

# GRACE GAZETTE

Volume XI

Issue 28

*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*

---

## BELIEVING IN VAIN

*By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.*

*I Corinthians 15:2*

The most impossible task for a man to perform is to exercise faith in CHRIST, yet the scripture is clear that apart from a belief in JESUS CHRIST a man shall surely perish. The LORD told Nicodemus, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) Then HE went on to say, "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." (John 3:18)

This was quite a shock for Nicodemus, being a Jew and steeped in the traditions of Judaism. As such he held to the notion that the physical descendants of Abraham were the chosen people of GOD, to whom GOD made a conditional covenant, wherein they would be blessed if they kept the law. The LORD told him plainly that the children of GOD were not manifested by being born into a certain nation nor being circumcised in the flesh, but rather, the LORD had a people out of every nation and tongue upon the earth whom HE loved with an everlasting love, and which HE would make known by the gift of faith. In fact HE said that those who did not believe would manifest the fact that they were condemned from the start.

Most men believe that they possess a free will which puts them on a basis of actually being more powerful than GOD, since they consider that they can thwart the purpose of GOD and prevent HIM from doing what HE desires to do, by an exercise of their will. They believe that they can keep HIM in a constant mode of damage control as they go about to upset HIS carefully laid "plans". In this same vein of thought they think that they can choose to believe or not believe as easily as picking out a pair socks from their dresser drawer.

Now it is true that they can choose not to believe, which they do, quite by nature, since they are dead in trespasses and sins from which they cannot extricate themselves. In this they act in the same fashion as a hog who chooses to wallow in the mire. Regardless of what you teach the hog or how clean you might make him, he will exercise his "free will" to choose the mud. In looking at a hog it is easy to discern that he really has no "free will" at all since he is a slave to his "hoggish" nature. In this same fashion men are slaves to their own nature as well. "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." (John 3:19)

Yet nothing is more common in the present day than finding multitudes who are convinced that they have "believed" in CHRIST because they decided to. In light of this commonly held notion, it is interesting to examine what Paul is speaking about to the Corinthians when he mentions the possibility of "believing in vain". The Greek word which is translated as "vain", in this passage, literally means "without reason, cause, or basis". In fact it is translated as "without a cause" in Matthew 5:22 and John 15:12. It also appears as "vainly" where Paul describes one, to the

Colossians, who would seek to turn their eyes away from CHRIST and embrace the trappings of fleshly religion, as one who is *"vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind."* (Col 2:18)

The thrust of Paul's message here to the Corinthians is to emphasize to them the necessity of the "resurrection" of CHRIST (and subsequently those who are HIS at HIS coming) as the basis of the hope which they have been given by "faith" in CHRIST. That hope is null and void if the dead rise not because, if the dead are not raised, then it is evidence that CHRIST is not risen. If CHRIST did not rise from the grave then HE could not be triumphant over sin nor could the sacrifice of HIS own body for sin be acceptable in the sight of the FATHER, since it would be a mere sacrifice of corruption. *"But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."* (1Cor 15:13-19)

Therefore if the gospel which Paul preached and these Corinthians believed is not true then he says they have *"believed in vain."* It is not a matter of their sincerity, emotional desire, or any activity which they might perform that could cause their belief to be true. The basis of the faith which "saves" is found in the OBJECT (or basis) of that faith. The OBJECT of true faith is declared in the preaching of the true gospel as it is sent by the power of the HOLY GHOST. The preaching of the gospel is the declaration of the "truth as it is in JESUS." (see Eph.4:21)

If the substance of preaching is not the preeminence of CHRIST who completely finished the work of redemption and displayed it by rising from the grave, in utter triumph over all of HIS enemies and those of HIS people, then any such preaching cannot be said to be "the gospel which Paul preached" and any man claiming to have "faith" in that which has no basis in fact, has *"believed in vain."*

Paul also mentions that this "faith" is that where in they "stood". Faith which is not in vain, is that which stands completely (not partially) upon its OBJECT. The Jews stumbled at CHRIST, because they were quite unwilling to jettison all hope in their own righteousness and forms of religion. *"For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God."* (Rom 10:3)

When my boys were little and I took them each swimming for the first time it took each one of them a while to get acclimated to going in the water. Then we would progress to being in the water where they could stand up. Then the day would come when we would go to the deep end of the pool. Each one would hold tightly to the side of the pool with a death grip and I would stand a few feet away and encourage them to come to me. After awhile they would get up the courage to let go of the side and come to where I was.

This was a longer process with some of them than the other. But ultimately they each let go of the side of the pool and would rapidly make their way to where I was (about two feet away). Sometimes one of them would try to reach out to touch me and still hold on to the edge, but I was always outside of their reach. When their trust in me exceeded their fear of the unknown then they cast themselves off and sink or swim they came to me. The man who claims to believe in CHRIST while still holding onto a hope in his own righteous deeds or religious superstitions is like they were when they would reach out to me while still holding on to the edge of the pool. The man who has confidence or hope in anything else but CHRIST has *"believed in vain."* True faith is that which casts all of its cares into HIS hands. As Job confessed, *"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him:"* (Job 13:15)

*"Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling."* (1Tim 1:5-6)