

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

WILL WORSHIP

Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh. Colossians 2:23

I began listening to a preacher on the radio just the other day about half way through his message. He was waxing eloquent on the subject of the work of GOD in a true believer. He spoke of how it was necessary for GOD to change the will of man in order for a man to serve him with his whole heart. I really started to listen with great interest because it is not often that you hear such doctrine openly espoused. He was doing a good job with his subject. He quoted Philippians 2:13 which says, "*For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*" However, my enjoyment of the message was short lived as he ultimately said, "but a man has to be willing to let GOD change his will," effectively negating everything valuable that he had said up to that point.

The early church was plagued with a false doctrine and philosophy that crept in and overthrew the faith of some, and has never completely disappeared. It is called Gnosticism. Gnosticism was a school of thought that exalted the ability of men to "know" spiritual things. It became mixed in with Christian doctrine and was spread by those who were "angels of light" (or messengers able to illuminate others). (see II Cor.11:13-15) Man is by nature attracted to those who reinforce his natural ability and mindset. Thus the rise of the "affirmers" and "positive thinking" gurus of the present day. Self-help is the order of the day and there is a constant barrage (or might I say garbage) of it in the media and so called "churches" around the world. It would be fair to say that the Gnostics are alive and well; basically dismissing the idea of the SPIRIT of GOD working in men to perform HIS will. When they don't outright deny this, they always make the will of Almighty GOD subservient to the will of men or they exalt knowledge above faith and revelation often reducing the Gospel to a definition which they can take pride in.

Paul wrote "*But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*" (1 Cor 2:14) Apart from a divine revelation and transformation (new birth) of a man, he will never be able to comprehend, let alone receive the truth of GOD. The truth and glory of the Gospel is outside the scope of man's innate understanding, regardless of the skill or the persuasiveness of the teacher. Of course most of the "affirmers" totally bypass the Gospel preferring to convince men that they can emulate JESUS CHRIST by learning a few simple rules of conduct and principles of philosophy. One can hardly argue with their success in selling books and drawing crowds. However, their teaching is a house built upon the sinking sand of man's "free will" which they assume he can exercise whenever he gets ready. Man's will would be "free" were it not for one inherited problem: He is dead in trespasses and sin and is a slave to that which has him bound. He will not choose to set himself free from this malady because he loves it. A man will always choose that for which he has the highest affection, so unless the LORD in mercy changes a man's affection the man will continue to travel the same path he has always trod.

Gnosticism gives rise to “will worship” which manifests itself in numerous schools of thought. Sometimes these various ideas almost seem at odds with one another yet they all share this common ground of “will worship”. One of the earliest conclusions that this philosophy gave rise to was the “*touch not, taste not, handle not*” (Col.2:21) concept which Paul ably combats in the book of Colossians and, to some extent, in Galatians. Some had concluded that men could make themselves “holy” before GOD by abstaining from various foods, drinks, and activities, or observing certain days and times. They exalted the will and ability of men to perform acts of “righteousness” which could be contrasted with those of lesser “character”.

Then there was the idea that arose that in reality there was no such thing as sin. The flesh was just the flesh with no connection to the “inner man” so that licentious behavior was acceptable. John fought against this error in the epistle of I John. “*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*” (1 John 1:8) These Gnostics taught that sin was only an illusion and not a deadly enemy to be fought against. Hedonism is an extreme form of this philosophy which in essence is the underlying notion of the “carnal Christian theory” which says that a man can be a true believer, yet live as the world does. Any doctrine which seeks to excuse sin or belittle those who would seek to identify sin in its many forms has its roots here. It is “will worship” because it exalts the will of men above the truth of GOD.

Then there is a very insidious idea which creeps in almost unawares when men set forth their own definition of the Gospel and then sit in judgment of all those who do not agree with their definition. There have always been certain factions and sects that have arisen down through time who have laid claim to special insight or favor and have determined that no one could possibly enter heaven except through their little gate. They all have used the scriptures to a greater or lesser degree in arriving at their conclusions, but for the most part are easily distinguished from the pathway of truth. Lately however I have been confronted with some who seem (as best as I can tell) to be fairly accurate in their scriptural knowledge and correct in their understanding of vital doctrines. Yet they are convinced that “knowing” the gospel as they define it is exclusively synonymous with the work of GOD in men. They practice “will worship”, because according to their logic, they make a man’s grasp of theology or his association with others, the basis upon which they “judge” his salvation. GOD is able to draw men to himself however and whenever HE sees fit, based solely on HIS purpose and power to deliver HIS own. Men are saved by CHRIST, (who is the SAVIOR of sinners), not their knowledge. “*The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his.*” (2 Tim 2:19)

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