

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

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. Galatians 5:13

To say that the life of the children of GOD is beset by struggles would be an understatement. They are first born into the world under the bondage of sin which is most appealing to their flesh. Apart from having to endure the natural heartaches associated with this condition, they are most content to dwell in this state and have no knowledge of or desire to walk in any other. While In this state they cannot be distinguished from the children of wrath. (see Eph.2:3) They love sin and are happy to travel the road to destruction oblivious of the danger that is on every side and surely awaits those who follow that path to the end. They have no one to blame for their condition except themselves and would gladly continue in it without any regrets; in fact they disregard many of the natural restraints of conscience which GOD is pleased to place in the minds of all men. (see Rom.1:19-32) Some of them adopt a form of religion but they pursue this form of godliness while denying the power of GOD (see 2Tim. 3:5) and fill up their own wicked imaginations. (see I Thes.2:13-16)

In GOD's own time HE is pleased to awaken them to the emptiness of such a path and to reveal to them the wickedness of their own heart making their sin and rebellion against GOD odious in their sight. (see Eph.2:1-6; II Cor.7:9-11) They are born again by the power of the SPIRIT of GOD. In HIS time (perhaps moments) HE is pleased to cause them to hear the gospel of CHRIST's redemption for the first time and to give them faith to believe it. By that gift of faith they are manifested as the new creatures which HE has made them and thus begins a struggle that heretofore they had known nothing about. Paul said, *"For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me."* (Rom 7:9-11)

This new creature is now locked in a life and death struggle inside this same body which until this time, the flesh had ruled without rival. *"For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."* (Gal 5:17) As the SPIRIT of GOD teaches HIS children they come to see more clearly the nature of the bondage which they were under before they were made new creatures and are brought into the awareness that *"the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death."* (Rom 8:2) They are made to understand that *"we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh."* (Rom 8:12)

The flesh dictated every move we made when we were without CHRIST, but now its power is no longer absolute, for we have been set free from its dominion by the power of HIM who dwells in us. (see Rom. 8:9) We are free to be what we are predestinated to be, *"conformed to the image of HIS SON"* (Rom. 8:29). Thus is begun the glorious liberty of the sons of GOD which shall reach its total fruition when these mortal bodies have put off their corruption in the

day of the resurrection. (see Rom.8:21) In fact the resurrection is spoken of as typical of that liberty which is already begun in the true saints of GOD.

Because we dwelt so long and completely under the bondage of the flesh we struggle in our bodies against the flesh trying constantly to reassert its former place of dominion. It is no wonder that one of the tactics that the flesh employs to regain this place of authority is to seek to deceive the sons of GOD as to the true nature of their liberty. Many devices have been designed unto this end.

Fulfilling the lusts of the flesh as if this was freedom. It never ceases to amaze me that some are intent on defining their "liberty" in terms of the things they are "allowed" to do in the flesh. I have seen many grow angry at any who would raise a question as to whether it is appropriate for Christians to engage in behavior which is both destructive to the mind and body, (which is the temple of the HOLY GHOST), and the setting of a bad example for others, not to mention how such things appear in the eyes of the world. I once knew a gentleman who vehemently defended his "right" to smoke a pipe as being a matter of Christian liberty. Now I am quite certain that there is no law against pipe smoking in the scripture nor would I ever tell a man such conduct is unlawful, but I fail to see how such a thing could be described as liberty since one could only be in bondage, by its habitual use. Our liberty as the sons of GOD is to be set free from the things which once had us bound not to engage in them as if they were some sign of spiritual maturity or freedom. Others defend their "right" to imbibe copious amounts of alcohol, food, all sorts of entertainment and amusement, and even coarse and unedifying language on the same grounds. The man who thinks these things are "freedom" or expressions of liberty does not have a clear understanding of that which had us bound. Paul said, *"All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any."* (1Co 6:12) GOD's children can not be brought into condemnation by any activity of the mind or flesh but we are not called to exercise our flesh, rather to recognize that our freedom is from the lusts of the flesh and mind. (see Eph. 2:3) Now having said that, neither are we called to be policemen over the activities of other brethren. (see Rom. 14:22,23)

Neglecting the discipline of our bodies. Paul said, *"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."* (1Co 9:27) Paul counseled Timothy to be a good soldier which implied the necessity to set a watch upon his habits and desires. (see II Tim.2:3,4) No one can make himself a follower of CHRIST by following certain disciplines, but one can most certainly cause himself to appear as one who is not a follower of CHRIST by neglecting the disciplines to which the children of GOD are called. The LORD stirs up HIS sons to obedience by the admonitions of the scripture to watch and pray, rejoice always, and to be faithful followers of those things we have been taught by the doctrine of CHRIST and HIS example. *"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."* (Gal 6:7)

Disregarding the meeting of GOD's children on a regular basis. Many of those who call themselves Christians regard the assembly of the saints as something which is optional for a true believer. Some view it as having a measure importance as long as it does not interfere with their busy lives. Recreational pursuits, family activities, and job requirements most surely take precedence in the minds of many. GOD's children most certainly are not bound by days, seasons, and times. However GOD has placed within HIS true sons a love for the brethren and a need to be strengthened by one another in a functioning body known as a local church. No amount of taped sermons, TV or radio programs, or personal bible study can substitute for that which GOD has ordained for the strengthening of HIS saints.

Finally we can conclude directly from the scripture that our freedom as the sons of GOD consists in being able to exercise love and esteem for our brethren in CHRIST without false pretenses but with a pure heart fervently. (see I Pet.1:22) *"For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God."* (1Pe 2:15-16)