

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

THE SIMPLICITY OF CHRIST

But, I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. *II Corinthians 11:3*

The natural understanding of men (that which is of the flesh) is not changed in the new birth. The flesh of a man remains as corrupted and corruptible as it was when he was created in Adam. When the LORD told Nicodemus that in order to “see (i.e. enter or comprehend) *the kingdom of GOD*”, he must be “*born again*”, he was not speaking of a transformation of his flesh but rather a “renewing of his mind” brought about by the SPIRIT of GOD quickening him from death unto life..

Thus HE admonished Nicodemus when, Nicodemus asked if this was like being born over from his mother’s womb (a fleshly birth). (see John 3:4, 10) The LORD described this “new birth” as one which is from heaven as HE said, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.” (John 3:6-8) HE actually told Nicodemus that unless he was “born from above” (which is the meaning of the Greek word translated into English as “born again”, he could not see the kingdom of GOD.

A man has no control at all of this heavenly operation since the SPIRIT is likened unto the wind over which man exerts no influence nor ability of prevention. Yet he is able to see its results and “hear” its sound. (see Acts 13:48; Rom.10:17) John clearly describes the SOURCE of this “*new birth*” when he described the calling of the sons of GOD, “*Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*” (John 1:13)

The man who is “born from above” is called a “*new man*”, or a “*new creature*”. “*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*” (2Cor 5:17) Now, while he is no longer dominated by his sinful flesh, being indwelt by the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD; he is nonetheless constantly harassed, condemned, and distressed by that flesh which he will carry with him to the grave. Before his “new birth”, he was quite content with the reign of his flesh and had no such conflict. This “flesh” is not merely his “corruptible body”, which is made of bones and sinews, but the very values, thoughts, and inclinations which it will use to destroy the new man; if such were possible. (see Mat.24:24; 2 Cor.4:18; Jude 1:24)

This is described as a warfare by Paul in his letter to the Galatians, “*For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.*” (Gal 5:17) He also has reference to it in the book of Romans, “*I find then a law, (i.e.; a principle of regulation) that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*” (Rom 7:21-24) In the next verse he glories in HIS deliverance by CHRIST and reiterates that he does serve the law of GOD with his “mind”, which is renewed daily. (see 2 Cor.4:16; Col.3:10)

Thus the normal "inclination" of the "new man" is unto an embracing of the righteousness of CHRIST and the way which HE has taught and demonstrated. With this thought in mind we read of Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians, "*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:*" (Php 2:5) He did not suppose that they had the "power" in their flesh to bring this to pass, but rather points out to them that to which they are called and inclined by the SPIRIT which is sent to lead them into all truth.

The exhortations which are given to the sons of GOD in the New Testament scriptures are directed towards the "renewed mind" and are given to make manifest the "normal" mind of the "new man" rather than an attempt to stir up their flesh to activities which it wars against by its very nature. The "normal" work of the SPIRIT of GOD in the "new man" is to subdue and fight against the "flesh" which never gives up its attempt to regain its once unrivaled place on the throne of the man's heart. This is a complex conflict and its outcome sometimes seems in doubt, yet all of the exhortations and consolations of the scripture are addressed to the "renewed mind" and thus bring much needed comfort. "*For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*" (Rom 15:4)

This is the very purpose of Paul's exhortation, "*Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.*" (Rom 6:11-13) Can a man by taking thought add one cubit to his stature or can he by "positive thinking" make himself "dead unto sin". The answer is "of course not", nor is Paul trying to stir up the flesh of his hearers to embrace the truth which is delivered unto them.

Rather, he is exhorting those in whom the SPIRIT of GOD works to consider and rejoice in the standing that they have in CHRIST and to apprise them of the expectations which are "normal" for those who have been made "alive in CHRIST". "*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*" (Rom 6:1-4)

Thus in this same manner he issues an admonition to those who are "raised up with CHRIST", to be mindful of the devious schemes of the flesh to turn them away from the "*simplicity of CHRIST*". If there is one thing that the flesh delights in above all else (in its warfare with the SPIRIT in us) it is the subterfuge of religion and its many charms. Whether they be duties, commandments, good works, baptisms, confessions of faith, gifts and callings, ordinances, external morality, will worship, etc. None of these things are the issues of life, and while they may not in themselves constitute evil, they are nonetheless often useful to the flesh in turning the eyes away from the one thing that is needful.

Paul declared to these same Corinthians that he determined to preach nothing among them except "*JESUS CHRIST and HIM crucified*". (1 Cor.2:2) The natural bent of man is to seek out a complex solution to his problems and thus the "simplicity of CHRIST" is not suitable to him, because it leaves him with nothing to perform and subsequently nothing wherewith to take glory to himself. Such a doctrine can never be satisfactory to the flesh. In fact Paul writes, "*For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.*" (1Cor 1:18)

Paul lays the axe to the root of human pride when he says, "*For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?*" (1Cor 4:7) "*Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.*" (Rom 8:33-34) Is this not the "simplicity of CHRIST"?

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