

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

THIS BODY OF DEATH

O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

Romans 7:24-25

Some believe that the actual fleshly body of men is the cause of their sin. These same people think that when David said he was conceived in sin that he had reference to the physical act which his mother and father engaged in. This mindset is condemned by the apostle Paul, when he said; *"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats,"* (1Ti 4:1-3) This error is at the very heart of man's natural religious bent which would lead him to believe that he can find favor with GOD by depriving himself of something or causing himself pain. It is the same error that causes men to promote morality as godliness and to exhort men to reform their lives in order to be considered as the followers of CHRIST.

Paul said *"For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me."* (Rom 7:9-11) In essence what he meant was that when he was lost in his religious darkness without the light of GOD he was enamored by his perception of the Law of GOD as a rule of life and thought that he was an able and willing keeper of it. But when GOD awakened him and revealed the true spiritual nature of the law, then he was slain by it because an understanding of the law served to show him the true extent of his sin. Only the SPIRIT of GOD can apply the law in such a way that a man is stripped of any hope of righteousness in himself and brought to the depths of despair. Until this occurs men will continue to look at the law as a code which they can live by and expect others to do the same, thinking that if they subdue the sin of their fleshly body that all is well.

In preface to this scripture Paul is making a contrast because he says, *"we were in the flesh"* (v.5) which he expands upon in chapter 8 saying, *"So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."* (Rom 8:8-9) He said we are not *"in the flesh"*. Yet we can look down and see our feet and our hands, so what could he mean? Clearly to be *"in the flesh"* here means something other than dwelling in a body of flesh and blood which Paul knew that he did. (see II Cor.10:3) It also clearly means that sin is something other than the simple motions of this fleshly body.

When Adam was created he was not under the curse of sin, but when he disobeyed GOD he plunged his natural offspring into the darkness of sin and brought death upon his posterity. His flesh as a substance was not changed but being brought under the sentence of death he became corrupted and has passed on that corruptible nature to all of mankind.

So we are not only born into a body which is naturally corruptible (i.e.; subject to death and decay) but we are born into a body which has a mind which embraces and delights in sin. It is here that our rebellion against GOD is made manifest and it is here that the SPIRIT of GOD works to destroy that rebellion. Reform of the motions of our flesh will have no effect upon the seat of our enmity to GOD. You can teach men to be religious and moral but only the SPIRIT of GOD can renew the mind which will result in the transformation of the man. This is why the LORD said to Nicodemus, *"Ye must be born again."* (John 3:7)

Now lest any should think that we are here speaking of some intellectual exercise begun by the SPIRIT and carried on to fruition by men, let me make it clear that this "new birth" is not a reform of the natural mind which is corruptible. Rather this new birth is the formation or creation (by the SPIRIT) of a completely new mind or principle which was in no way a part of the man before the SPIRIT's visitation. He has been made into something that he was not before, a new creation. *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."* (2Cor 5:17)

Whereas before the new birth he was under sin's complete dominion, he is now set free. *"For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace."* (Rom 6:14) When we were under sin's dominion, walking in the darkness of a corruptible mind, we were *"free from righteousness"* (v.20) but now our mind is made to operate from a different perspective and we are the servants of that which we one time despised. (v.22) The reason for this is that eternal life which springs from HIM who is our LIFE has been implanted in the quickened sons of GOD. Oh marvelous freedom, joyous deliverance.

When we were under the rule of the old man, we enjoyed a complacent serenity. Now that tranquility is disturbed by a constant warfare. That corruptible flesh which we have dwelt in since our birth is still with us and does even now plot and connive to regain that place of dominance it has always occupied. We are now a new man (creature) who has a new master and consequently there is now a conflict between that SPIRIT that now inhabits us and that flesh which so long dominated us. (see Gal.5:17)

Paul laments this fact as he cries out *"O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"*. One of the ancient rulers (Mezentius) often sentenced murderers to be chained to the dead carcass of their victim. One can only imagine the horror of trying to live one's life while chained to this putrefying body. Some have surmised that Paul had this in mind with his language here. Perhaps he did or did not, but it is an appropriate illustration in either case. Though we are the freeborn sons of GOD, it has pleased HIM to keep us ever aware of our own fallibility by not removing us from the "flesh". Though we are not "in the flesh", the flesh is most certainly in us.

It is because of this conflict and warfare that we are constantly reminded of the glorious nature of that complete deliverance which has been promised to us and which hope is ever near and real to those who have fled for refuge to HIM. Without this conflict we would be as that man who James describes, *"For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was."* (Jam 1:23-24) When we look in that mirror we can see this rotting corpse which is chained to us causing us to value HIS promise all the more. We confess that we have here no continuing city but we look for one which is to come whose builder and maker is GOD.

Our strength and our help is in the LORD and in HIM alone. If HE should cast us off we should most surely perish. But we are ever encouraged to read that *"HE which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:"* (Phil 1:6) *And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it."* (1Th 5:23-24) Corruption cannot inherit incorruption but HE will change our vile body, *"that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself."* (Phi 3:21)