

Gospel Gleanings, “...especially the parchments”

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Practical Implications of Fearing God

Good and upright is the LORD: therefore will he teach sinners in the way. The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way. All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies. For thy name's sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great. What man is he that feareth the LORD? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose. His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth. The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant. (Psalm 25:8-14)

Psalm 25 is rich with truth for the task of living the life of faith. David begins and ends the psalm with a prayer. Our study verses contain various reflections on the character of God and on the impact that God should have on the way we live. Especially in Scripture, when you begin and end a thought with prayer, expect the reflections between the two prayers to be noteworthy.

Theologians might not affirm God's goodness with the same points that David makes, but I'd rather follow David's inspired line of reasoning than theirs. After all, God chose David to write a major segment of His book, something that no contemporary theologian can match. David's teaching here resonates with sincere believers in the trenches of life. God supremely demonstrates His goodness in His gracious and merciful treatment of His people when they sin. He never approves of our sins. He won't even look the other way and ignore them. The believer who thinks that God looks the other way when he/she sins is sadly out of touch with the black character of sin and with the holy nature of God, something of life in a fantasy world.

David corroborates the point as he moves us along the lesson. *The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way.* The opening point reminds us that God demonstrates His goodness by teaching “sinners in the way.” Following the Hebrew pattern of rhyming ideas, he then expands the thought and reinforces it with this verse. The Hebrew word translated “meek” leads us to such parallel words as weak, poor or needy, humble, or lowly. It conveys the mirror-opposite attitude to the self-sufficient person who claims to have all the answers. It also is opposed to the person who consistently rationalizes sin in his/her life as either justified because of what others said or did, or because of the situation in which they acted. It is a near-universal truth; people who think they already have all the knowledge they need are not teachable, even by God. I have long been convinced that the folks who resist exhortation from fellow-believers equally resist divine exhortation. In our interaction

with other believers we will reveal our deepest attitude toward God. If we react to our fellow-believers with stubbornness and resistance, we likely react in similar fashion to God. If we demonstrate a gracious openness and receptivity to the counsel of fellow-believers, we will also be more receptive when God nudges us to make changes in our life.

This sentence also makes another encouraging point. God doesn't reserve His instruction to the elite and worthy. He sends it to those who confront and acknowledge their frailty.

All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies. The divine character, God's deepest nature, will not be—cannot be—fickle or duplicitous. God is in many ways mysterious and infinitely beyond our depth, but in things revealed He is open and predictable in terms of moral and ethical issues. He will not lead us to sin and then punish us for the very sin that He caused us to do. Those who impute this trait onto God commit a near-blasphemous betrayal against the holy and moral nature of God. That said, however, do not overlook the conditionality of the verses, "...unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies." Paul brings this thought to our minds in a New Testament setting (Romans 11:22, Paul will not allow us to overlook both divine goodness and divine severity. By our submission to God or by rebellion, we determine which aspect we shall experience from Him.).

For thy name's sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great. Perhaps the greatest single discouragement that I've personally encountered in my nearly fifty years of ministry has been the significant number of occasions when someone in my pastoral care showed all the signs of trial in their life, but, when asked, put up a false front of self-control rather than acknowledging reality and asking for Biblical assistance. Christians have drunken far too deeply from the relativistic well of ever-changing moral values that has intoxicated our secular society. We have redefined sin so that we can pretend that dreadful three-letter word only applies to "them," whoever "them" actually is. We may have a sickness or a "bad habit," but we stubbornly and pride-fully resist applying the word "sin" to anything that we personally say or do. This prideful attitude is the opposite from David's example here. Not only did he acknowledge his sin, but he specifically cried out to God for pardon because "it is great." The first and most significant step toward divine forgiveness and inner healing from our sin problems lies in confession, sometimes both to God and to fellow-believers. Our silly pride will not fool God.

What man is he that feareth the LORD? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose. If you stopped reading the psalm at this point, how would you define the person whom God will teach and lead to nobler faith and conduct? David simplifies his description of this person. It is the person who "feareth the LORD". We would hardly define the fear of God in our life with such terms as humility or spiritual neediness, but that is the parallel that David draws for us.

David then encourages the one who fears God with a promise that God shall

teach this person in the way that He shall choose. Linger for some reflective thought on this point. Who chooses the ways that you go in your daily life? For most of us, sadly, we make the decisions and choose the paths that we view as in our personal best interest. Then we try to convince God to bless our own choices after we made them with little or no prayerful consultation to Him. The person whom God promises to teach is the pliable and submissive believer. Do not miss the point; it is central to our lesson here, as well as to our study of the fear of God. God teaches us in His ways, “the way that he shall choose,” not the ways that we choose.

His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth. A sense of peace that transcends life’s circumstances often appears in Scripture as the blessing of faithful obedience to God. We all have met sincere believers who view their Christian life as something near to a life prison sentence. They are morally upright. You could trust them with anything that you own. However, they live miserable and unfulfilled lives. They are still trying to choose their own ways and negotiate with God to bless. In making this choice *they shut themselves off from God’s teaching in the ways that He chooses*, ways that lead to our dwelling “at ease” despite life’s ironic and sometimes cruel twists.

The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant. God is not so much in the secret-keeping business as in the revealing business, but He discreetly reveals Himself and His blessings to believers who will respond to His revelation in respect and worship. To see God’s covenant is not so much to become aware that it exists, but to see the personal application of God’s eternal covenant with His people to our personal lives and circumstances. “I have been young, and *now* am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread” (Psalm 37:25). In this verse David shares one of God’s major “secrets” with us, His absolute faithfulness to care for His own. We have no promise that God will supply our wishes, but we do have the promise that He will supply our needs.

So what do we learn from this psalm about fearing God? We begin to see some incredibly practical truths that should penetrate every aspect of our life. It should convince us to abandon once and for ever our common habit of trying to control everything around us by our personal abilities or strategies. Faith simply accepts the obvious. Who is better equipped to deal effectively and rightly with all the complexities of life that you and I face every day? No, faith doesn’t passively drift through life, trusting God to do everything for us. Neither does it run frantically through life trying to control everything around us that impacts us. This idea of the fear of God submits to Him and trusts Him to step into our lives and instruct us with wisdom above our own knowledge or abilities. How do we get from the proverbial “here to there”? We start by having a heart-to-heart talk with God in which we come to terms with His way, not our own. At that point He will start the teaching.

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