

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

SELF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not; but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.

Matthew 21:31-32

The LORD JESUS totally confounded the Jews, especially the Scribes and Pharisees, with the message that HE taught. They were quite certain that all of those who were keepers of the law would be those who would be given an entrance into the Kingdom of GOD. They were what would be called today; the “moral majority”. The concept that living a “good” life will influence GOD to bless a person or nation is essentially received without question by the vast majority of people in the earth. It should not shock us therefore that even the vast majority of those who claim to be Christians would believe the same thing.

This error is ingrained in the very heart of the natural man and no one has to teach him that it is so. In its most virulent form this idea leads men to believe that they can earn a place in heaven by their own good works. In a more benign (but just as deadly) form, this error causes those who are “conditionalists” and “moralists” to think that the favor and blessing of GOD, in the earth, can be merited and is bestowed on the basis of man’s obedience.

Men are born thinking that they have it within their power to choose right from wrong, good or evil. This concept is most often referred to as “man’s free will”. It seems plausible and in fact very logical to men to hold onto this notion, sometimes very tenaciously. When challenged about this theory I have seen men digress into fits of rage and vitriol that would cause a sailor to blush. They are often quite exasperated that anyone might so much as question this view which to the majority is sacrosanct and above scrutiny.

We are quite certain that man has the ability to “choose” evil and walk contrary to the commandments of GOD. He has demonstrated that “ability” and “power to choose” from the very beginning as Adam chose to disobey GOD’s clear directive not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The LORD JESUS said to the Pharisees, *“Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.”* (John 8:43-44) This is indicative of the very nature of man especially those of a religious mindset. The Psalmist said it like this; *“The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.”* (Psa 58:3) So without doubt man can “choose” evil; which he does with striking regularity.

The other premise, however, finds no basis in the scripture. Man cannot and does not “choose” to do good. Paul quotes the Psalmist, saying; *“As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none*

that doeth good, no, not one.” (Rom 3:10-12) Man’s “inability” is not physical in nature but is rather rooted in the seat of his desire. A man can only choose those things which he desires to choose and no man by his own nature “can” desire anything but that which Paul describes as, “fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind;” (Eph 2:3).

Now this is not to say that man cannot be taught to live according to some “moral rule” or societal expectation, either through religious instruction or natural teaching. Even dogs can be taught to sit or heel at their master’s commands. It is a great mistake however to think that the “keeping of a law” or obedience to some religious “order” is “righteous” in the eyes of GOD. Many hold up the “Ten Commandments” as the standard by which men are supposed to live. They chisel them on monuments and print them on yard signs to remind men of their “obligation” as if this was GOD’s standard, and that by so doing they can influence men to keep them. Even sadder, though, than those who live with a total disregard of these “commandments”, (embracing all manner of debauchery and wickedness), are those who “think” that they walk in obedience to them. It is far more difficult to teach a man who is convinced that he is a law keeper, of his wickedness, than it is to show the man who has a total disregard of the law of GOD that he is corrupt.

According to the LORD JESUS CHRIST, that man who looked upon a woman with lust, even though he never was in “the flesh” unfaithful to his wife, was just as much a breaker of the “law” as was that man who in disregard to the seventh “commandment” became physically joined to another woman. This very teaching causes those to gasp, who consider themselves as “moral” and “upright”. The standard of GOD’s righteousness cannot be chiseled in stone nor written by the pen of even a ready writer. The benchmark of that righteousness, which alone is accepted in heaven, is the LORD JESUS CHRIST, *“Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.” (1Pet 2:22)* GOD allows no deviance from a perfect keeping of HIS law. It is not “righteous” in HIS sight for a man to outwardly obey the Ten Commandments or even to desire to keep them in his heart. Only a perfect righteousness can avail in the courts of heaven. Any failure in mind or action must be judged as complete failure and cannot be received by HIM who is *“of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity” (Hab 1:13)*, regardless of how slight men may consider it.

Any standard other than this ONE, which gives a man any sort of comfort that he has some “righteousness” before a Holy and Almighty GOD, is nothing more than a delusion and an exercise in “self-righteousness”. That man who has fled to HIM for refuge and embraced HIS righteousness as his own, knows that all that the “ten commandments” can do is remind us of our inability to keep them. Each time he looks at those tablets of stone he is condemned except he knows, *“But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” (1Cor 1:30)* The only “righteousness” which he can claim is that which is provided to HIM by that which is imputed to HIM by the work of the LORD JESUS CHRIST. Absolutely no man will be received into the presence of GOD on the basis of any other “righteousness” than this.

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” (Rom 8:1-4)