistent teachings of Scripture. However, if we attempt the opposite posture, believing that all salvation in the Bible is unconditional on anything that we do, we no less contradict Scripture than in the first error. Denial of two distinct salvations in Scripture rejects the clear teachings of Scripture that we see in our present study, as well as throughout the Bible. What we see in the pattern of this chapter appears throughout the Bible. Scripture affirms that our eternal salvation, with all the necessary conditions or requirements, God wholly accomplished through the Lord Jesus Christ and applied it in the new birth to God's chosen people by the Holy Spirit. Scripture equally affirms that the blessings of faithful, obedient discipleship are applicable to regenerated children of God, and that they requires specific mental and behavioral conditions to be performed by His children. We see this pattern in our study chapter. God didn't proposition matter or negotiate its creation; He sovereignly created it out of nothing. God didn't consult with the elect or conduct an opinion survey to see if they would agree to the redemption that He secured in the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, as Paul shifts

from the creation and our redemption, our eternal security in our Surety, the Lord Jesus Christ, he boldly injects a distinct tone of conditionality, "If ye continue...." All of God's regenerated children will not always manifest godly conduct or submissive faith. To the extent to which we fail in the measuring up to these specifically stated Biblical conditions, we fail to experience the harmony and joy of our true and legal standing with God in our personal experiences.

We should carefully avoid devaluing the blessings of discipleship, the New Testament's "faith-walk" lifestyle. We need not link our discipleship to our eternal standing with God, for Scripture does not teach that our eternal standing is contingent on our faith-walk, front door or back door style. Imagine two people going through seventy to ninety years of life, both living through similar trials. One of these people stands firm in the faith, no matter the intensity of the trial. The other person claims the faith, but often drifts and falters in the heat of trial. The first person appears joyful and unflappable. The second person often seems tortured and depressed. If you had the choice of imitating the first or the second person, which person would you follow? Would you choice make any difference in your sense of joy and fulfillment in life? Would it make any difference in how you handled those intense trials that we all face at times? Of course, it would make a world of difference. That is the precise point that Paul is making in our study lesson, a point that he continues to the end of this, one of the longest sentences in the New Testament.

Aside from the finished work of Christ and our security in Him, consider the two mental outlooks that Paul describes in our passage. One attitude lives in angry resistance to God and His way, rationalizing wicked works and more imitating the churning tides of the ocean than stable godliness. The other attitude embraces the reality of Jesus and His loving finished work, applying the joyful victory of that work to life's difficult moments. The first attitude professes faith, and even makes a

reasonable show of faith at times. I will not deny its existence, but I will question its depth. Scripture indicates that the trials of life choke out joyful fruit in many of God's children, corrupt and overthrow their faith, and leave them blind and forgetful of God's gracious work on their behalf and in them.

If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel.... Notice the personal tone of Paul's address here. The people whom he exhorts are not empty, hypocritical, and wicked sinners. They are the same people whom Paul addressed in the beginning of this letter as "...the saints and faithful brethren in Christ...." But faithful saints are not effectually and irresistibly decreed to live out their faith. Rather God commands them to do so throughout Scripture, our present passage included. Manifest your "saint-hood." Declare your son-ship in your faith-walk, whether in the heat of intense trial or in the peaceful shade of green pastures and still waters. Paul exhorts this precise behavior in our passage.

In our generation a new denomination began in southern California that has gained significant popularity in our culture. A primary tenet of this new religion boasts, "Doctrine divides; love unites. Let's just avoid preaching doctrine and love one another." These folks seem oblivious to the fact that this statement is itself a form of "doctrine." However, when you engage these folks in a conversation regarding what they really believe, you'll discover that they hold to strong doctrinal beliefs. Their founder wrote an emotional diatribe against the doctrines of grace, while his followers regularly preach the Arminian doctrine of salvation by works. No doctrine? Hardly.

This particular group and its empty assertion of all love and no doctrine raises a notable question. Does it matter what a person believes or teaches? If a preacher is sincere in his beliefs, and if he avoids major moral lapses, should we view his errant and unpredictable doctrinal teaching as wholly insignificant? I offer that Paul addresses and rejects this idea clearly in our passage. *If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel....* Paul did not stop with a minimal assertion that we need to avoid major moral slips; just practice loving God and our fellowman. He imposed the requirement that we must "...continue in the faith...." "...the faith..." strongly identifies a specific faith, a body of doctrines or beliefs that collectively outline the "...faith that was once delivered to the saints." (Jude 1:3) Paul's "If," his condition on our attitude and conduct, categorically includes the substance of what we believe.

The Colossian saints, the "...faithful brethren in Christ..." had heard the gospel. They knew the difference between salvation by works, hybrid salvation part by works and part by grace, from God's truth. They understood the grave error of Jewish legalism. They were struggling with the new ideas of pagan Gnostic philosophy, a major theme in Paul's letter to them. If they were to attain the peaceful joy and spiritual stability of which Paul here writes, they must not only practice the moral-ethical principles of the gospel, but they must also continue "...in the faith...."

Their continuing in the faith must also represent a faithful, consistent habit; "...grounded and settled...." They could not embrace the gospel truth today in Paul's company and embrace another belief, another gospel, tomorrow. Paul exhorts them to "...be not moved away from the hope of the gospel...."

Few evidences more clearly reveal a person's belief than his/her mental outlook. You will discover no small group of very moral, decent people in most churches who work hard at practicing basic Christian ethics, but their attitude might leave you believing that the practice borders on torture for them. They seldom smile. Their eyes are glazed and dark with sadness. If you really look at them, you more want to cry than smile. Often these people will tell you how important it really is for professing Christians to practice their faith. True enough; but somewhere these sad folks lost their vision of the character of the New Testament gospel. The "hope of the gospel" is unknown--and sadly un-experienced--to them. For them hope is a rather elusive Bible doctrine, not a joyful outlook, a true lifestyle that celebrates God and our standing in Him. They may often preach on the topic of joy in the gospel, but joy becomes another goal, another task to be completed, another impossible dream to be dreamed. Five minutes after they finish their sermon, demanding that their congregation must be joyful, whether they like it or not, you will struggle with depression if you spend any time with such a person. These folks have no sense of the "hope of the gospel," for they have embraced another gospel, one that enslaves rather than instills joy and hope. They live in the dungeon of depression and self-loathing, while trying to convince themselves more than anyone else that they are on the mountain top. Lord deliver us from ourselves!

Paul's note of joy, peaceful reconciliation, all culminating in the hope of the gospel, earmarks the fruit of the New Testament gospel. It breaks the chains of our self-imposed prisons and gently holds our hands, leading us into the dazzling light of grace and hope. Does it make a difference? Indeed it does!

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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
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