

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 LETTER KILLETH

Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

II Corinthians 3:6

The Bible is full of contrasts; the sheep and the goats, the wheat and the tares, law and grace, etc. Yet there is no greater contrast that is presented anywhere in the scripture, than that which is manifested by the work of the SPIRIT and the work of the flesh. One is unto LIFE and the other is unto death. One tends to freedom and the other to bondage. One produces humility and the other boasting.

The work of the flesh is common among all men since every man, born of woman, shares in those natural tendencies of desiring to satisfy that flesh and seeking its preeminence. A man does not have to learn one thing in order to serve his own interest nor does he need any encouragement to prefer his own way above that of his fellow man. Some call it looking out for number one and is as common a trait as is two eyes, two ears, and a nose.

It is very simple to detect these tendencies in the observation of men as they act out their selfish desires. One can plainly see the destructive nature of the flesh when it seeks to have the preeminence over others or to seek its own good at the expense of others. No one has any doubt about that destructive nature when men pursue their own selfish habits (such as drunkenness or drug addiction) to their own hurt and the harm of others.

Yet while these things can clearly be seen for what they are, religion often cloaks the flesh in robes of seeming righteousness which camouflages this same flesh and makes it to be acceptable to the very flesh which to some it seems to subdue. The Pharisees are the poster children for this deception which is as much a friend to the flesh as is the satisfaction of its carnal lusts. Only those whom the LORD gives discernment by the gift of HIS SPIRIT can see religion for what it is, just a tool of deception, in the hand of the devil to keep men in the very bondage from which they cannot escape by its power.

In describing the error of the Jews, (in general), Paul says that they, *"being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."* (Rom 10:3-4) This is a fatal error in whatever form it takes. It does not matter how similar, what a man believes, may be to the actual truth (which is stated in the last sentence). If a man is clinging to any hope other than CHRIST alone, he shall surely perish.

Religion and all of its trappings appeals to the flesh because it enables a man to indulge his basic desire to establish a righteousness of his own with which to commend himself to GOD. It matters not whether that religion involves self denial and service to his fellow man, or some supposed spiritual devotion which is mystical in nature, or even if it supposedly involves a belief in the "inerrancy of scripture". The scriptures cannot enlighten a man apart from the operation of the SPIRIT to open HIS eyes and give HIM revelation. The Bible can be an idol to those who revere its verbage but have no love for its contents.

A man's religion is like a "security blanket" which he can pull on in times of distress and trouble, and lean upon when he is dying, but apart from leaning upon the living CHRIST, all such ground is sinking sand. No great discernment is necessary to see the errors of those religions which deny CHRIST to be the true and living GOD, such as Buddhism, Islam, Mormonism, etc. The really deadly deceptions are those which are the closest to the truth while yet denying the very substance of the truth, by clinging to some work of the flesh which can be promoted in men or set forth as proof of true belief.

Modern "evangelism" is built upon this unstable ground and continually calls upon men to exercise faith as if such was in the power of men to do so. Not only that, but a far more damning aspect of it is that it presents the efficacy of the work of CHRIST as being dependent on the agreement of men in order for its application to be complete. How often have we heard men being cajoled and plead with to "let the LORD into their hearts" or to "give their heart to the LORD", as if HE was limited to merely making an attempt to save them. This is not the gospel of the "glory of the blessed GOD" (see I Tim 1:11) which Paul said was committed into his trust nor does it vaguely resemble the truth that we are sent into the world to proclaim, that JESUS CHRIST "*shall save HIS people from their sins*" (see Mat.1:21), nor does it in any wise proclaim HIM who is "*traveling in the greatness of HIS strength---mighty to save*". (Isa.63:1)

Counterfeit gospels are those which give men any reason (however slight) to boast in any thing other than the finished work of CHRIST in the shedding of HIS blood and the application of that saving work to their souls by the operation of the SPIRIT of GOD quite apart from any activity on their part. Those who embrace these counterfeit gospels are quite fond of the letter of the new testament but have no understanding of the SPIRIT of it. Paul said he was made an "*able minister of the new testament*", not in its mere letter, but rather recognizing that apart from the work of the SPIRIT of GOD to apply the truth of it to the hearts of men it was of no more benefit to them than the law of Moses which could only condemn them.

Many approach the New Testament as if it was meant to be applied in the same fashion as the Old which could not in any wise benefit the hearers because of the weakness of the flesh. The nature of the flesh does not change and it is foolish to think that that New Testament can be applied to men as the laying on of duty or the fulfillment of some obligation. Yet this does not stop the duty-works preachers from preaching faith as a duty rather than a gift and obedience as an obligation rather than a blessing from the hand of GOD.

The "*letter killeth*" because it demands performance but cannot provide a PERFORMER. The need of the awakened sons of GOD is not a rigorous list of duties which they must perform but rather the faithful work of a COMFORTER which leads them to lean upon the ONE who has satisfied all demands for them. They do not need a taskmaster but rather ONE who will guide them into all truth. This is that ONE who the LORD spoke of when HE said HIS SPIRIT would convince the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. This continual work by HIM in the children of GOD is that which ministers life and health to them as they see CHRIST alone as their all sufficient SAVIOR.

HE is that ONE who gives them a love for the truth and not just a knowledge of it. The man who has "letter religion" is the one who is convinced that he is saved and that he knows the truth and is confident of his ability to defend it and inform others of it. That man who is taught of the SPIRIT confesses his own weakness and his lack of true understanding but has been given a love for the TEACHER and cannot be turned aside even as Peter who confessed, "*thou hast the words of eternal life.*" (John 6:68)

"For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." (2Cor 4:5-7)