

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

WEAK AND BEGGARLY ELEMENTS

But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Galatians 4:9

The apostle Paul was steeped in Jewish law and practice. As a young and eager student, he had sat at the feet of Gamaliel (see Acts 22:3), the most renowned and eminent Bible teacher of his time. He had become a Pharisee and gloried in his lineage as a descendant of Abraham. *“Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.” (Php 3:4-6)*

He had much to be proud of as he rejoiced in the religion and tradition of his forefathers. To say that he was the epitome of a religious Jew would be an understatement. To question his adherence and reverence for the Mosaic Law would be sheer folly. There was not one jot or tittle of the Ten Commandments which he outwardly despised and we can see quite clearly his willingness and zeal to destroy any upstarts that might be deemed a threat to that tradition which he believed was synonymous with righteousness. (see Acts 22:4,5)

In his awakening on the Damascus road, we see one of the truly amazing displays of the Sovereign Grace of GOD in the salvation of sinners that can be found in the Word of GOD. If you were going to pick out the most likely candidate for becoming the chief spokesman of GOD in the declaration of the Gospel of HIS glory in JESUS CHRIST, Saul of Tarsus would not have been mentioned at all. Yet we see the LORD demonstrate that HIS hand is not shortened to save by many or by few nor is HE in anywise hindered in calling one, whom HE has set HIS love upon, out of darkness and into the LIGHT of the glory of GOD in the face of JESUS CHRIST. HE is able, in a moment of time, to sweep away all impediments that might exist in the mind of HIS elect, even as the Psalmist said, *“Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.” (Psa 110:3)* This is in keeping with Peter’s declaration on the Day of Pentecost, *“For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” (Acts 2:39)* This also demonstrates exactly what the LORD said, *“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” (John 6:37)* *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” (John 10:27)*

The same LORD who spoke to HIM on the Damascus Road also directed him to the house of Judas, in Damascus, where he was led in his blindness. The LORD sent Ananias, a disciple of the LORD, to minister sight to the blind and awakened Saul of Tarsus. In this we are reminded that the LORD uses the gospel to bring *“life and immortality to light”*. These same men whom Saul had letters of reprisal against, meaning to do them harm, were those whom the LORD used to minister unto him. How glorious are the works and ways of HIM who sits upon the throne of Heaven and shows mercy to whom HE will show mercy. Who is sufficient for such things?

It seems that very soon after these events the LORD sent him away into the deserts of Arabia. We have little information as to what he did while there, but we do know that during this time the LORD gave him direct revelation of the TRUTH of the gospel by the very teachings of the risen

CHRIST, even as he testified, being an apostle who witnessed the risen SAVIOR. *“And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.”* (1Cor 15:8)(see Acts 22:14-17; II Cor. 12:1-6) None could teach HIM but CHRIST who unfolded the mysteries hidden from many.

One can only imagine the consternation that gripped his mind and heart as the LORD stripped away layer upon layer of the thought process that had been ingrained in him by that religious tradition which he so highly valued and followed with sincere zeal. By the grace of GOD he came to see the utter folly of all that he had lived for up until that time. *“But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.”* (Php 3:7-11) His whole perspective changed in a short time.

He was not an immoral man (by man’s standards) and yet he came to understand that *“he was the chief of sinners”*. It is often difficult for naturally religious men to realize the separation between that which they might deem “morally upright” and the embracing of the true RIGHTEOUSNESS which is only found in CHRIST. Paul was given “laser vision” on these matters, so much so that he was accused by the Judaizers of preaching that men may *“sin that grace may abound.”* This line of thinking still exists among those who would define sin as moral and practical choices rather than seeing sin as the condition of the flesh, more so in mind than practice.

Whatever a man values, promotes, and admonishes others to seek and follow which is not the righteousness of CHRIST is not the message which Paul preached. This is exactly what he confronted the Galatians with as he said, *“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.”* (Gal 1:6-7) To preach any other message than JESUS CHRIST and HIM crucified is a “perversion” of the TRUTH, however morally upright those may be who declare it or how otherwise scriptural their teaching may be.

He was specifically confronting those who sought to perpetuate “Judaism” as being compatible with the freedom of the sons of GOD, from the law of sin and death. Yet there is, even today, a form of “Judaism” which seeks to equate moral practice with righteousness before GOD. This equation does not exist. *“For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”* (Php 3:3) *“For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.”* (Rom 2:28-29)

Paul admonished the Galatians for wavering from the message of free grace and entertaining the teaching of those who would bring them back under that from which they had been set free. His warning to them was that to go back to that from which they had been delivered was to deny the gospel which they professed to believe. There were those then and there are those today, who are fearful that the message of a full and free salvation in JESUS CHRIST will cause men to embrace their sinful flesh and promote its base desires. Yet he says, how can such things be? *“God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?”* (Rom 6:2)

The clearer that the born-again child of GOD, sees that all of his righteousness is found in CHRIST, the more desirous he becomes to be found *“in CHRIST”*. Those who trouble the sons of GOD in all ages are those who would seek to bring them back under the law from which CHRIST has forever set them free. Thus, Paul upbraids these Galatians for returning to the observance of times, days, and seasons which he describes as “weak and beggarly elements.” The observance of a time or a day is most certainly not a sin for the sons of GOD, but then neither is the disregard of such. The weak and beggarly aspect of such is when men seek to bind such observances upon those who rest in CHRIST alone. Carnal sabbath keeping is often pressed upon the children of GOD under the guise of “following the law”, yet Paul clearly says to do so is to press the children of GOD to walk in foolishness. Let every man in CHRIST walk as CHRIST walked, giving glory to HIM alone and giving no place for the flesh to glory. mam