

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

SEVENTY TIMES SEVEN

Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

Matthew 18:21-22

The natural man loves the order and orthodoxy of organized religion. The flesh takes great comfort in having liturgies and hierarchies, which require chief seats occupied by various office holders and those with clerical distinctions. In these matters he shows the law written in his heart; which principle causes him to desire and impose limits upon the degree to which he is required to go in his exercises of religion and this same notion would ultimately place boundaries on the extent to which he should show mercy and deference to others.

The principle of liturgical worship (i.e.; that which follows a prescribed or predetermined order) is adhered to by many (actually the majority) since such does not require them to wait upon the LORD but they can fulfill their religious "obligations" by following this order. They are assured by these predetermined "orders of service" that they can neatly package their "worship" into a particular time frame and insure that everything runs smoothly and nothing unexpected can occur.

I have been told by some that doing so enables things to be done "decently and in order". If that is the primary goal when they meet together, then I suppose that they get exactly what they desire. Yet if we read the scriptures, we find no such liturgies prescribed or practiced, but, simply some wise instruction concerning the general course that the meetings of the saints should take. GOD is not the AUTHOR of confusion, and HE does not need "clergymen" to "ride herd" in order to avoid confusion. Where the SPIRIT of the LORD is there is liberty and if HE is present, there will be that order which HE alone can provide. What other order would we desire to see manifested?

Peter asked the LORD this question "*How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?*" Since he had been raised in the Jews religion he assumed that there had to be a limit upon just how much forgiveness was required, since there were limits upon how far he could go on the Sabbath and on the particular foods he could lawfully eat. This is the reasonable expectation which the law would set forth. So being somewhat magnanimous in his estimate, he opined the figure of seven times. I am sure he probably was proud of his own generous estimate and figured that it was an ample amount.

The LORD's reply laid the axe to the root of his legalistic consideration and gave him an answer which was quite astounding to Peter's natural line of thought. This was not the answer that Peter expected and certainly not one which was welcomed by him in his flesh, which naturally looks for a limitation upon just how far one should go in showing mercy. In essence the LORD told him that there was to be no limit upon such mercy and forgiveness.

The LORD's answer is very much akin to, and in keeping with, HIS astonishing teaching in HIS sermon on the mount. "*But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou*

away. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.” (Mat 5:39-44)

I can think of no other of CHRIST's teaching that is anymore contrary to the natural man's legalistic thought processes than this. More has been written and said by men trying to explain why the LORD didn't really mean what HE said here, than has been written declaring that this teaching is the very essence of the Kingdom of GOD and is necessarily at odds with flesh and blood which HE said cannot inherit that Kingdom.

Let every man who claims to be an heir to that Kingdom, confess openly of the glory and wonder of this principle which is part and parcel of that “*law of the SPIRIT of life in CHRIST JESUS*” which has set us free from the law of sin and death.

While every desire and natural inclination of the flesh has a law (of one type or another), against it; there is no law which is against the fruit of the SPIRIT. “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.*” (Gal 5:22-23) This is the true expression of the freedom and liberty which the sons of GOD have in CHRIST JESUS. This is also the very principle of LIGHT and LIFE which the flesh wars and struggles against in the born again sons of GOD.

When we are offended (some are more easily offended than others, yet all have their points of weakness), our natural tendency is to seek revenge of one sort or another against the one who has offended us. In some measure the flesh usually compensates (for a necessary restraint against homicide of the offender) by simply harboring a grudge or seeking some fashion whereby he might “even the score.” This is seen by the natural man as quite necessary in order to teach others a lesson, but mostly just to gain the satisfaction of ones own selfishness.

After all, the flesh opines, those who offend us must of necessity pay some sort of price. The principle of “an eye for an eye” is indelibly written in the heart of the natural man and rages against the principles which the LORD clearly set forth in HIS earthly ministry. Thus the LORD would remind us. “*Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.*” (Rom 12:17-19)

The matter of “forgiveness” is easy to contemplate yet impossible to practice apart from the grace of GOD in operation in the sons of GOD. There is probably no other issue that robs the people of GOD of the peace and enjoyment of the sweetness of GOD's mercy than the manifestation of a hard heart which will not fully and freely forgive those who (at least in our mind) have offended us in some way. This is what the LORD alluded to when HE said, “*But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*” (Mat 6:15) A man who will not forgive others cannot enjoy the forgiveness which flows from the very heart of the LORD towards those whom HE loves with an everlasting love.

An unforgiving spirit is like a cancer which eats at the soul, even as Ahab pined for the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite. (see I Kings 21:1-13) Now to be sure, Ahab was primarily moved with covetousness, but the underlying cause of his dissatisfaction stemmed from his self-centered sense of entitlement, which is where the root of “an unforgiving spirit” gets its sustenance.

When we clearly understand that we are not “entitled” to anything, and that whatever blessing we might receive in this world is because of the simple mercy of GOD towards us, then we can receive the truth that we do not have the right to be offended. Which of us has not offended our fellow man time and again? Who among us has not willingly “offended” the graciousness of GOD? Thus we begin to see that “forgiveness” is not something that is required by the law of GOD but a principle of the greatest enjoyment which we can experience. “*Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.*” (Col 3:12-13) True freedom! mam