

GRACE GAZETTE

Volume XII

Issue 25

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

FELLOWSHIP IN THE GOSPEL

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:

Philippians 1:3-6

Paul reminded the Philippian believers that they were constantly in his prayers. Especially as he recalled their “*fellowship in the gospel*”, which began when they were given eyes to see the glory of CHRIST’s redemption and continued on till the present time. This was a source of great joy to him as he contemplated the faithful work of CHRIST in those whom HE is pleased to call; (“*HE which hath begun a good work in you*”).

This “*fellowship*” (of which he speaks) is that which manifests the bonds of Christian love which are exhibited by those in whom the LORD has begun a good work and presently performs the same in them. “*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*” (John 13:35) To be without this “brotherly love” is to manifest the absence of the work of GOD regardless of what one may claim to believe or be. “*We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.*” (1John 3:14) “*If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?*” (1John 4:20)

The Greek word for “*fellowship*” is “*koinonia*” and means “participation or partnership in a common cause.” This Greek word occurs twenty times in the New Testament and is translated as “*fellowship*” twelve times. It is also translated as “*communion*” (four times); “*communication*”(one time); “*communicate*” (one time); “*contribution*” (one time); and “*distribution*” (one time).

When one has this kind of “*fellowship*” with another they must share a common desire (to see CHRIST exalted), a common bond (love for CHRIST and one another) and a common commitment (to follow the way of CHRIST) or there can be no such thing as true “*fellowship*” at all. “*Can two walk together, except they be agreed?*” (Amos 3:3) This is why Paul told the Corinthians, “*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?*” (2Cor 6:14)

Those whose affection is set upon this world have fellowship with the “*unfruitful works of darkness*” (see Eph.5:11) which they are engaged in to the satisfying of the flesh. The sons of GOD are admonished to “*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*” (1John 2:15) Rather “*our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:*” (Phil 3:20)

Paul speaks of “*fellowship in the gospel*”, which describes the basis for the bond which unites the sons of GOD in this world and is a precursor to that which is yet to be realized in the “*ages to come*”. This “*gospel*” of which he speaks is not a message which simply speaks of some sort of

general good-will towards men but rather one which centers on the work of redemption which CHRIST came to perform in the behalf of that elect people which were chosen in HIM before the foundation of the world.

Paul relates to this when he told the Corinthians, *“For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”* (1Cor 2:2) This is the basis for the true fellowship which he speaks of to the Philippians. Heretics (i.e.; schismatics, see Acts 20:30; III John 1:9; I John 2:19) have crept in among the saints over the years and have injured this pure *“koinonia”*, by the introduction and addition of the works of the flesh of one sort or another. This most insidious evil is readily perpetrated by those who emphasize the free will of men as something which is equally important as the work of CHRIST.

This pure *“fellowship”* has also been wounded by those who would promote a hierarchy among the saints which is commonly seen by having a class of men set apart which are commonly known as the clergy. Oftentimes they make *“preaching”* to be a profession which one pursues even as he would any other worldly form of employment. Many who reject the use of the term *“clergy”* nonetheless support the same notion by seeking to make a distinction between those who have teaching and preaching gifts and the other members of the body who are given other various gifts for the benefit of the body. Clearly all gifts are given by the same SPIRIT and all are intended for the building up of the body with none occupying a dominant place among the saints.

Quite often we have witnessed churches whose *“fellowship”* is centered around the gifts (usually preaching) of certain individuals. Some are more enamored with the *“ability”* of these individuals to *“preach”* than they are with the outworking of the gospel itself. Such was seen in Corinth with some saying *“I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas;”* (1Cor 1:12) The *“fellowship”* of the saints must be in CHRIST alone, anything or any *“one”* else is a detriment to true *“fellowship in the gospel.”* When CHRIST alone is preached, none care who the mouthpiece might be, but together rejoice in HIM. That man who promotes himself cannot preach CHRIST alone and the man who preaches CHRIST alone cannot promote himself.

While we are thankful for all of the gifts and callings of GOD, we are no more or less thankful for the preaching and teaching gifts. Unfortunately there has arisen (over time) the notion that the purpose of the gathering of the church is to *“hear”* someone with an appropriate gift *“preach”*. We would in no wise seek to denigrate nor deemphasize the importance of sound teaching and preaching among the saints, yet we can find no exhortations or examples in the scriptures that would lead us to believe that this is the primary *“activity”* around which the church gathers.

We do find that we are to *“shew the LORD’s death till HE comes”* by eating the bread and drinking the cup. We are to *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”* (Col 3:16) *“Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.”* (1Th 5:11) *“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 4:16) *“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”* (Heb 10:24-25)

This is the true *“fellowship in the gospel”* which has regard first to CHRIST alone and then to our brethren (the church) *“Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.”* (Eph 1:23) *“If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.”* (Philip 2:1-3) *“That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.”* (Philip 3:10) *And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”* (Acts 2:42)