

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

WORK, LABOR, AND PATIENCE

Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.

1 Thessalonians 1:3

Memories are the material that forms the pavement of the road from the past to the present hour. Some folks seem to spend more time examining that pavement than they do in moving forward upon the road. We must not live in the past but we can most surely be benefited by it as we contemplate those things which have brought us along on our journey through this land in which we presently sojourn. For it is those things that have occurred that have produced the present state in which we currently dwell. Solomon made reference to this topic when he said: *"The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us. There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after."* (Eccl 1:9-11)

Paul speaks to the Thessalonians of remembering their work, labor, and patience. Yet he speaks of them, knowing that each one of these traits is the product of a greater power than their own and recognizing that these occurrences are but the manifestation of the blessing of GOD upon them, rather than the cause of that blessing. He follows this verse by remarking, *"Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God."* (1Thess 1:4)

He "knew" that they were the elect of GOD, not because he had a sneak peak at the LAMB's book of life, where their names are recorded, but rather because he saw the evidence of the work of the SPIRIT of GOD in them and thereby concluded that they were of the elect, since the reprobate have neither faith, true love for the brethren, nor an expectant hope in CHRIST alone. This is the work of GOD in constraining the sheep to follow HIM. Another Shepherd they will not follow nor be content to go in and out and find pasture through any DOOR except HIM.

He mentions their "work of faith". Many confuse what he is saying here by making his remembrance to be their "works of faith." Now it is indeed true that faith without works is dead, or we might say that any faith which does not produce good works is not true faith but merely a counterfeit. Yet he is here remembering their "work of faith" which is not exactly the same thought as their "works of faith". This particular phrase is used only one other time in the NT *"Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power."* (2Thes 1:11)

It is clearly apparent that he is speaking of a work which is performed in and upon them by the LORD's power in order to fulfill the good pleasure of HIS will. Faith is the gift of GOD, it is not the product of the free will of men nor can a man be taught or persuaded to exercise it. A man born without limbs could more easily "exercise his legs" than could one of the sons of Adam who is

born dead in trespasses, sin, and unbelief, “exercise” faith. Apart from this gift of GOD being bestowed upon a man, not one shall ever believe.

So this “work of faith” is only “theirs” in the sense that they are the ones upon whom this “work” is performed. This “work of faith” is performed for a purpose; which is to deliver them from darkness and bring them into the light. For they have both seen and believed, and it is this same “work of faith” which HE will continually perform in them. “*Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*” (Php 1:6)

In the religious tradition in which I was raised as a child, members of the church were often called upon to give a “testimony”. This always consisted of recounting how they first came to believe. Now such could be called “a testimony”, yet if the only testimony which a man has is just a memory, then he has no faith at all. The “work of faith” is a very present work and the testimony of those who have it is this, “*For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*” (Php 2:13) It is that of which Paul said, “*the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.*” (1Thes 2:13) This is the “work of faith”.

Then he mentions their “labor of love”. We read again of this in Hebrews, “*But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak. For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.*” (Heb 6:9-10) Here it is specifically defined as ministering to the needs of the saints, not simply in the past tense but in the present as well.

Paul demonstrated this “labor of love” in his own life as he admonished the Ephesian elders, “*I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.*” (Act 20:33-35)

He exhorts the Ephesians in his epistle, saying, “*Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.*” (Eph 4:28) James makes a similar exhortation. “*If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?*” (Jas 2:15-16) John then defines it even more plainly, “*But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?*” (1John 3:17) “*If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?*” (1John 4:20)

A “labor” of love requires effort and even discomfort, yet it looks not on that effort or pain but rather on that good which is accomplished thereby. The LORD JESUS CHRIST did indeed set the standard and show us the purpose of such labor. “*For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.*” (2Cor 8:9) The purpose of riches is not to consume it upon our own lusts.

Finally he mentions their “patience of hope”. Hope is, in reality, the only thing that can cause a man to have patience. “*For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.*” (Rom 8:24-25) Hope is not exactly the same thing as faith, yet a man cannot have a true hope unless he has a true faith. A hope which is built upon a faulty faith is but a mere pipe dream. Yet when the SPIRIT of GOD gives a man faith to believe that JESUS CHRIST is the only SAVIOR of sinners and he does by that same grace cast himself upon that SAVIOR then he has a HOPE which cannot fade nor fail. We cannot see our names written in the LAMB's book, but by HIS grace we can see HIM high and lifted up as that one who receiveth sinful men and is the absolute SAVIOR of sinners. It is there that the “patience of hope” rests and confesses with Job, “*though HE slay me, yet will I trust HIM.*”

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