

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

UNNATURAL REPENTANCE

For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.
II Corinthians 7:10

When Moses appeared before Pharaoh to demand the release of the Hebrews, he told Aaron to cast his rod down and it became a serpent. The Egyptian sorcerers then imitated this feat by casting down their own rods which also became serpents. With their enchantments they were able to duplicate many of the successive miracles and plagues wrought by Moses and Aaron by the power of the LORD. Of course ultimately their abilities to imitate these occurrences failed, showing their power to be of a limited source. In the same fashion, the natural religious bent of man enables him to imitate practically every real spiritual work of the SPIRIT of GOD. Sometimes the flesh can produce fruits which appear genuine at least for a season. Morality is often mistaken for the work of the SPIRIT when it is nothing more than the activity of the flesh. Religious habits and customs often produce a measure of devotion which is sometimes mistaken for that which is wrought by the SPIRIT of GOD.

The Pharisees are good examples of the power of religion, since they were in general a class of men who were very morally upright and sticklers for keeping the law in a very strict fashion. Yet the LORD said *"except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."* (Mat 5:20) It is quite obvious from the words of the LORD that human endeavor (as strong as it may be) is of no worth in the economy of HIS kingdom. HIS own disciples were quite astounded by HIS teaching on this matter. (see Luke 18:26,27)

It also seems obvious that the LORD commands men to repent. (see Mat.4:17) and that he sent HIS disciples out to preach that men should repent (see Mark 6:12). In the same fashion HE is pleased to inform us that *"without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."* (Heb.11:6) The natural man is often moved by emotion or learning to attempt to "act" in both faith and repentance. After all, men believe that they have it within their own power to connect with GOD and to obey HIM according to their own choice and ability. Man's natural philosophy would teach him that it must be so because he does not believe that GOD could or would demand of him something which he cannot provide.

Therefore it is little wonder that man has devised all manner of religious activities, mantras, and theories which are designed to satisfy his longings. (see Rom.1:25) That religion which is widely called "Christianity" is really no different than any other religion, when practiced in the power of the flesh rather than the power of GOD. Many men pay lip service to believing the Bible and subscribing to the teachings concerning CHRIST. Nations boast of being "Christian"

and whole societies and cultures have sprung up which imitate to a greater or lesser extent the outward tenets of that which is called the Christian faith. Multitudes of “churches” meet week after week quite self assured of their “obedience” to that “faith”, some even able to prove by long standing traditions their connections to the early apostles. Yet all of this is but the work of the flesh apart from the application of the grace of GOD.

Repentance literally means “a change of mind or direction”. The Greek word(s) for repent and repentance is the root word from which our English word “metamorphosis” comes. Just as a caterpillar is changed into a butterfly through metamorphosis so the sons of GOD are transformed by repentance. Yet this repentance is that which acts upon them by the grace of GOD rather than some process which they bring to pass by their own power. Paul says there is a sorrowing (or regret) which is a natural occurrence which only brings death or perpetuates death. However there is a true repentance which is unto salvation or manifests deliverance. (see Mat.9:13; Acts 5:31; II Tim.2:25; II Pet.3:9) True repentance is :

More than simply the regret of the flesh. Paul said *“Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner.”* (II Cor 7:9) It is quite common for men to regret their past actions even to the point of tears but such sorrow is but the common activity of the flesh. Esau regretted having given his birthright away even with tears after he realized the blessing he missed, yet he was not sorrowing in a godly fashion (see Heb.12:16,17) Many a drunkard or murderer has lamented his actions and the sorrow they have brought to themselves and others yet this is not true repentance but distress for not receiving the blessings associated with proper behavior.

A heartfelt recognition of the ONE against whom all sin is committed. David demonstrated true repentance when he said, *“Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.”* (Psa 51:4) The adulterer or wifebeater who sheds tears for the pain he has caused his wife has stopped short of true repentance because he does not see that his actions are primarily an offense to GOD. David sinned against Bathsheba, Uriah the Hittite, and the whole nation of Israel just to name a few, yet he was brought to see that his sin against GOD was so great as to make all others fade from view.

A work wrought by the power of GOD. True repentance cannot be a work of the flesh because in order for it to occur a man must be brought to the total end of himself and his effort even as the publican, who, *“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) As long as a man thinks that he can offer something to GOD or perform some religious deed he cannot be in a state of repentance. This is totally an “unnatural” act performed in HIM by the SPIRIT of the living GOD. This is the same SPIRIT which bestows the gift of faith.

An ongoing condition in the born again sons of GOD. Repentance is a condition of the heart rather than an activity of the flesh, though true repentance will be manifested in these earthly bodies in which we are inhabitants. *“For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal.”* (II Cor 7:11) This state of repentance always drives the sons of GOD to cling to the righteousness of CHRIST without which they know themselves to be blind, naked and undone.

Softly to thy garden lead us, To behold thy bloody sweat;

Though thou from the curse hast freed us, Let us not the cost forget.

Be thy groans and cries rehearsed By the Spirit in our ears,

Till we, viewing whom we’ve piercèd, Melt in sympathetic tears. Jos.Hart (1712-1768)