

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

WHAT IS A SINNER?

But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. *Matthew 9:13*

The scripture clearly says *"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God"*. (Rom 3:23) So one might consider that a sinner would be easy to find, yet experience and the word of GOD teaches us that such is not the case. The old bard, Joseph Hart said, "A sinner is a sacred thing; The Holy Ghost has made him so." The scripture says that CHRIST came into the world to save sinners (see I Tim.1:15) and it also very clear that not all men shall be saved. (see Mat.7:21-23; John 8:21-24)

So exactly what is a sinner? I believe the LORD has given us an illustration of this in the words which HE gave to the prophet Jeremiah when Jerusalem was besieged by the Chaldeans. *"And unto this people thou shalt say, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I set before you the way of life, and the way of death. He that abideth in this city shall die by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth out, and falleth to the Chaldeans that besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be unto him for a prey."* (Jer 21:8-9)

In summary the prophet made it clear that the LORD's purpose was to completely destroy Jerusalem and all of its inhabitants and that the only hope of being spared from this destruction was to cast themselves on the mercy of the Chaldeans who were the instruments of this destruction empowered by the LORD to accomplish HIS purpose.

This instruction was totally contrary to natural common sense. It made absolutely no sense to the natural thinking of men to abandon the relative safety of the walls of the venerable city of Jerusalem which had stood the test of time, to cast oneself upon the mercy of those who were bent upon the destruction of both the city and its inhabitants. After all, these walls which now wrapped around them were the very ones which had long been a symbol of their separateness from the heathen who dwelt outside its walls. These walls were built with the blood, sweat and tears of their forefathers and formed a veritable treasure chest of all of the religious traditions upon which they found a source of some comfort.

In the same way in which the prophet's instruction was considered an insane idea, the scripture says that the *"preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."* (1Cor 1:18-19) It is impossible that the natural man should ever embrace the truth of the gospel because it seems a most unlikely and religiously unappealing means of escape from destruction to him. The only way for a man to see the glory of the gospel and the power of GOD in it, is for the HOLY GHOST to give him ears to hear it and eyes to behold its wisdom.

Yet there is another preparation which goes hand in hand with that awakening and that is being given the gift to be able to truly assess one's own worthiness of destruction and his utter inability to do one thing in his own power to avoid it. Such men are described in the scriptures as "sinners". We see one such individual who went down to the temple to pray right alongside one who was the epitome of the morally upright and religiously faithful and who was one of those whom the LORD described as needing no repentance. (see Luke 15:7)

“Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other.” (Luke 18:10-14)

One man recounted his “faithfulness and morality”, while the other could only sue for mercy.

True repentance is that which causes a man not only to hate his wickedness but his own “righteousness” as well. True repentance is the evidence of a man being a “sinner”, the likes of which the LORD “*came to save*”. True repentance is that which causes a man to renounce the very things in which he once trusted even as Paul said, *“But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.”* (Phil 3:7-9) Only sinners are called to this repentance, the righteous are left in their righteousness where they are quite content.

Job was just such a sinner when the LORD opened his eyes to see himself as he really was, *“I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”* (Job 42:5-6) The gift and work of true repentance causes a “sinner” to despise not just his wicked deeds but the very thoughts and intents of his heart that would lead him to walk contrary to the way of GOD but equally if not more importantly, to hate any thought that might arise within his bosom of any self righteousness he might possess. The righteous, religious man can find some good in himself, even if it is only by comparison to those he feels are morally inferior to himself as the Pharisee looked at the publican and even thanked GOD that he was not like him. Religious men discover many ways in which they can feel themselves superior to others whether it be in degrees of faith, levels of doctrinal understanding, or the performance of good deeds.

The righteous man is primarily concerned with morality and avoiding deeds of wickedness while maintaining (as he sees it) a faithful walk in the eyes of men and GOD, feeling that the law is righteous and good and a measuring stick whereby to gauge his progress. The sinner, however, despairs of having any righteousness at all and knows that he is full of sin from head to toe and cannot even presume to approach the LORD for anything except to prostrate himself and beg for mercy, knowing that the law can in no wise comfort him, but rather condemn him because of his inability to keep one jot or tittle of it.

So what is a sinner? A sinner is:

1. A man in whom the LORD is pleased to work in acquainting him with his own depravity.
2. A man who utterly despairs of finding one thing within himself or his actions that would please GOD in any way.
3. A man who renounces all hope in religion of any type.
4. A man who can find no comfort or help in any but CHRIST alone.
5. A man who rejoices in the proclamation of free grace and knows that such affords him the only hope of being an object of GOD’s mercy.

[To understand these things aright, This grand distinction should be known:

Though all are sinners in God’s sight, There are but few so in their own.

To such as these our Lord was sent; They’re only sinners who repent.]

[What comfort can a Saviour bring To those who never felt their woe?

A sinner is a sacred thing; The Holy Ghost has made him so.

New life from him we must receive, Before for sin we rightly grieve.]

This faithful saying let us own, Well worthy ’tis to be believed,

That Christ into the world came down, That sinners might by him be saved.

Sinners are high in his esteem, And sinners highly value him. #89 Gadsby’s Hymns

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