

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

WITH OPEN FACE

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. *II Corinthians 3:18*

A very common activity of most humans is to look in a mirror each day in order to examine their appearance. When we are young and vibrant it is easy to be pleased with what we see, but the older that we get the more shocking does that image appear.

Paul writes here to the Corinthians about the “veil” which was upon Moses face and likens that “veil” to the lack of vision which the Israelites had of the “glory” of the Law given on Mount Sinai. The glory and power of that Law was unto condemnation, as is illustrated by the fact that the mountain was covered with fire and smoke and that no man could approach unto it without being killed. “*For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake.*” (Heb 12:20-21)

Man naturally looks at the law as a code of ethics or moral guide which he assumes he can, and perhaps even should, keep and abide by, though requiring great effort. The religious man even glories in it and often judges his righteousness relative to others and to that which is accepted by GOD, by his own supposed adherence to it. He believes that he can earn the favor of GOD by his dedication to it and considers that the blessings of GOD are dispensed according to this obedience, even when that obedience is imperfect. (see James 2:10)

This is a “veil” of darkness which leads to utter destruction and is manifested most clearly in Paul’s recognition of the error of the Jews. “*For they being ignorant (because of the veil) of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.*” (Rom 10:3)

Thus Paul instructs the Corinthians using the illustration of looking in a glass (i.e.; mirror). Yet rather than instructing them to look at themselves he shows them that the man who is brought from darkness to light does behold with “open face” (i.e; having the veil which covered his understanding removed) the true “glory of the LORD.”

As he looks in this “mirror” with that understanding he is caused to see that CHRIST alone is the glory of GOD. He goes on to give this very illustration in the next chapter. “*For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*” (2Cor 4:6)

The majesty and power of the gospel, which “brings life and immortality to light”, does show those who are bowed down with their own sin and inability to keep the law (whether it be the natural law given to the Gentiles (see Romans 2:14-16) or the Mosaic law given to the Jews) that the sum of all RIGHTEOUSNESS is found in JESUS CHRIST alone.

Thus as he looks into this mirror and rather than seeing himself as a condemned sinner he begins to see that “*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus,*

who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.” (Rom 8:1-2)

The more, that he stares at CHRIST the more (according to the power that works in HIM both to will and to do of the good pleasure of the LORD) that he beholds the glory of CHRIST and the less that he dwells upon his own innate corruption. The flesh will always gravitate towards condemnation because it is still operating under that “veil” which cannot behold the true glory of GOD, but assumes that this glory must be in the law in some measure.

This darkened and corruptible flesh will seek to make him believe that he is wrong not to examine himself by the law and compare himself to its demands and hang his head in shame. The man who is born again does not need this sort of continual darkness because he is well acquainted with his inability to keep the law, by the convicting and convincing work of the SPIRIT upon him. He already is well aware that he cannot keep the law. He does not need a continual stirring up of the image of his corruption by the constant harassment of duty/works.

There is a purpose in self-examination and exhortation (see 1 Cor.11:28; 2 Cor.13:5) but it is not to put the veil of the law back over his face. The man who is born from above would indeed despair of being stirred up to good works by the condemning power of the law and the constant exhortations unto an obedience which is defined by the law.

Rather, the man who has eternal life is only made strong as he beholds the IMAGE of HIM who is incorruptible and in whom resides all of the glory of GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS. Thus his “self examination” (as he looks into the mirror) causes him to see that the righteousness of CHRIST alone is his hope. He is “changed” by this constant gaze.

Once, in his youth, he beheld his own face in the mirror, (i.e.; while he was yet in darkness with the veil upon his face) and thought he looked strong and vibrant and able to perform mighty deeds. He was then pleased with what he saw and considered his own ability and took great delight in keeping the law or at least in an attempt thereto.

When he was awakened from his youthful slumber and acquainted with the condemnation of the law which hung over his head like the sword of Damocles he became like the man who has passed his youth and prime, looking in this mirror only to see the steady march towards his own death, and who cannot find any image therein which leads to hope.

This man will continue in despair apart from the sweet and faithful work of the SPIRIT of GOD to remove that veil from his face to behold the IMAGE of CHRIST in that mirror, rather than HIS own. This is to be given eyes to see that CHRIST has borne his sin and carried it away, and imputed to him HIS own perfect righteousness.

The longer he stares at this IMAGE of the glory of GOD the more of that glory he sees and the more precious the SAVIOR and SOURCE of his righteousness becomes. When the condemnation of the law roars as a mighty lion and the Judaizers seek to harness him with that yoke, which neither he nor his fathers could bear, the more confident he is that CHRIST alone is his hope even though his flesh would constantly seek to persuade him to remember that old image which he viewed with the veil upon his face.

He sees with “open face” (i.e.; unveiled) the absolute, imputed righteousness of CHRIST. Could he in anywise improve upon it?

He sees with “open face” the complete sinlessness of CHRIST. Could any other enter into the presence of HIM who will not look upon sin?

He sees with “open face” the fullness of the GODHEAD bodily in JESUS CHRIST. Could there be any greater glory than that which is found there?

He sees with “open face” the risen CHRIST. Upon what else would his expectation of a deliverance from the grave rest?

He sees with “open face” that ONE who is ascended and who shall return to gather HIS purchased possession. *“For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”(1Cor 13:10-12)* mam