

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

SYMBOLS OF CHRISTIANITY

For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love. Galatians 5:6

Lately, there has been much concern by many over the removal of a cross from a monument in California. Similarly there were several incidents, around the nation during the holidays, where nativity scenes were not allowed in public places. And certainly we were all made aware of the the monument of the Ten Commandments that was forcibly removed from an Alabama courthouse. Now there are those who are working to remove the motto "In GOD we trust" from our nation's money. Some are bent on having "under GOD" removed from the pledge of allegiance to the flag of the United States.

In light of all of this what is the true believer to do? What (if anything) should be our concern? It is indeed a romantic and reassuring idea (false however) that by having such mottos on our currency or phrases in our pledges that it makes it so. The reality is that our nation as a body of citizens has long ago turned its back on biblical Christianity. In fact it has never embraced it. Neither has any other nation on earth. Great numbers of people in any nation, (even its leaders) on earth may be "Christians" but that does not mean that they live in a "Christian" nation. The nations of the earth cannot be "Christian". The LORD JESUS said that HIS kingdom was not of this world, if it was of this world then we would fight with the weapons of this world. But the weapons of our warfare are not carnal. The weapons of any nation on earth must of necessity be guns, knives, and bombs because in this world will be wars and rumors of wars till the end.

Some have said that the cross should not be removed from this monument because to do so is to remove a "symbol of Christianity". It is odd that Christians (followers of CHRIST) should agree that something could be a "symbol" of their faith which their LORD never taught them to adopt. I see a lot of people wearing crosses around their necks, in their ears, and other places, and I have no great objection. It is quite common to see crosses adorning all sorts of books, buildings, art, and tombstones. Again it is certainly not an objectionable thing to me. The problem comes in when we try to make a "T" shaped piece of wood, gold, or plastic into a symbol of Christianity. Men in their religious fervor and bent may desire (as the heathen) to have images and icons which they consider to have some significance(or holiness). Some even consider it a sacrilege to question this practice. But CHRIST never taught us this. Many of the early Jewish believers thought that the symbol of circumcision should be carried over into the new covenant. Yet such an idea was rejected by the apostle Paul who rightly understood that true faith in JESUS CHRIST is not demonstrated in outward signs and symbols but only in that work which is wrought in the heart by the HOLY GHOST.

As the followers of CHRIST we are not free to design and adopt "symbols" because we like them; because they remind us of certain aspects of our faith; or because we value their religious worth. The only symbols which we are to adopt and promote are those three symbols the LORD JESUS left us with and taught us of.

Baptism. Much has been written about baptism down through the years. Much debate has been given on what method should be used in the administration of it, who can administer it, and who is a proper candidate. The scriptures seem to be plain spoken about all aspects of it. But let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. The Greek word for baptize is "baptizo" which literally means to dip or immerse. The baptisms that took place in the scripture were done where there was much water. (see John 3:23) In one instance they came up out of the water. (see Mat.3:16; Acts 8:39) Baptism is meant to be a picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of CHRIST and also of the death of the old man and the resurrection of the new. (see Rom.6:4; Col.2:12) It's difficult to see this picture in the practice of sprinkling or pouring of water but is quite plain in the demonstration of total immersion. As to who can administer baptism, again the scripture seems quite clear that any one who is sent by GOD to do it must do it. Phillip met the Ethiopian on the very road which led by water. On the other hand Paul said he was not sent to baptize. (see I Cor.1:17) One thing that seems to be clear is that this is not a power conferred by men but by GOD himself, not on the basis of rank or position. Who are proper candidates? Those who believe. *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."* (Mark 16:16)

Bread. The LORD told his disciples to eat the bread of his table in remembrance of HIM. HE had specific reference to the taking of the bread at the last Passover feast HE had with them on this earth. But HE did not intend that we should remember the Passover when we eat it, but to remember that HE gave his body as a sacrifice for us. *"For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the LORD's death till he come."* (1 Cor 11:26)

Wine. The LORD JESUS astonished his disciples when HE told them *"This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me."* (1 Cor 11:25) One thing that no Jew would do was drink blood yet the LORD told them that was what they were to do. Obviously HE did not mean that the wine was literally blood but that it was a symbol of his blood shed for us. Now as we take it at the LORD's table we are reminded of the awful price that was paid for us. The bread and the wine are spread upon the LORD's table, not the church's table nor any table designed by men. Those who are invited by the LORD should eat and drink freely of it. *"let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup."* (1 Cor 11:28)

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