

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

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.

1Peter 3:16

The scriptures teach us that GOD made man in HIS own "image". Many are those that have surmised that by this statement, that the LORD endued man with a nobility and excellence of stature which made him to possess immortality in some measure. This "immortal" part of man is often described as his "soul". I have heard many say that men have an immortal soul that must live on beyond the grave. This is the source, in their mind, of supposed blessing or horror depending on the ultimate destination that one may arrive at. We don't have the capability or desire to engage in the philosophical aspects of this statement. Yet we desire to be content in reading what the scriptures say, and hopefully not adding our philosophy to them.

The first mention of a "soul" is when the scriptures say, "*And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.*" (Gen 2:7) Now it would seem clear to us that man was made "*a living soul*". So that it would seem in the same clarity, an accurate statement that "man is a soul", rather than that "man has a soul". The LORD made him such by breathing into lifeless dust, life itself. This is what Paul preached to the Athenians at Mars Hill. "*For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.*" (Acts 17:28)

The LORD "alone" has immortality. "*Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.*" (1Tim 6:16) This "immortality" is that which sets the LORD apart from mortal creatures, of which man is one. "*For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity.*" (Isa 57:15) It is that which sets CHRIST apart from those HE came to minister unto, "*For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself.*" (John 5:26) And it is this gift of "*eternal LIFE*" which sets the sons of GOD apart from the world, "*And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.*" (1John 5:11-12)

So, we are not at all convinced that when the scriptures speak of man being made in the image of GOD that it has any reference to being made "immortal" in any sense. Rather the contextual reading of the scriptures indicate that HE made man to have "dominion" over the "Earth" and its creatures in the same fashion (though not to the same extent) as the LORD rules over the entire creation. "*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.*" (Gen 1:27-28)

It is interesting that the result of the "new birth" of the spiritual man is the same as that "original birthing" of the natural man. "*For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to*

be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." (Rom 8:29) The sons of GOD are predestined to be like CHRIST even as Adam was made to be like his CREATOR in the purpose for which he was put in the earth. So the "new birth" is an event which is transformative, in that those who are, by the grace of GOD, privileged to experience it, receive "LIFE" which they did not heretofore possess. This is not a restoration back to some state which they walked in before Adam's sin, but rather a "new creation" which never existed, but to which they were ordained according to the purpose of GOD. *"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) That which is SPIRITUAL is lasting in nature, while that which is natural must and shall pass away. *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said---, Ye must be born again."* (John 3:6-7)

The word "conscience" appears 29 times in the New Testament. Each time it is found, it is translated from the same Greek word, which means a "perception of a moral consciousness". All men are born with a conscience, which operates in varying degrees, according to the purpose of GOD. *"For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another"* (Rom 2:14-15) The operation of this "natural conscience" is demonstrated in the account of the woman taken in adultery. *"And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one."* (John 8:9) This conviction is natural and not of the SPIRIT in like fashion as Judas who went out and hanged himself due to his guilt. This is not true repentance, but rather, natural sorrow.

It has pleased the LORD to turn this natural "conscience" in some over to a "reprobate mind", *"And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient."* (Rom 1:28) The most severe case of this is found among those who deny the gospel, twisting it into a perverse lie. *"Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron."* (1Tim 4:2) *"Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness."* (Eph 4:18-19)

While this "conscience" works in all men to a greater or lesser degree, there is a "conscience" which is bestowed on none but the children of GOD. Paul testifies of it, *"And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men."* (Acts 24:16) He is speaking of the "HOPE" which he has been given in the "resurrection of CHRIST". Even the "reborn" sons of GOD, have doubts and fears due to their corruptible flesh, yet it is this "conscience" from which they cannot (thankfully) escape, as the SPIRIT of GOD works in them both to will and to do of HIS good pleasure. It is that which Peter spoke of when the LORD asked them if they do would depart from HIM. Peter confessed, *"Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life."* (John 6:68) It is the same with Job, who said, *"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."* (Job 13:15)

It is this "conscience" which caused Paul to preach nothing but "CHRIST and HIM crucified" among those to whom he was sent, *"For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward."* (2Cor 1:12)

When the high priests made continual offerings of bulls and goats, they could only outwardly make an atonement for sin. Neither the priest nor those for whom the offerings were made could have any lasting peace and "as pertaining to the conscience." (Heb 9:9) Yet CHRIST as that PERFECT SACRIFICE has brought this PEACE. *"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 the ministration of that "good" and "pure" conscience, which is given to the sons of GOD as they are reconciled unto HIM. mam