

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

DECLARATIONS (PART 2)

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us. Luke 1:1

Having set out in the last issue our intent to set forth a declaration of what we believe the scriptures to teach, we continue that endeavor. The LORD admonished us through Peter to "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." (1 Peter 3:15) Some have assumed that being able to beat men over the head with proof texts or to bring them into submission by the overwhelming rhetoric and logic of dead letter arguments is the height of spirituality. We must always be mindful that the best defense of what we believe will be demonstrated to others by the effect our belief has on our everyday lives. The LORD said "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." (John 13:35) So our chief endeavor in setting forth this declaration is not to prove our discipleship or win arguments, but to encourage one another in the most holy faith and to equip us to give answer to those that ask; being mindful to do so in humility.

In the last issue we sought to answer the questions of who is GOD and who is man. To miss those basic truths is to be in error on everything else we may say. But hopefully we can move forward from these fundamental answers to descriptions of other points of doctrine which are needful in our understanding of the gospel.

What is sin?

The most basic definition that the scripture gives of sin is "sin is the transgression of the law." (1 John 3:4) Of course, the law in consideration is the law of GOD. GOD is the only lawgiver who is without any restriction. There is no court or counsel which can stand in judgment nor overturn any law which HE has decreed as binding upon men. Man in his fallen state is a natural rebel against every law which GOD has set forth. Sin has such a pervasive grip upon man that he has become a slave to it and cannot escape it by himself. The scripture plainly indicates that men cannot lay the blame for their sin at the feet of GOD (see Eccl.7:29; James 1:13) nor accuse HIM of wickedness (see Job 33:13) nor even question HIS motives (see Rom.9:20), but the scriptures are equally plain that sin did not and does not occur apart from the decree of GOD.(see Isa.63:17;II Thes.2:11; Prov.16:4) Yet all men from the least to the greatest are accountable before GOD for their sin. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;" (Rom.3:23)

Sin is not merely descriptive of the activity of man but it is also indicative of the corrupt nature of man's heart which causes him to transgress the law. (see Gen.6:5; Rom.1:28-31; 3:9-19) The sin nature that we all have was inherited from our father Adam and we are under the curse of sin because we are born sinners. (see Rom.5:12-14) Sin is not only found in acts of open rebellion and disobedience but also in the failure of men to do those things which are good. "to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." (James 4:17) Sin is also made manifest when men misuse and abuse the things which GOD intended for our good. (see Prov.23:29-33)

While sin itself has the power to destroy men, the most terrible fact is that GOD hates sin and will bring judgement on all those who are tainted by it. (see Ps.5:5; Prov.21:15; Ezek.18:4)

What is Redemption?

Redemption literally means "liberation procured by the payment of a ransom" (Strong's Greek & Hebrew Dictionary). As we look at redemption in the scriptures we find that it has four parts:

A purpose. CHRIST's redemption of sinners was neither an afterthought nor the remedy for an unforeseen problem but was in fact the very reason that HE created the world in the first place. *"That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."* (Eph 2:7) (see Eph.1:10-14; Rev.5:9-13)

A people. Redemption carries with it the understanding that a ransom is being paid to "buy back a possession". Redemption by its very definition is particular in nature, that is, it is carried out with a specific people in mind. If a wealthy man pays a ransom to set a child free no one would be surprised to discover that the child was his son nor would they be amazed if he did not pay a ransom for all stolen children. The LORD has an elect people which were given to the SON before the foundation of the world. HE loved them with an everlasting love and HE came into the world to "redeem" them. While we can say that the value of HIS life was infinite in worth it is clear that the scriptures indicate that HIS purpose in redemption was to purchase the deliverance of HIS own elect sons and daughters. (see John 17:2,9-10)

A payment. The most glorious aspect of our redemption is our REDEEMER. *"God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."* (Gal 6:14) But here we must glory! The death of the LORD JESUS CHRIST on the cross of Calvary is the central theme of the gospel. It is impossible to preach the gospel without proclaiming JESUS CHRIST and HIM crucified. HE was the only one who could be both *"just, and the justifier"* (Rom.3:26) of HIS people. HE was without sin yet HE took upon HIMSELF our sin. Death had no claim upon HIM yet HE died in our place. He did not just make our redemption "possible" but HE actually "obtained" (i.e.; got into HIS possession) it for HIS elect. The salvation of the LORD's people is owing totally to the payment which HE made, delivering us, and satisfying forever our debt of sin.

A place. HIS redemption not only delivered us from the debt of sin, but also from its bondage and curse, and ultimately purchased for us an eternal abode which HE has fashioned for us. *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ;--- In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; "* (Eph 1:3,8)

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