

Fearing God: Trusting God

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 20, #16 April 24, 2005

O Israel, trust thou in the LORD: he is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD: he is their help and their shield. Ye that fear the LORD, trust in the LORD: he is their help and their shield. The LORD hath been mindful of us: he will bless us; he will bless the house of Israel; he will bless the house of Aaron. He will bless them that fear the LORD, both small and great. (Ps 115:9-13)

J. E. Smith suggests that this psalm was sung in the congregation in something of a responsive reading style. "Here a leader would sing the first line of each verse addressed to God in the second person; then the congregation would respond with the second line in the third person. "Israel," "the house of Aaron," i.e., the priests, and "fearers of Yahweh" are called upon to trust in the Lord because he is the "help" and "shield" of his people."³⁵[1] This style would certainly give a touch of clarity and emphasis to the lesson. Many of the psalms in this section of the psalms are not identified in terms of author, occasion, or date. They take on a common, and timeless, issue for the people of God. There is some indication that the original author of the words that we sing, "How firm a foundation..." originally submitted these words anonymously so that as the people sang them they would only concentrate their attention on the message. In any case where the worship of God is involved the major issue is not who said what, but God—God alone. "We preach not ourselves..." (2Co 4:5). The preacher who makes himself the centerpiece of his message has a poor theme for his sermon. More often preachers, and sometimes others in the faith, will attempt to leave the appearance of Christ-centric teaching or living, but their motive eventually appears. Take them out of the limelight, and they quickly show a different side to their Christianity. Reject their wishes, and they will reveal the sad fact that they are more interested in getting their way, their personal satisfaction, than in Biblical truth and self-denying Christian faith. The psalmist begins this psalm with a God-centered focus that emphatically rejects the self-serving motives from any attempts to serve God, "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, *and* for thy truth's sake" (Ps 115:1).

The author of this psalm is rather blunt in his debunking of idols. "Their idols *are* silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; *so is* every one that trusteth in them" (Ps 115:4-8).? Contemporary Christians sometimes dismiss idolatry with the prideful "How silly, no one today would be so ignorant as to worship an idol." However, take a look at the time and ventures that command their attention. Their "idols" are no less senseless and vain than Old Testament Israel's.

Consider this simple truth. Who made the silver and gold that people used to carve out their idols? God made it. Used according to His direction, silver and gold can be put to noble use for the glory of God. The same subtle truth holds for twenty-first century idols no less than ancient idols.

Many people today worship their family. You doubt it? Identify a family in crisis. They show all the marks of a disaster looking for an excuse to occur. Quietly and helpfully ask someone in the troubled family, "Is everything all right? Is there anything I can do to help?" How do they respond? "Oh, everything is just wonderful. I don't know how it could be any better." Often one or more members of this family made a conscious choice to structure their family in direct violation of Biblical teaching. They have all the rationalizations at the tip of their tongue, but they show a stubborn resistance to any question regarding their family's spiritual or familial health.

Another contemporary idol has to do with one's career. Offer a professing man a big promotion and title, and watch how he deals with it. Often he will accept the career advancement without giving any thought to how it will impact his faith. It involves relocating to another part of the country. Does he investigate the existence of godly churches in the area near his new assignment, especially prior to his acceptance? I have lived through most of my adult life involved in bi-vocational ministry, serving as a pastor, along with working in a secular profession. More than once I declined promotions that required me to relocate out of the area where I believed my ministry assignment called me to live. However, I have often stretched the fabric of my personal energy and intellect so that I was too tired and far too preoccupied with my secular work to give my best to my ministry.

I believe that a careful examination of a person's calendar and checkbook will readily expose the priorities of their life. If they have an idol, you will see it in these two faithful indicators.

God created the family. God kindly makes career or livelihood opportunities available for our needs. He even blesses the wise use of money and devotes a lot of ink in Scripture to instructions on how to use it so that it does not use us. In precisely the same way that ancient Israelites abused and misused silver and gold, part of God's material creation, turning something good that God made into an idol, contemporary Christians abuse and misuse family, career, finances, and any number of other things into their own contemporary idols.

The psalm urges those who fear God to trust God. During this study of the poetic books to uncover Biblical teaching regarding the fear of God, we have repeatedly discovered that fearing God and obeying God are inseparable. I suggest that this psalm adds another dimension to the equation. We cannot separate fearing God and trusting God. Inherent in an attitude of trust is one's confidence in the integrity, character, and reliability of the one trusted. Paul instructs Timothy to warn his congregations not to "trust in *uncertain* riches..." (1Ti 6:17). What does Scripture teach us about the character of God that leaves us with the conviction that He is unshakably trustworthy and righteous in every aspect of His Person? Scripture affirms God's consistent goodness, His predictable faithfulness, His utter lack of fickleness, His faithful awareness of His people and their daily needs, and any number of other attributes that leave us with a clear indication of His reliable faithfulness, His trustworthiness.

Occasionally people will promote theological ideas not supported by Scripture that compromise the character of God. For example, the advocates of "double-predestination" teach that God's "revealed will" always promotes and produces good for His people, but they often also teach that God's "secret will" either actively or passively causes all the evil in the world. This idea diabolically imputes a moral fault upon God. Sometimes advocates of this idea will try to evade the problem by saying that God causes evil in such a way that He is not the Author of sin, but their conclusion contradicts their caveat. Interestingly, if God has a "secret will," we do not know its contents. Otherwise it would not be His "*secret* will." Inevitably the advocates of this error profess to be proficiently informed as to the contents of God's "*secret* will." The god of the "secret will" contradicts the moral character of the God of the Bible. I do not deny that God has a will wholly unknown to mortals, even the most informed and spiritual of men. However, I emphatically do deny that men can know the contents of His secret will. I deny with equal emphasis that God's secret will in any way contradicts His moral character as faithfully displayed in His "revealed will" in Scripture.

We may comfortably join the anonymous author of this psalm in urging those who fear God to trust in Him. You may trust Him more than you trust a contentious spouse, a rebellious child, an unscrupulous and money-driven employer, or any other person in your life. Will trusting God change their disposition or moral character? Likely not, but trusting God and obeying Him in every aspect of your life will put God on your side, not in an adversarial role to you. It will bring His kind providence to your assistance in the trenches of life. You may "...boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb 13:6). The options are rather simple. We trust God, or we have nothing reliable

to trust. Do you fear God? Then trust Him!

Elder Joe Holder