

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

A GOOD CONSCIENCE

Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck:

I Timothy 1:19

One of the most prominent and iconic parables which the LORD set forth is that of "The Sower". (see Mat.13:3-9) In it HE taught the purpose of the SOWER to put forth the word of GOD, into the ears of various peoples (i.e.; illustrated by the soils or lack there of) in the earth. That word is simply disregarded (i.e.; some fell by the wayside) by the multitude. Then there are those that initially receive the word with great joy, (i.e.; stony ground) but due to the shallowness and unspiritualness of man in his natural state of religiosity, he soon grows weary of it and withers, having not the ROOT to sustain him. This is the predominant state that the majority of those who call themselves Christians abide in. They have an outward appearance and confession of faith, and many religious affiliations yet they have no consuming interest in the things of CHRIST and the word of GOD does not "burn in their heart". (see Luke 24:32; Jer.20:9)

Some of that seed (the word) sprouts up in thorny ground, and due to man's preoccupation with the cares of this world, their interest in it is soon displaced by carnal pursuits. How often have we observed this "soil". It holds much outward promise but, ultimately, cannot sustain any growth because the plants which grow there are choked out due to a lack of true light and a double minded way. While they may express some interest in the "word of GOD", and even "make time" for it, yet they find more satisfaction in the pursuit of carnal joys and pleasure and will make that quest the priority in their lives. This is the ultimate end and result of a reliance upon free-will, rather than the absolute will of a predestinating GOD.

Then there is the relative, peculiarity of that "*good ground*" which brings forth fruit unto life everlasting. The glorious thing is that this is the ground that the SOWER, purposes to plant, even from the outset. That seed which falls upon the other soils merely has the purpose of serving to show the stark contrast between the ways and religion of men and that gift of faith and salvation which is bestowed on those whom the LORD loves with an everlasting love (i.e.:the good ground).

All of GOD's children are not enabled to bring forth the same amount of "fruit" (i.e. "*But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.*" (Mat 13:8)); yet all bring forth the same fruit nonetheless. For it is that fruit which is ordained by GOD. "*According as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.*" (Rom 12:3) This is the exact same fruit which is produced by GOD in all of that "good ground". "*Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." (Jude 1:3)*

This "common salvation" is accompanied in those to whom it is given, by a genuine belief and reliance, that CHRIST, and CHRIST alone is the BASIS and SUBSTANCE of that, upon which, all of their hope is built. Even as Edwin Mote wrote, " My HOPE is built on nothing less than JESUS' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on JESUS NAME." This is that "good conscience" which Paul writes to Timothy about and which Peter sets forth,

“Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.” (1Pe 3:16)

This “*good conscience*” is synonymous with that “*unfeigned faith*”, (i.e.; not contrived, nor of the will of man, but genuine, as the product of GOD) which Paul writes of saying, “*Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.*” (1Tim 1:5) It is that for which there is no substitute and which cannot in anywise be the result of the endeavor and activity of men. It must be implanted and sustained by the “*SOWER*”. “*For all men have not faith.*” (2Thess 3:2) Clearly Paul speaks of this genuine faith to Timothy, “*When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.*” (2Tim 1:5)

True faith must have a basis upon which it rests. Without this basis then it is merely a religious notion which is passed down from one generation to the next. Regardless of how entrenched such doctrines and practices may be they can minister no real hope or comfort to those who are exercised by the knowledge of their sinful condition. This is pointed out by the writer of Hebrews, as pertaining to the continual offerings for sin which were made in the Tabernacle and the Temple. “*Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience.*” (Heb 9:9)

While religious duties might serve to satisfy the conscience of some, yet to those who are convinced of their own depraved state and innate wickedness, these pursuits only serve to minister condemnation to them as they are aware of how empty such rote performances are and how little affected in the conscience that they are, by them. This is the contrast that is given when, by grace, GOD is pleased to convince a man of the utter sufficiency of that which CHRIST as the GREAT HIGH PRIEST has perfectly performed. It is only then that his conscience can be at rest. “*How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*” (Heb 9:14)

This is clearly expressed in a hymn by Eliza Hewitt:

My faith has found a resting place, Not in device nor creed;

I trust the Ever-living One, His wounds for me shall plead.

I need no other argument, I need no other plea;

It is enough that Jesus died, And that He died for me.

In contrast to that “*good conscience*” which is found in true believers, Paul speaks of some who promote a doctrine which does not center on the work of CHRIST alone, but which, would seek to persuade men to rely upon various works and activities of religious flesh as necessary for their sanctification. He describes them as having a conscience which is “*seared with a hot iron*” (i.e.; numb to truth), and warns GOD’s people to pay no heed to their requirements and duties. “*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, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving.*” (1Tim 4:1-4)

Now indeed some have erred in using their liberty as an excuse to indulge their flesh, rather than to serve their brethren, but it is a far greater and more deadly error to rely upon an abstaining from substances or the observing of days than it is to thankfully partake of those things which CHRIST has made clean. Anything upon which a man might find a place of reliance, whether it be some form of outward obedience or some denial of a fleshly lusts, rather than in resting upon the complete and finished work of CHRIST as both his sanctification and his justification is to be found shipwrecked. “*And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.*” (Heb 10:21-22)

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