

GRACE GAZETTE

Volume XIX

Issue 23

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

THE VOICE OF REJOICING AND SALVATION

The LORD is my strength and song, and is become my salvation. The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous: the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly. The right hand of the LORD is exalted: the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly. I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD.

Psalms 118:14-17

The common thought of man is to equate righteousness and morality. Thus, it is quite common for men to make various judgments of the suitability of the behaviors of other men, based upon what they judge to be righteous conduct. When they discover this moral acceptability, then they consider that such men are "righteous" and where they don't, they deem such to be "unrighteous". The Pharisees were just such a people. They were the epitome of religious men, who consider righteousness to be what they can see in themselves and others who follow their "moral code" and in varying degrees perform in a manner which they would consider that GOD would find acceptable or vice versa, unacceptable.

To say that the scriptures do not set forth a basis or standard of "morality", which men imperil themselves to disregard, would be an error. Yet to consider that a man could be deemed "righteous" by an adherence to this standard of "morality", would be a more egregious error than to disregard this standard and live unto his own lusts. A man may be delivered from the wicked works of his mind which sets him at odds with his CREATOR, but there is no deliverance for the man who considers his own or others conduct to be found pleasing unto the LORD. No where is this anymore vividly illustrated than in the LORD's parable concerning the two men who went up to the temple to pray, one being a Pharisee and the other being 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.*" (Luke 18:11-12)

He reeled off, quite an impressive list of accomplishments and seemed (in his own mind at least) to have avoided many of the pitfalls which befell those less "righteous" than himself. We have no reason to believe that he was not perfectly satisfied with the moral standing which he claimed. Just like the "rich young ruler" who assured the LORD that he had observed the law of GOD from the time of his youth. (see Mat.10:17-22) Such men are sure that they have done what is required of them, and therefore, in their own mind, do stand in a place of "righteousness", at least when compared with others of lesser achievement.

The Publican, on the other hand, could not escape the knowledge that he had fallen woefully short of all that was required of him, and could find no place of standing before the LORD. "*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.*" (Luke 18:13) The LORD said that he was "justified" (i.e.; judged as accepted or rendered innocent) while the Pharisee was not.

Thus, we learn that "righteousness" and "morality" are not synonymous nor can one define the other. The LORD alone can judge a man to be righteous. The basis upon which HE does so is by imputing the perfect "RIGHTEOUSNESS" of JESUS CHRIST to those whom HE loves. Though we are not specifically told that the "rich young ruler" was granted repentance unto life,

we can read the scriptures which tell us that the LORD had a special affection for him. "Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me." (Mar 10:21) We also see that HE did not make a "suggestion" or a request to the young man, but rather a commandment. Just like he did to HIS disciples when HE commanded them to follow HIM. *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."* (John 10:27)

The faithfulness of the LORD to convince and convict HIS own of their sin and shortcomings is seen as he went away *"grieved"*. Many have assumed that this means he did not come back, but it rather seems to me that he sorrowed when he viewed the regard of his riches (which before to him were a source of joy) as the very evidence of his imperfection. He went away sorrowing even as Peter did when the cock crowed, and his sin was uncovered to his mind and heart.

I am more convinced of this when we see the subsequent lesson which the LORD taught HIS disciples about the difficulty of those, who are rich in this world's goods (be it gold and silver or morality), of leaving those things behind to gain the Kingdom of GOD. HE said that with men, such things are not possible (remember the Pharisee convinced of his own righteousness), but with HIM all things are possible. For it is HE who confers righteousness and not that belonging to those upon whom HE imputes it according to HIS sovereign purpose.

Saul of Tarsus was a man full of his own righteousness and in his own mind (even as the Pharisee *"prayed thus with himself"*) was zealous in his service to the LORD. It was only as the LORD stripped away his self-glorifying that he was caused to cry out *"Who art thou LORD"*. When the RIGHTEOUSNESS of CHRIST is revealed, those whom the LORD awakens to behold it can make no claims of their own righteousness and must as the Publican cry out for mercy.

Paul (that new name, see Rev.2:17) looked upon that which he once rejoiced in and counted it all as garbage. *"Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. 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."* (Php 3:5-8)

Thus, we see him expressing *"the voice of rejoicing and salvation."* It is the same with all of those whom the LORD is pleased to grant the gift of repentance and faith. In the days of Nehemiah, the WORD of GOD was read to the nation of Israel. *"For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law."* (Neh 8:9) This WORD is sharper than any two-edged sword and pierced their very hearts as the LORD wielded it with power. This weeping is a sign of repentance which is brought about by GODLY sorrow. Yet Nehemiah told them not to weep, but rather to rejoice in the salvation which GOD had already wrought for them. *"Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength."* (Neh 8:10)

Paul reminds us of the same when he says, *"Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster."* (Gal 3:24-25) The work of the law is a necessary one, due to the innate sin of men, but it cannot minister hope or help to the sons of GOD. The purpose of the law is in bringing repentance, which is not an end in itself, but rather has its perfect work in bringing the sons of GOD to rejoice in the RIGHTEOUSNESS of CHRIST. HE is our SALVATION.

Such rejoicing is meant to occur in the *"tabernacles of the RIGHTEOUS"*. Those "dwelling places" of the LORD are indeed temples of joy. Thus, Paul exhorted the Thessalonians, *"Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice."* (1Th 5:16) Where else can the JOY of GOD's people be found but in HIM who has *"brought LIFE and IMMORTALITY to LIGHT in the gospel."* *"(For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)"* (2Cor 6:2) Cannot all of the sons of GOD now say, *"the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly."* *"Salvation is of the LORD."* *"We will rejoice and be glad in it."* *"The LORD our RIGHTEOUSNESS"*. mam