

GRACE GAZETTE

Volume XI

Issue 30

Published occasionally for Zion's mourners

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

BETWEEN PRESUMPTION AND DESPAIR

For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.

Romans 8:24-25

Gifted speakers, who masquerade as preachers of truth, can sometimes cause men to be stirred up in an emotional state which is often mistaken for true conviction of sin. When a man's "conviction" arises out of the ability of the preacher to "turn a phrase", perhaps causing the hearers to, (at least presently), fear the consequences of sin, then that man will likely also be readily convinced that his deliverance from this fearful state of burning in hell forever, rests in his own ability to complete some evangelical formula called the "plan of salvation". One, so convinced, can be perfectly satisfied for these "preachers" to pronounce him as one of the "saved", because of his actions. He is easily persuaded that this "decision" to "be saved" has caused all of heaven to rejoice, and that his name is now recorded among the redeemed. Of course in some circles one must also add the act of baptism or various other acts of obedience to really seal the deal. All of which such men are ready to "do" and take comfort therein.

That which is labeled as "faith" in many evangelical circles, today, is really nothing more than presumption. GOD is pictured as being much like the "genie" in Aladdin's magic lamp. All one has to do is rub on the lamp and voila! GOD appears; ready to grant our wish. In fact HE is "unable" to resist coming out of the lamp, and is so relieved that men have rubbed on the lamp that HE grants salvation on preprinted cards prepared for the event.

In the natural thinking of men they believe that they have both the right and the ability to be acquainted with the GOD of Heaven and Earth. They are convinced that they can "learn" about HIM by studying the scriptures, going to church, or hearing men preach just like you would "learn" about any subject which one is inclined to pursue. In fact they are often even more inclined to think they can "know" the LORD, because they are persuaded that HE is essentially in need of something which only they can provide; that is an attentive heart which operates in faith.

Many men presume that they can actually help GOD gain the fulfillment of HIS desires by their decision to "accept" an "offer" of salvation from HIS hand as if HE was running a lemonade stand and is overjoyed when HE gets a customer. This terminology is quite prevalent in modern "Christendom" but cannot be discovered in the scriptures either by example or teaching. Salvation is not an "offer" nor is CHRIST on the auction block waiting to be "accepted" or approved. GOD cannot in any wise be aided by men. *"But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased."* (Psa 115:3)

Men presume they can believe. Men presume that GOD is bound by formulas and their religion. Men presume that they can gain something from HIM by their obedience. Men presume that GOD "ought" to come to their aid. Men presume that their "presumptions" constitute "faith". Job was a man who actually did have some understanding of the truth of GOD, yet he was stripped

naked and bare before HIM when the LORD was pleased to visit Job in power. *"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)

When the HOLY SPIRIT is pleased to convince a man of his depraved heart and the wicked actions that have been created thereby, the fruit that is produced by this conviction is a despair of deliverance that causes him to cry out in deepest distress. We see this anguish exhibited in those who heard the message preached by Peter on the day of Pentecost as well as that of the Philippian Jailer who cried out in the darkness of the night and that of his soul as well.

The purpose of the preaching of the Gospel is not to, ultimately, produce despair in those who are given ears to hear it, but rather to bring *"life and immortality to light"* (2Tim 1:10), apprising them of the reconciliation which CHRIST has procured. Yet a man in his natural state has no appreciation for this message of redemption and is unable to hear it or believe it.

Therefore, in order for a man to hear this truth proclaimed and then to believe what he hears, his heart, mind, and soul must be prepared to receive it. Those whom the LORD has ordained unto eternal life are also those in whom the HOLY GHOST performs the work of repentance. This work has its beginning as the LORD is pleased to cause them to be awakened to their total estrangement from GOD and the utter impossibility of their being able to effect a remedy or solution for this separation. This awakening is more than just a change of thinking or activity of the mind, but rather it is the application of the power of GOD in causing a man to be born again, (or from above) through the regenerating power of the HOLY GHOST. He is made a new creature, not by the will of the flesh but by the power of the ETERNAL GOD.

The plow of conviction is set deeper in some than in others but since it is the same SPIRIT who performs the work in one as in another; the characteristics of repentance are the same. None has ever believed the gospel of the redemptive work of CHRIST, who has not first been convinced that he is a sinner, worthy of destruction. This work of conviction causes a man to understand his poverty, his unworthiness of receiving mercy, and his utter inability to correct his situation.

This scenario could only result in one outcome (which is total despair) were it not that the same LORD who administers the gaping wound of despair is also the ONE who applies the healing balm of the REDEEMER, as HE gives the gift of faith causing the one who "hears" the gospel, to be awakened to a lively hope therein. *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."* (1Pet 1:3)

The man who hears the gospel, being awakened from the deadness of sin, in which he has long dwelt by nature, has an immediate longing to be included among those who are numbered with CHRIST. Yet true faith does not cause him to "presume" that he is automatically included in that number simply because he desires to be or makes a decision to be. Rather that faith which he has been given causes him to cling to an abiding hope in CHRIST, having no ability to depart from those things which his soul has been made to believe yet clearly understanding that it is by mercy and grace alone that he has any reason to hope therein. *"Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life."* (John 6:68)

So while the man who has presumption says, "I can tell you the exact time and place where I decided to be saved", the man whom the LORD has given hope, says "Pass me not O gentle, Savior, hear my humble cry, while on others THOU art calling, do not pass me by." While those with presumption say, "I have accepted the LORD", those whom the LORD is pleased to give a lively hope, say, "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to THY cross I cling, naked come to thee for dress, helpless look to THEE for grace, foul, I to the found fly wash me SAVIOR or I die.

To presume one has salvation because of an act of free will is to perish with those of whom the LORD spoke in Matthew 7:21-23. To be given over to despair, even as Judas, is to perish as well. By and according to the grace of GOD, there is a place between presumption and despair, wherein HE has seen fit to dwell with HIS children. It is the place called HOPE. *"Behold, the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy."* (Psa 33:18) mam