

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

SORROW AFTER A GODLY SORT

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, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

II Corinthians 7:11

Paul wrote to the church at Corinth in his first epistle, to them, concerning several issues which they needed to address and correct. Not the least of these issues involved a member of their assembly who was living in an openly adulterous relationship. Not only was this an adulterous union, but was a particularly egregious relationship which involved incest since the young man who is mentioned was fornicating with his father's wife, (i.e., his stepmother).

There are several lessons to be learned from this situation. One is that even those who are professing believers in CHRIST can be overtaken in the foulest of sins in the flesh. Two is that these sins are no less odious when discovered among those professing CHRIST, than when they are discovered in the men of the world who have no such profession. In point of fact they are even more egregious because they are carried out by those who claim (at least) to have more light than those who are the children of wrath. Three is that these open sins cannot be tolerated in the midst of those who call themselves brethren, assembling together for the purpose of corporate worship and the building up of the saints, i.e.; the church in a particular location. To turn a blind eye towards such debauchery is to tacitly approve of it and to allow it to continue unchecked is to become guilty of the same, if the church is one body.

In reading Paul's second epistle to the Corinthians we discover that these matters were dealt with, by the Corinthian church, and the young man was brought to repentance according to the mercy of GOD and he was restored to fellowship among those with whom he shared a common profession of faith. One of the evidences of a work of the SPIRIT in any person or church is that they exhibit an attitude of repentance when confronted with their error(s).

Most of the time when we hear the word "repentance" mentioned (if we hear it at all) in the preaching of the modern day, it is used to describe an activity which men decide to undertake as a matter of their free will. Yet when we find true repentance described in the scripture, it is always the result of a work of GOD in the heart, and has fruits that can be identified. (see Luke 3:8) A man might claim to "repent" but that work of GOD produces results which cannot be mistaken. One example is that of Peter, "*And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.*" (Luke 22:61-62)

We see also the evidence of it in King David when Samuel looked him in the eye and declared, "*Thou art the man*". His resultant prayer is found in Psalm 51. And who can overlook the very poignant confession of Job, "*I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*" (Job 42:5-6)

Repentance in its simplest form is a change of direction. This change of direction however is not one which is simply “decided upon” but is one which is brought about by a sovereign work of GOD’s SPIRIT in the sons of GOD. This is what Paul speaks about when he says, “*what carefulness it wrought in you.*” This is the same word (wrought) which is used in Rom 7:18 when Paul is describing the effects and working of his sinful flesh in rebellion to the law of GOD. So, just as the working of the flesh produces sin in the flesh, true repentance can be known and seen in those who are made repentant by that which is produced in them by the HOLY SPIRIT.

One of the consequences of the curse of sin, is “sorrow” as we read the LORD’s declaration to Adam, “*cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life.*” (Gen 3:17) All men without exception are acquainted with this natural sorrow, simply as a result of being born of Adam’s race. Sin produces sorrow in a natural sense and there is even a form of repentance which is the result of that natural sorrow. This is illustrated by the drunkard who in his stupor beats his wife and abuses his children, then when he sobers up he is heartbroken over his actions and swears that he will never do it again. This is true “sorrow” but it is not the “*godly sorrow*” of which Paul speaks to the Corinthians. Rather this is that repentance which needs to be repented of which Paul mentions in II Cor.7:10. This is the “*sorrow of the world*” which “*worketh death.*” This is illustrated quite clearly in the sorrow which overwhelmed Judas as he went out and hanged himself. This natural sorrow only leads to death, it cannot minister life.

True repentance however, is an evidence that LIFE is present in those whom the LORD is pleased to give this gift. Sorrow always accompanies this “repentance”, but it is not a sorrow which results in death, or is simply the sorrow of the flesh, but rather is the manifestation of spiritual life. This is that “*sorrow after a godly sort*”, of which Paul speaks, which produces a change of mind, which then causes a change of direction, even as Saul on the road to Damascus.

Those fruits of “*godly sorrow*” which produce repentance are set forth by Paul as he describes the reaction of the church at Corinth,:

“*What carefulness it wrought in you*” This word “*carefulness*” means “an eagerness or diligence, or we might say a singleness of purpose. When a man is moved with godly sorrow, he is not easily distracted but desires to find a remedy for the situation he is in.

“*What clearing of yourselves*”. Usually when a man is clearing himself he is seeking a way to excuse his wrong doing, yet this “*clearing*” of which Paul speaks is not that of making an excuse for sin, but rather seeking to be rid of it, as one would “clear” a blockage. The Greek word that is used here literally means “a plea”, in this case a desire to be forgiven and rid of that sin which was the cause of this “sorrow”. This results as a man is made aware of the awful nature of his crimes and the ONE against whom those crimes are committed. Even as David said, “*Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.*” (Psa 51:4)

“*What indignation*”. In the flesh, indignation is most often hypocritical but there is a true indignation which is the fruit of the SPIRIT wherein a man is made to hate and despise his errors.

“*What fear*”. “*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*” (Heb 10:31) That man who is acquainted with his sin and the absolute HOLY character of GOD, must and shall tremble when he is reminded of the corruption that yet remains in himself and the wicked deeds which are produced thereby. We read of that fear in David’s prayer, “*Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.*” (Psa 51:11) There can be no more troubling thought to a child of GOD than this prospect.

“*What vehement desire*”. “*Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.*” (Psa 51:10)

“*What zeal*”. “*Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.*” (Psa 51:12-13) It is the desire of those in whom “godly sorrow” has had its perfect work to love and serve GOD.

“*What revenge*”. “*Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.*” (Psa 51:2) There is but one OFFERING which is acceptable to GOD. “*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*” (Psa 51:17) mam