

GRACE GAZETTE

Volume XXI

Issue 8

Published occasionally for mourners in Zion

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 LIBERTY OF FREEDOM

Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. II Corinthians 3:17

The desire for liberty or freedom is an innate part of man's psyche. This trait is beneficial to them in some ways, but is also at the heart of their rebellion against GOD as we see manifested in Adam's transgression in the Garden of Eden. It is reported in many history books that Patrick Henry made this statement at the Virginia convention prior to the signing of the Declaration of Independence: "Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!" Now we are not certain if these are his exact words or if they were all uttered at the same time and location. Yet they do represent his and many others' mindset during those turbulent times in our nation's history.

Those who have seen the movie, "Braveheart" will recall its depiction of the last words of William Wallace as he was executed, shouting "Freedom". Many are those who have taken up arms in this life to war against other individuals and governments which they perceived were seeking to enslave them or take away their liberty and freedom. Insofar as the flesh is concerned, there is a certain nobility in such a quest and this very thought process is that which has mobilized nations and armies to great conflicts, involving mayhem and death of both the oppressed and the oppressor.

In his book, "The True Bounds of Christian Freedom," Samuel Bolton made this statement (in effect), "A man cannot grasp what freedom is until he first understands what it is that has him bound". Many men have spent time in prison believing that they would be free, if only the door to the prison was opened and they could live outside of its walls. Yet many of these same men, when given the opportunity to leave their cells, find themselves back within its confines in a short period of time. That which bound them was not the prison bars, but a much more incipient enemy to their liberty.

A man may live in a country which promises, "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness", and yet be bereft of all three. He may walk about doing exactly as he pleases, and yet be in the greatest bondage from which he cannot free himself. He may be a "free man" and yet be "a slave", regardless of his protests that such is not the case. Practically all men will insist that they are creatures with a "free-will". Yet all men, without exception, prove over and over that they are, in fact, in bondage.

Martin Luther, in the sixteenth century (1525 to be exact), wrote a book titled, "The Bondage of the Will". In very clear fashion he used the scriptures to prove that, while men do indeed operate according to the desires of their heart, they cannot cause themselves to desire that which is good and will continue in a rebellious path away from GOD, unless HE is pleased to restrain them and change their natural desire of pleasing themselves to follow HIM. Paul uses the words of the prophets of old to prove this very truth. "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes." (Rom 3:10-18)

The greatest impediment to a man coming into a knowledge of GOD is his firm conviction that he has the ability to gain that knowledge through an action of his own "free will". This is the very stumbling block, which Paul points out, that hindered the Jews in coming to CHRIST. *"For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God."* (Rom 10:2-3) When men entertain the notion that they can gain the favor of GOD through some activity, faith, or obedience of their own, they only demonstrate their innate blindness and bondage from which they shall never escape apart from HIS grace and mercy. The more that a man labors in his own "power" to follow the LORD, the greater is his bondage.

The LORD JESUS declared, *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."* (John 8:34-36) The Jews thought that they were "free men", yet the LORD plainly testified that they were yet the servants of sin, and told them that the only true "freedom" is that which HE alone can bestow.

They defined "sin" as being overt actions of disobedience to the letter of the Law. This is indeed "sin." This is what Paul speaks of when he said, *"I was alive, without the Law once."* (i.e.; he was ignorant of the true nature of the Law, considering himself to be a "lawkeeper".) The LORD defined sin, however, in much more explicit terms, (see Mat.5:17-48) which leaves all men guilty before GOD, and unable to approach unto HIM in their own power, as Paul goes on to say, *"when the Commandment came, sin revived, and I died."* (i.e.; when the true nature of the Law was revealed, he saw himself guilty and judged worthy of death, from which he could not escape.) The Law itself is not weak nor does it cause a man to be in bondage. Rather the inability of the Law to deliver men from sin is due to their own inability to walk according to its precepts, without error. (see Rom.8:3-8)

Paul plainly declares, that *"where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty"*. So, there is a "liberty" or "freedom" which can be enjoyed by men which is granted to them, not by the efforts of their flesh, the activity of their will, nor their ability to "have faith." Rather this is a liberty which is only enjoyed by those to whom the LORD is pleased to indwell with HIS SPIRIT. *"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness."* (Rom 8:9-10)

We are certain that men do not in this lifetime overcome the weakness of their flesh nor live in this world "without sin". (see I John 1:8-10) Yet we are equally certain that those whom the LORD is pleased to awaken from "death unto life" shall enjoy the "freedom" of the sons of GOD and cannot be brought into bondage. Paul describes this "freedom" when he says, *"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death."* (Rom 8:1-2)

Had it pleased the LORD to deliver men from ever again "committing sin", HE most certainly could have done so. Yet their sinfulness remains. Paul describes this condition and its remedy. *"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, 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? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."* (Rom 7:18-25)

The freedom of the sons of GOD is to be delivered from the notion that by some measure, of human effort they can cause themselves to be pleasing in the sight of the LORD. They are set free from expecting that they can establish their own righteousness by these endeavors. Gone is their bondage to the carnal notions of the flesh that by seeking to "touch not, taste not, or handle not", they are now made holy. *"Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days."* (Col 2:16) The liberty and true freedom of the sons of GOD is found in CHRIST alone. "CHRIST is ALL".