

GRACE GAZETTE

Volume III

Issue 9

Published occasionally for Zion's mourners

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

OFFICERS OF THE CHURCH

For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Romans 12:4-5

When I was in grade school (not really all that long ago, regardless of what some may say), each class or club would choose some of their classmates as officers. Each had a president, vice president, secretary, and reporter. Later on as grades progressed, other offices were added such as treasurer and student council representative. Not everyone clamored for these positions (except as we grew older and realized the significance and benefits of such a station) but one always felt honored to be selected. Most of the time the selections were based on popularity rather than ability to perform any particular task. In fact as I best recall there wasn't a lot of business to be conducted anyway. But such an arrangement gives a sense of order that is comforting and adds an air of legitimacy to any gathering of people.

The children of Israel (in the flesh) in the Old Testament grew weary of being led by GOD who spoke to them through HIS prophets. Some would say that they had a legitimate complaint in the fact that Samuel's sons were not of the best character (i.e.; were wicked men). But this excuse is born out of ignorance that GOD sometimes speaks more loudly through HIS silence than HE does through HIS voice. HIS drawing back from HIS people is sometimes more effective than HIS holding them near. They clamored and longed to have a king like the other nations of the earth. Though the LORD warned them of the results of such government through the prophet Samuel, the people persisted and GOD (according to HIS sovereign purpose) granted them their wish and gave them King Saul. (see I Sam.8:1-22)

Man's nature from the very beginning has prompted him to shirk his own accountability before GOD and to place it somewhere else. One only has to listen to Adam and Eve's excuse making in the Garden of Eden to know that this is true. (see Gen.3:6-13) It is ingrained in man's fleshly nature to elect (choose) leaders to whom they can delegate responsibility and thereby relieve themselves of any accountability that they might have. The New Testament church has not escaped this notion totally. Many feel comforted by an arrangement of hierarchy and kingship in their local assemblies. By following such an arrangement, they can appear acceptable and legitimate in the eyes of the religious world. This idea has become so pervasive that to even raise this issue is to be met with disapproval on many sides, as if seeking to follow the scriptural example is somehow an error.

Somewhere along the line (it happened quite early; see III John 1:9) the people of GOD became to be divided into two distinct groups. These groups are commonly referred to as the "clergy" and the "laity". Most Christians today don't even bat an eyebrow when such descriptions are cast about. They assume (because it is comforting to the flesh) that such an arrangement must be taught in the scripture, if not by actual text, at least in example. "Lay" people are reassured; since they don't need to worry about deception, false doctrine, or the introduction of non-scriptural ideas into the assembly; because they have someone, "the clergy", looking out for

them. All they have to do is show up on Sunday, take notes on the sermon, and call the "preacher" if they run into trouble of one sort or another. The "clergy" on the other hand (this is a broad generalization, with some exceptions) is comforted by having a specific job to do and an income to go along with it. Everyone is benefited by this arrangement but the problem is that we find no scriptural mandate in favor of such an idea. (see Rev.2:6,15)

The scripture indeed teaches that the church is to have officers (i.e.; those who fulfill an office). But rather than there being a small number of offices which are to be filled by a select few, the scripture indicates that all of GOD't people have an office (i.e.; task or ministry) in the assembly of the saints for which they are particularly gifted, and the healthy function of the body as a whole depends on each office being occupied. The body of CHRIST (the church) is a living organism rather than an organization and as such must operate as a living body with each part supplying its necessary function. (see I Peter 2:5)

These offices are filled by GOD. No one can be elected to them and no one can be demoted and have that office taken away by men. The LORD raises men up and he puts them down according to HIS sovereign purpose. (see Rom.11:29; I Cor.12:18; Eph.3:7)

There is no ranking or levels of status in these offices. None can say of the office they are given that it is more or less important than that which is given to another. (see I Cor.12:21;26)

These offices cannot be retired from. Unless these offices are filled by hirelings there can be no cessation of their function simply because someone wants to quit. At any time GOD may change the function or calling of a member of the body but there is no cessation of that person filling an office in the body if they belong to CHRIST. (see John 10:13; I Cor. 12:7)

These offices are widely diverse as to their scope and operation. They don't always fit into nice little, easily defined cubicles. (see I Cor. 12:27-30; 8-11)

All offices are not equally desired but they are all equally necessary for the growth and function of the body. (see Eph.4:16; I Cor.14:1-14;39-40)

All offices do not involve public speaking but all offices demand participation of the members of the body. Not all of these offices are displayed each time the church meets. (see I Cor.14:26-40; Rom.12:8)

mam