

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 FRIENDS OF GOD

The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!

Luke 7:34

Several years ago I had paused in front of a TV shop in the mall (you can tell how long ago that was) while waiting on my wife to finish her shopping. One of the TV's was playing the broadcast of a famous "preacher" (of Glass Cathedral fame). I was curious enough to spend a few minutes listening to his pep talk and carnival show, when I noticed an older gentleman standing just to my side and behind me, also watching. After a few minutes he expressed his disgust (which was the same as mine) by saying "this is Mr. Rogers for adults." While his statement was quite humorous, it was also quite accurate. "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood" was a children's TV program for several years. He always began his program with a little song asking the children to be his neighbor and his friend.

I thought the old gentleman's comments were quite apropos and an accurate portrayal of what many people accept quite happily as modern Christianity. Many churches go to great lengths to advertise their "friendly atmosphere" and "welcoming demeanor". Some of them even trying to one up the other churches around them by using all sorts of gimmicks to get folks attention and get their families "involved" in their various religious activities, worldly entertainments and sports teams, not to mention their gargantuan building schemes and projects.

I am quite content to let the dead bury their dead and have no axe to grind against these religious games that men gladly play. But I am quite concerned when they use these "Cathedrals of Tomorrow" to purport that their view of GOD and the gospel, is that which is taught in the scriptures. They go about to distort the TRUTH of GOD and in the process often wound some of those who are of a weak understanding and trusting disposition. This is exactly that which the LORD said to the Pharisees; *"But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves."* (Mat 23:13-15)

Recently I have read several articles whose main thrust was to tell men how friendly GOD is and how much HE wants to be friends with them. According to them HE is just waiting patiently for them to let HIM be their friend. Their thought process is that if they just let men know what a great guy he is that many will be persuaded to give him a chance to be their friend. The main problem is that they do not understand the natural rebellion, which is in the heart of man by nature, which causes him to despise the way of GOD. *"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 other problem is that they have a fundamental lack of understanding of who the GOD of Heaven and Earth is. GOD has no needs. HE has no lack. Nothing can be added to HIM nor can anything be diminished. HE does not need friends. HE dwells in the LIGHT unto which no man can approach. HE is IMMORTAL and INVISIBLE. Until a man has something of an understanding of the basic character of HIM who rules in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the Earth, it is impossible that he can grasp the great gulf that exists between mortals and HE who inhabits eternity, stretching out the heavens like a curtain and covering HIMSELF with LIGHT like a garment. (see Ps.104:2)

It would behoove a man to become “friends” with HIM, but such is an impossible task and one which is quite outside the realm of his natural desire or of his ability to gain entrance into HIS presence by his own effort and will. While we encourage sinners to seek HIM, we understand that the only time they will is when HE is pleased to give them grace to do so. This is exactly what HE told Nicodemus who came unto HIM by night. *“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3)* *“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 3:7-8)*

We do read in the scriptures that some men have been called the “friend of GOD.” *“And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.” (Jas 2:23)* *“And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.”(Exo 33:11)* Neither Abraham nor Moses sought the LORD to become HIS friend. Rather HE called Abraham out of heathen darkness and made of HIM a great nation according to HIS purpose. Moses was delivered from death (as a baby) at the hands of Pharaoh’s henchmen and ultimately raised up to a place of prominence in Pharaoh’s house, all the while in heathen darkness. Yet in HIS own time HE called Moses while tending his sheep and equipped him to lead Israel out of bondage.

In all of HIS dealings with Abraham and Moses, the LORD was always the ONE who determined the course that they would take and it was they who benefitted from HIS kindness in using them to fulfill HIS purpose and magnify HIS NAME in the Earth. HE befriended them quite apart from any overtures on their part. HE did not go looking for someone who would listen to HIM and fulfill HIS desires. They were made willing in the day that HE reconciled them unto HIMSELF.

Normally, those men who become friends share common interests and enjoy one another’s company. They mutually agree to befriend one another. Men do not seek friends from among those who despise them and who oppose their actions. Yet we find that the ONE who has need of no one has shown HIMSELF to be the “friend” of those who have the least claim of ever gaining HIS affection by their actions and are actually opposed to HIM.

The Pharisees were quite moral and upright men (as men judge) who went about with great religious fervor, much “praying”, and giving “honor” to the Scriptures by carrying them with them wherever they went. Yet the LORD did not identify HIMSELF as their friend. Though they could not recognize HIM as the KING, yet they did correctly identify those among whom he companied and befriended. What they despised: “HE is a friend of publicans and sinners”, the LORD delighted in as HE came to seek and to save that which was lost.

HE is the “FRIEND” of sinners: Those who have no religious fervor, those who recognize their spiritual poverty, those who have great need of faith but find none in themselves. Those who confess that HIS law is just and good, but find in themselves no ability to walk according to its precepts. Those who cry out for mercy but know that they deserve none. These are those among whom HE will be found. “What comfort can a Saviour bring, to those who never felt their woe? A sinner is a sacred thing; The Holy Ghost has made him so. New life from him we must receive, Before for sin we rightly grieve. This faithful saying let us own, Well worthy ’tis to be believed, That Christ into the world came down, That sinners might by him be saved. Sinners are high in his esteem, And sinners highly value him.” (Joseph Hart, # 89 Gadsby’s Hymns) Are you a sinner, in need of a SAVIOR? CHRIST is mighty to save those who are HIS friends. mam