

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

UNIFORMITY

For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. 2 Corinthians 10:12

One of the most glorious aspects of GOD's creation is the great variety that HE designed into it. This fact is seen not just in the vast numbers of species and types of plants and animals that HE created but in the great diversity that there is even among the same species. One only has to sit on a bench at the mall or in a park and look at people as they stroll by to appreciate this very fact. Seldom do any look just alike. In fact when one considers the various shapes that we take it is amazing that we can all be identified as people. Some are tall and slender, some are short and rotund, some are tall and fat, while others are short and skinny. Even those who are identical twins can usually be separated by those who are closest to them, especially if one compares their fingerprints which will never be the same. We can conclude that GOD made individuals, each with a unique purpose, and not just some general species known as man.

The sinful nature of man causes him to rebel against the purpose of GOD. So we see that in the midst of this glorious diversity which GOD has obviously designed; the carnal nature of man desires uniformity. This can be seen in the conduct of men in a variety of ways. The fleshly nature of man leads him to follow fads and trends which the world deems desirable. Often under the guise of expressing ones individuality, we see men coming under the yoke of bondage to be like everyone else. This is demonstrated quite appropriately in the current fad of tattoos, piercings, and other body modifications. Many are swept up into participating in these activities because it's the in thing to do. Everybody's doing it so it must be alright.

One does not have to search very far to find men who are exhorting GOD's people to great activity. The predominant religious thought today is to keep people stirred up with much busy work (all, of course, in the name of the LORD; see Mat.7:21-23). It is almost as if some believe that the more they do the more spiritual they are. The flesh is convinced that it can earn favor with GOD by its deeds and faithfulness. Therefore all of the world's religions are interested in the works of men but GOD is interested in the heart worship of HIS people. (see John 4:24; Mat.15:8; I Sam.16:7) HE would have us draw close to HIM rather than be engaged in many activities, which while they may keep us busy (and satisfy our religious flesh), they produce nothing of lasting value.

Now it is outside the scope of our calling to condemn or approve of these practices but as the LORD's people we can judge what the scriptures have to say and how they should apply to those who are the called out sons of GOD. The LORD strictly forbade the children of Israel from engaging in this kind of behavior (see Lev.19:28;21:5; Deut.14:1) because it was the common practice of the heathen. (see 1 Kings 18:28) We are not shocked or dismayed when the children of this world engage in activities whose chief design is to exalt the flesh. They are only acting according to their nature. But the children of GOD have a higher calling and we are distressed when those who profess to be followers of HIM imitate the world in anything, let alone to follow it

in such blatant displays of self glorification. We are called to be a people that are set apart from the world not conformed to it. (see II Cor. 6:14-7:1; Titus 2:11-14; I Pet.2:9)

The desire for uniformity is not simply found in such base activities as those we have already mentioned but can also be discovered among those who would be "religious leaders and followers". The common blueprint for today's churches is for everyone to follow certain patterns of worship, service, and devotion. Modern clergymen have discovered that the key to success is to avoid conflict by getting everyone to think alike. So they have adopted a role wherein the life of the body is dependent on them. Little more than lip service is given to studying the scriptures. In its place is a prescribed "lesson" which is to be looked at by all involved. It would not be conducive to "uniformity" if everyone actually studied the scriptures for themselves. It is much less problematic to get everyone to read someone else's thoughts that to express their own. The song service is preselected so everything will run smoothly and each minute of the service is earmarked for a certain activity. Every thing is done so "decently and in order" that the average person has no idea if the HOLY SPIRIT is present or not, because the show must go on regardless.

This idea is also carried into the modern concept of "soul winning" which has a cookie cutter approach to "making converts". It begins with the false notion that men can be cajoled, persuaded, shamed or scared into believing the gospel or as it is commonly referred to "accepting CHRIST". With that thought in mind many go about with a prescribed "plan of salvation" which they have been taught to present to men with the expectation of "closing the deal" much as a car salesman does at the end of his sales pitch. So according to this "plan" many are "swept" into what they are told is "salvation". Today's churches are full of these "converts" whose knowledge of spiritual truth is totally dependent on what someone else tells them. (see II Cor.4:6; Eph.1:17)

What a stark contrast there is between these ideas and what the scripture says. Paul said, *"my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the SPIRIT and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of GOD. " (I Cor 2:4-5)* GOD saves HIS people individually according to HIS own timetable and in keeping with HIS purpose. Then HE brings them into HIS church "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of CHRIST. Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the SON of GOD, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of CHRIST: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even CHRIST: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." (Eph 4:12-16)

GOD has given a variety of gifts to HIS people for the express purpose of building up the body. HE will be glorified as each one supplies the necessary part that only they (by HIS grace) can give. We must not desire uniformity but diversity. *"Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of CHRIST. Wherefore HE saith, When HE ascended up on high, HE led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." (Eph 4:7-8)* *"We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of GOD, and not of us." (2 Cor 4:7)*

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