

Gospel Gleanings, October 30, 2022

Dear Friends,

In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul emphasizes that all Scripture is beneficial in that it furnishes, fully equips, the believer for all good works. If we follow this foundational truth, we shall look to New Testament teaching and to those who teach and follow it alone for our spiritual compass. The echo of contemporary Christian teaching is Scripture plus, and the "Plus" ends up commanding more attention and obedience than Scripture.

Once we study our way through the gospels and Acts, what comes next? Where can believers of today look for their guide? In that section of the New Testament, we find the writings of Paul, John, Peter, James and Jude, all directed to churches, preachers, and individual believers to guide them (Us) in their faith-sojourn. Does anything in those writings teach us to look to our favorite philosophy, personal opinions, or political party or leaders? Nothing. Nothing whatever. Yet so many who profess Jesus look far more to other sources than they look to Jesus alone.

Our study passage describes the Biblical institution, "Church," as the Lord's "pillar and ground of the truth." "Pillar" refers to the massive columns in an ancient building, to its vertical strength and stability. "Ground" refers to the foundation on which the building stands, to its horizontal stability. The more modern believers ignore, often outright reject, the New Testament's teaching on this thing called "Church" the more they doom themselves to spiritual instability. No surprise, that instability is precisely what we see in so many professing believers of our day.

Let's spend more time studying what the New Testament teaches about this unpopular thing called "Church" and anchor our lives and our faith to that people who seek most clearly to identify with that first, New Testament Church, not the latest fads or political or social movements of the day. The blessings and the contented joyful fulfillment, the spiritual stability, of our lives depends on it.

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

What Follows Acts?

These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:14-15 KJV 1900)

When we consider each of the men whom the Holy Spirit used to write our New Testament Scriptures, Paul wrote more of the content of our New Testament than any other single man. Good reason; the Lord chose Paul to be His apostle to the Gentiles. From the first century, the dominant cultural makeup of believers in Jesus have been Gentiles, non-Jews. Over my ministry, I have

known several people who were from some degree of Jewish ancestry—and believers. None of them claimed any kind of special privilege. They believed in Jesus and enjoyed their spiritual life by His faith just as we Gentile believers.

Over my ministry, I have spent more time in studying and in preaching from the “Pauline” letters of the New Testament than from the other portions. Why? His writings deal with doctrinal and lifestyle issues that the faith-culture from the first century till the Second Coming would face. We need that teaching to deal with our walk of faith. However, we should not so emphasize Paul and his writings that we neglect any other portion of the New Testament, for all those writings belong to our faith. We need their teaching.

Luke ended Acts with Paul teaching religious Jewish people in Rome. Paul’s state as Acts concludes is his house arrest following his appeal to Caesar. His final arrest was not so relaxed. In this case, he was allowed to live in a “Hired house,” to receive guests freely, under some form of supervision by a Roman soldier. Despite being the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul never stopped trying to convert the Jewish people whom he encountered. In this case in Rome, he sent for the people (Likely of a synagogue in Rome) and taught them. The record indicates that some of them believed (Acts 28:24 KJV) Before this group departed, Paul cited an Old Testament passage of judgment against them, similar to Jesus’ own judgment against the unbelieving leaders of the temple in his time.

Paul joyfully received both Jew and Gentile believers who sought to learn from his teaching. His emphasis in the Roman letter on various issues that a mixed congregation might face bears lively testimony that the early church (Or churches. Paul’s Roman letter is not specifically addressed to one church in Rome, but “*To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints.*” (Romans 1:7 KJV) Did more than one church exist in Rome at the time? Or had no church yet been formed there? One of the earliest post-New Testament Christian letters was written by Clement (Of Rome) to the Corinthian Church. His opening words identify his home church, “The Church of God which sojourns at Rome.” Clement is believed to have been one of this church’s first pastors. Apparently, he was widely respected for his faith and wisdom, so some members of the Corinthian Church wrote him a letter for his counsel in a growing controversy in that church. Clement wisely rebuked them for schism in the House of God. Generally, this letter is believed to have been written late in the first century, making it the first of the post-apostolic writings available to us today. Given this early reference, it is my view that Paul wrote to this church, though he does not specifically refer to them as a church, but in the broader terms of Romans 1:7. I rather like Clement’s phrasing, “The Church of God which *sojourns* at...” Churches—and church members—should never allow themselves to become so comfortable or so intertwined with this world and all its varied causes and tangents that they forget their true spiritual status and their “Homeland.” Whatever goes on around us, we are ever sojourners away from home. No cause on Planet Earth is so important as to drain our attention or spiritual focus and energy away from the object and theme of our faith, “***Jesus and the resurrection.***” (Acts 17:18 KJV)

After Damascus Road (Acts 9), most of the Book of Acts follows Paul and his ministry, along with Peter (For example, his preaching at the house of Cornelius in Acts 10-11). Wherever those early ambassadors for Jesus went, as soon as they arrived, they found people who heard and believed their message. Shortly afterwards they formed those people into churches. Despite the Biblical theme of “Church” being mostly ignored in Christian teaching in our culture, it is a central foundation for a stable and abiding presence of the gospel in word and in life in our New Testament. Failure to grasp and respect this truth inevitably leads to unstable faith and an unstable testimony to that faith in the lives of believers.

Notice Paul's description of the New Testament Church concept in our study passage. In the first three chapters of First Timothy, Paul's emphasis to Timothy is how believers should think and act, "*how to behave*" themselves in "*the house of God, which is the church of God.*" Paul uses "House" in this lesson both as a metaphor of a building and as a reference to the family or "Household" of God.

First, consider the metaphor of a building. In the Sermon on the Mount, closing lesson at the end of Matthew 7, Jesus used the same metaphor. Those who hear, believe, and live by His teachings (In the Sermon on the Mount and beyond) will become like a man who built his house (His life) on a rock foundation, stable and enduring. Those who hear and fail to build their lives on His teachings (In faith *and* in conduct) will become like a man who built his house (His life) on a foundation of sand, unstable and shifting, never stable, slipping and sliding through life from one idea or belief to another.

By his use of the same symbol, Paul adds emphasis to Jesus' lesson. What is the best way for a believer after Jesus' ascension to find spiritual health and stability in both faith and lifestyle? The life on a rock (Or perhaps "Rock") most often appears in one location, one setting, a place that both Jesus and His first followers called "Church." In the first century, there were not literally thousands of different "Churches," all teaching different ideas and lifestyles. There was one. How does a truth-seeker today find that "Church" that still represents Jesus and His teaching? The best path to chose for that discovery is a serious study of Scripture. Numbers gathered, popularity, or programs that appeal to various human interests (From life problems such as marriage and raising children to the latest political boiling pot); these things often serve more to distract people from deficient faith to stuff than promote truly Biblical faith. The "House of God" is best discovered by reading about that "House" in the New Testament. Then find the people who most imitate that faith alone and link yourself to them.

Paul continues this "House" symbolism in our study lesson. "*Pillar and ground of the truth.*" A skilled builder knows that he must design and build a stable building by methods that ensure both vertical ("Pillar") and horizontal ("Ground" or foundation) stability. Otherwise, like the house on the sand that Jesus described, that house and the lives that live in it shall crumble under the first stress.

The New Testament also uses the idea of a "House" to refer to a family unit, as in the "House of Cornelius" in Acts 10. Given Paul's emphasis to Timothy in the first three chapters of 1 Timothy, and in our study passage on "Behavior," on conduct, I suggest that Paul also had this concept in mind in this teaching. Children learn their first habits of interpersonal relationships within their "Family unit" where they were born and raised. We need this godly Biblical model to show us the way to stable, God-glorifying faith and life.

I believe the blending of both ideas in this passage is altogether appropriate. We learn how to conduct our faith—and our faith-life—most clearly and soundly in this place that Paul here describes and teaches. And we also find the most stable and productive life we can ever attain in that place, with the repeated teachings of those same truths that Jesus and His chosen ambassadors teach us in our New Testament.

We are not at liberty to live our life "*in the house of God, which is the church of God*" by our personal philosophies and preference. We are living in God's house here! He is the head of this house. We honor Him only as we manifest His teachings and His lifestyle in our own lives. Paul makes this point emphatically.

Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 2:3-5 KJV 1900)

Do you want to know more about this “Behavior” that Paul (The Holy Spirit Who directed Paul’s words) intended? Here it is simply stated. The problem with New Testament Christian faith and living today is not that people do not know or understand what it is, but that they allow personal ideas to rule their lives so that pride refuses to consider, much less practice this selfless lifestyle. Preach this passage and its clearly stated message to the typical congregation of professing Christians today, and you’ll get glassy eyes and blockaded minds that refuse to even consider seriously this lifestyle. It would interfere with what “I want,” what “I think.” So, the majority of today’s professing Christians never realize the profound peace and joyful blessings of following Jesus. Remember. In Philippians 4, Paul devotes most of the chapter to godly and joyful contentment. In that chapter, Paul mentions both “*the peace of God*” and “*the God of peace.*” And, according to his teachings in that context, what “keeps,” literally stands guard over and thus adds stability and enduring strength to your “*hearts and minds*”? It is the peace of God! Not our private opinions or beliefs. Not our latest political passions. Not our lucrative career. And we discover that peaceful stability guarding and strengthening our lives only to the extent we reveal our “*moderations*” to other people and bare our souls (“*in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.*” Philippians 4:6 KJV) to our God, to the Head of our spiritual “House” *and* “Household.” Folks, we can’t get to Philippians 4 except by way of Philippians 2.

One of the most obvious maladies of today’s Christian culture is lack of stability. Given the passages we’ve studied in this lesson, is it any wonder that this same unstable culture also ignores, either knowingly or blindly, God’s primary stabilizing power for their lives. How is our “Stability factor” in our life and faith? How is our “Church” life and health? ***The two go hand in hand.***

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