

GRACE GAZETTE

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Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Hebrews 12:12-13

THE BASIC GOODNESS OF MAN

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. James 1:17

This week our whole nation mourned the passing of a great leader and statesman. History will show (as it always does) the wisdom or folly of the decisions and actions taken by those in places of leadership. On this basis we can see that Ronald Reagan was indeed a man of vision and conviction. He was blessed by GOD to make decisions which have not only favorably affected our nation, but the whole world. Of course, there are those who would disagree with that assessment (but they are generally doing so not with objective consideration but by letting partisanship cloud their judgement.) As the LORD's people we should judge all things by the standard of truth (regardless of our personal agreement with the people or politics involved). (see Matt.7:2; John 7:24; Phil.1:9; Eph.4:31; James 4:11; I Pet.2:1) Whether or not we admire someone should not change the criterion by which we judge them, their actions, or the results.

Something that I heard repeated often during this week as men remembered Pres. Reagan, was that he believed in the basic goodness of man. I had mixed feelings about that statement each time I heard it repeated, so I decided that the test of the truthfulness of that concept would have to stand or fall based on the truth that is revealed to us in GOD's word. (see Isa.8:20) To say something is good or not is often based on personal preferences and comparisons. Some people say that squash (the vegetable) is good. I have personally never been able to make that same analysis. Some say Fords are good, while others disagree and say that only Chevys are good (this is closer to truth). So, in order to determine whether something (or someone) is basically good we must have a standard by which to judge that goodness. Most people would say that diamonds are good. Yet not all diamonds have the same value. A jeweler looks at the worth of a diamond with a completely different set of standards than an industrial tool maker. Some stones meet or exceed the standards set for clarity and color. However, others don't measure up to those criteria yet are valuable in industrial applications and are used to perform vital tasks that could not be accomplished otherwise. So, while the jeweler may look at certain diamonds as being useless, the tool maker looks at them as being very valuable. Therefore, in order to judge the worth of a diamond, the standard by which it will be evaluated must be clearly stated. If we are going to answer the question, (are men basically good?), we must first determine what we mean by good. Then we must seek out a standard to compare that goodness to. The scripture says, "And GOD saw every thing that HE had made, and, behold, it was very good." (Gen 1:31) Everything that GOD has created (man included) is good. HE has done all things well and everything has been done according to HIS purpose. HE has made no mistakes nor does anything need any improvement which HE has designed. (The cosmetic salesmen, tattoo parlors, and plastic surgeons of the world would no doubt disagree.) So, in this general sense of being formed for GOD's purpose, we can conclude that man is basically good.

The scripture says, “So GOD created man in HIS own image, in the image of GOD created HE him; male and female created HE them.” (Gen 1:27) This is said of none of the rest of GOD’s creation. Not the angels or any of the other forms of life which HE made, whether known or unknown to us are said to be created in HIS image,. Compared to all other forms of creation, man occupies a unique position. For upon him is conferred this great privilege and honor not bestowed on the rest of that which was formed by GOD’s hand. In this sense of comparison to the rest of creation, we can conclude that man is basically good. The scripture says, “O man, who art thou that repliest against GOD? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast THOU made me thus? Hath not the POTTER power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if GOD, willing to shew HIS wrath, and to make HIS power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that HE might make known the riches of HIS glory on the vessels of mercy, which HE had afore prepared unto glory.”(Rom.9:20-23; see Jer.18:3-6) Out of HIS creation GOD chose to redeem some even as a potter makes some vessels which HE deems worthy to keep while HE rejects others to be thrown away. Just as the potter’s hand is that which imparts value to a lump of clay; so it is true that the intrinsic worth or value of any man exists because GOD made him so. In the sense that GOD chose some vessels unto honor by the work of HIS own hand, we can say that man is basically good. GOD saw mankind as worth redeeming because HIS hand formed vessels unto honor designed unto this end.

The scripture says “*there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*” (Rom.3:12). Now I suspect that the average person who advocates the concept that “man is basically good” will take issue with this scripture. Here the standard of goodness is higher than man can achieve. Men may compare the righteousness of one man to another and favorably contrast their relative goodness. For example, George Bush may be seen as “good” when compared with Saddam Hussein. But when any man is compared with the absolute standard of righteousness, the LORD JESUS CHRIST, then any pretense of “goodness” is swept away. We are humbled in the dust and must confess with Daniel of old, “*there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength.*” (Dan 10:8) “*But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.*” (Isa.64:6) Thank GOD that it is “*Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to HIS mercy HE saved us*”. (Titus 3:5)

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