

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

FINDING JESUS

Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. Matthew 24:23

I was riding down the road just the other day minding my own business, as usual, when I was accosted by a sign beside the road, almost causing me to lose control of myself and the vehicle I was in. Several thoughts jumped into my mind as I fought off the offending placard. The first seems so obviously an error that one wonders how it has become such a widespread practice. The purpose of the sign was to advertise the location of a church's meeting house. The sign said that the church could be found one mile down the road. Driving that distance down the road I looked but never could see the church, all I saw was some empty buildings (well kept I might add). It has become such a common practice to call buildings "churches" that the average person (even most so-called Christians) thinks nothing of it and some are even offended when this matter is brought up. But the scripture never uses such language. Churches are "called out assemblies" of GOD's people gathered in certain places. The Churches in the New Testament are known by the locations wherein they met and not vice versa as we have it today. A church may exist without a building to meet in but a building can never be a church in scriptural terms. Now I am sure that many will agree with what I am saying, but they will laugh it off as a technicality and continue on with the same unscriptural practice that they've known all their lives, preferring tradition to that which cannot be denied in the Word of GOD.

But as unscriptural as the practice of calling buildings "churches" may be it is a minor error compared to the main thing (written upon the sign) that leaped out at me. In bold letters it said, "FIND JESUS at (name omitted) CHURCH". Now as absurd as such a statement is, I realize that this concept is a pretty common one also. I have heard some men talk about "finding JESUS" and encouraging others to do the same. Some may even say, what's wrong with saying that? The primary error is in the implication of what is being said.

1. It is the epitome of pride for a man to think that he has it within his power and ability to discover the LORD GOD of heaven and earth by his own effort. The GOD of the bible is described thusly, "*Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting.*" (1 Tim 6:16) The true and living GOD reveals HIMSELF to men according to HIS choice. "*Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts.*" (Psalms 65:4) "*Canst thou by searching find out God?*" (Job 11:7) We are at HIS mercy, not HE at ours.

2. The true and living GOD does not dwell in temples made with hands so it is impossible to "find" HIM at a particular location. One of the characteristics of idolatry is that the god who is worshipped can always be located because he (or she) has no power to move on his own. One of the most idolatrous practices in modern churches (in my opinion) is the "altar call" or "invitation". At the conclusion of preaching it is often announced that now men are going to be given the

"opportunity" to be saved as if it is within the puny power of men to appoint a place and time where GOD will meet with men. Salvation is not something that a man can "decide" on or take advantage of. It is not an offer to be accepted or rejected according to ones own desire. Rather it is the gift of Almighty GOD granted to HIS elect according to HIS own schedule and circumstance. (see Eph.2:1-10)

3. The LORD JESUS CHRIST is not lost, therefore HE cannot be found. The scripture speaks about HIM finding the lost sheep and by way of the allegory of the finding of a lost coin, HE recovers that which is HIS. HE is the one who seeks HIS own. HE knew us before we knew HIM, HE bought us with HIS own blood, HE sought us when we were not seeking HIM, and HE brought us out of the darkness when we could not even discern the darkness. *"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."* (Luke 19:10) A person cannot lose something that was not his to start with. (see Eph.1:4-5)

4. The gospel message is one which centers on the person and work of Christ. It is quite common to see that message reversed in most modern preaching which centers on what man needs to do in order to gain salvation. In fact the work of CHRIST is often only mentioned as something that men should receive or accept. The primary concern of most so called "preachers" and "soul winners" is to get folks to make decisions and "let the LORD into their hearts." How on earth did the true gospel ever become so perverted? How can a man dead in trespasses and sins "let" the LORD do anything? Since when was the LORD reduced to waiting on men to do something? Not one time in the holy scriptures do we find anybody preaching the gospel as an offer to be accepted or rejected.

We are quite certain that the salvation of the LORD's people does not in any way depend upon the will of man. The GOD of heaven and earth shall accomplish HIS purpose in the earth completely and cannot be hindered nor aided by the abilities (or lack thereof) of men. Men stand in need of the LORD to do something for them and not vice versa. We rejoice to discover in the scriptures that HE is mighty to save. HE has obtained eternal redemption for HIS elect children and HE is in the process of calling them from out of every tribe, kindred, and tongue on the face of the the earth. Were it not that the GOD of all grace was intent on gathering the "lost" there would be no hope for such sinners as we are. *"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."* (Eph 2:4-6)

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