

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 AGONY OF VICTORY

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

To say that we live in a society which worships celebrities would be an understatement of the highest order. Movie stars, athletes, and even some who call themselves preachers are revered and showered with adulation because they are either beautiful to look upon, can run faster and jump higher than others, or possess great skills of oratory and the ability to amuse others. In fact, when one possesses all of these gifts then they are held in the highest esteem by the rank and file who live vicariously through such heroes. While human talent is something that can and should be admired, we must never forget that any talent that we or others may possess is simply the gift of GOD and HE alone is worthy of worship. "For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" (1 Cor 4:7) GOD has a purpose for every talent which HE bestows upon any member of the human race and all of those talents shall bring glory to HIM even though the use of them by the creature and the intention of their hearts may be to glory in themselves. This activity merely manifests the justice of GOD's condemnation of sinners who worship and serve the creature more than the creator.

Those of us who preach that the salvation of GOD's elect is totally a work of GOD's sovereign grace apart from any effort or ability on the part of men, are often accused of being those who wink at sin or encourage men to sin that grace may abound. In nearly thirty years of preaching these glorious truths, I have never known of anyone who had a clear understanding of GOD's grace and HIS absolute predestination of all things who ever purported or taught any such thing. If one thing is clear in the scripture and in the experience of the true children of grace, it is that GOD works "in us both to will and to do of HIS good pleasure" because He has "predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will." (Eph 1:5) "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son." (Rom.8:29) GOD not only does something FOR HIS elect, HE also does something IN them. "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" (1 Cor 6:19) Now the amazing thing is that in the process of HIS performance of HIS will in us, HE does it in such a way that we are aware and desirous of that work in us. The man who has no hunger and thirst after righteousness has no reason to believe that such a work of grace has been performed in him, regardless of his religious affiliations or claims of being a child of GOD. "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." (Rom. 8:9) GOD uses the exhortations and admonitions of the scripture to stir up HIS people unto good works which HE is the author and performer of. These admonitions and exhortations fall on deaf ears otherwise. Duty preachers expect to produce good works by laying

burdens upon men, using the terror of the law as their means. However, GOD moves HIS people by the prompting and work of HIS SPIRIT who brings HIS word in an effectual way to direct them to walk according to HIS desire.

Someone has said that the difference in winning and losing an athletic contest "Is not the will to win, but the will to prepare to win" or the willingness to endure whatever is necessary in order to be found triumphant in the end. Paul describes the striving of the LORD's people to do the will of GOD as those who are engaged in an athletic contest. In fact the term "strive for masteries" in II Tim.2:5 is translated from the Greek word, "athleo" from which we get our English word "athlete". The true enjoyment of any such contest is to taste the thrill of victory. Men train for the Olympics with the purpose of not just participating but winning. So too does the SPIRIT work in HIS people the will to "endure hardness" in order that we might "win" CHRIST. Now only a work monger would conceive of this language in the scripture as being about the ability of men to perform some sort of task which would cause them to gain a victory. The scripture is plain that CHRIST has secured the victory of HIS elect by HIS own work. The very victory which is purchased for them is that which causes them to "strive to enter in at the straight gate". So he that "striveth" (Greek word agonizomai, root of our English word "agonize") does so because the SPIRIT works in him mightily to do so.

Having said all of that it should be clear that the true sons of GOD are stirred up and motivated by the word of GOD to be found faithful before HIM in love. That man who can be content with any sort of status quo in "religion" has no reason to believe that he has been regenerated by the SPIRIT of GOD. Is it possible that those who are quickened by that SPIRIT should be content to dwell in their same sinful ways day after day? Can those in whom the SPIRIT of the living GOD dwells be perfectly happy with the activity of their fleshly mind? Can they live from day to day without prayer (see Gal.4:6) and fellowship with their heavenly FATHER? Can they count the assembly and fellowship of the saints as something of secondary importance? (see I Jn.3:14) Do they consider their standing before GOD as a light matter; not ever considering the ground upon which their hopes are built; and can they be satisfied by the assurances of men? *"But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do (or are doing) these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."* (2 Pet. 1:9-11)

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