

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

BEATING THE AIR

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

I Corinthians 9:24-27

Throughout the writings of Paul the apostle, one clear message shines out in all that he preached and taught. He was completely centered on this one subject that is, itself, the very basis of the gospel, and in fact without which no true gospel can be proclaimed. He summed it up to the Corinthians saying, "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." (1Cor 2:2)

Over the years (since he uttered those words and left behind an indelible mark for having been true to that message from the beginning of his ministry till the end,) many have come along and sought to add to that simplistic message, all types of forms, traditions, and various duties for the sons of GOD, which they consider equally as important.

Yet anything which is "added" to that plain message does not serve to empower the gospel or to strengthen the sons of GOD, but rather to dilute the message and to avert the eyes of the hearers from the one SOURCE of their HOPE and CONFIDENCE, to a system of fleshly works.

Throughout his writings he sets forth many exhortations unto the children of GOD. Yet in every instance, his purpose in doing so is to bring the mind of those he has exhorted back to the very basis of his message rather than to lay a burden upon the back of those who have already felt the lash of the law and are acquainted with the weakness of their own flesh.

He instructs the Philippians about the humility and single-mindedness of CHRIST when he exhorts them to "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." (Php 2:5) HE instructs the Romans about the finished work of CHRIST in satisfying the Law when HE exhorts them to, "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace." (Rom 6:11-14) Likewise he instructs the Colossians of the all sufficiency of CHRIST when he exhorts them to "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all." (Col 3:9-11)

Thus we see Paul setting forth the culmination of the work of CHRIST (here in this passage of scripture found in I Cor. 9:24-27) in the sons of GOD; those in whom the SPIRIT "worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." (Php 2:13);

Paul did not browbeat the Corinthians here, nor did he lay a heavy burden upon them to perform some deeds in the power of their flesh, which will supposedly improve their standing with the LORD or enhance their blessings in spiritual matters. Rather he sets himself forth as an example of that determination that had been given him to run the race set before him.

Quite often parents try to instill their values into their children by instruction only to see those children disregard those values as they reach maturity. The truth is that a parent cannot cause their children to adopt their values, or believe what the parent believes. What they can do, however, is set forth a clear example (that leaves no doubt in their children's minds) of those things which they (the parent) believe and are committed to walk in.

This is what Paul is doing here as he uses the illustration of running a race with the intention of winning, regardless of the cost or amount of effort involved. Paul clearly understood that he had no power in and of himself to perform this as he testified, *"But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."* (1Cor 15:10)

So here, he is not primarily trying to "stir them up to some action", but is rather indicating the commitment that the LORD had given him to run and fight, with that incorruptible CROWN, which fadeth not away, clearly in sight. He did this knowing that CHRIST who is our example rejoiced as a strong man to run a race and did in fact triumph in the contest which HE gladly entered for the sake of all of those who were hidden in HIM. That victory which HE obtained was for their sakes and HE has come forth as their CHAMPION, crowned with many crowns.

The sons of GOD are thus called to triumph in that victory which HE has won for them. HE has thus set for us an EXAMPLE that we should follow in HIS steps (see I Pet. 2:21) Therefore, we see Paul, willing to be an example to his "children in the gospel" (see I Cor. 4:15) as he declares unto them his determination to "fight a good fight and keep the faith." (see II Tim 4:7).

In order to win a fight, one must identify his opponent and then enter the ring and actually fight that opponent. Thus Paul says that he is not merely "shadow boxing" (i.e.; beating the air) but rather seeking to land blows to his enemy or opponent. He clearly identifies his opponent in this particular fight as "his body", which is synonymous in this instance with "his flesh". What he is describing is not exactly the same warfare which he describes in Galatians, *"For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."* (Gal 5:17)

That battle cannot be waged on the terms he is here describing to the Corinthians, for that is a spiritual battle which is waged completely by the SPIRIT of GOD and our sinful flesh which would oppose the truth at every turn. He rejoices to the Romans that this particular battle is waged by our CHAMPION and the outcome is not in doubt.

It, rather, seems that he is here speaking of recognizing that he must oppose his own flesh in an external battle which he says he must not lose else he be discovered to be "disqualified" (i.e., a castaway) and therefore discredited as a spokesman for CHRIST. A crude example of the "fight" which he is waging would be as one might enter upon a diet in order to lose weight. Now it is certain that a man will not lose one pound that is not ordained for him to lose, but it is also certain that if a man continues with a diet of donuts and softdrinks that he will not lose one pound either.

He recognizes that his "body", if not subdued, will ultimately harm him and ultimately the cause which he seeks to maintain. It is in this same vein that he exhorts Timothy, *"Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier."* (2Tim 2:3-4) He recognized that our "body" is not our "friend" and must be "fought" against lest it cause us to be entangled in matters which could bring dishonor to the very cause we desire to see set forth.

May we be given a mind and heart such as Paul exemplifies here, recognizing that there are practical battles which need to be fought as well as that Spiritual warfare which is carried on by the SPIRIT of GOD. Nothing that a man can do will enhance that which our PERFORMER brings to pass, but nothing excuses the sons of GOD from recognizing their "enemy" either. mam