

# 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*

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## A SIGN AND WISDOM

*For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom. I Corinthians 1:22*

If there is one thing that is common to every religion upon the earth, it is the notion that a man can adopt its precepts and gain an understanding of its doctrines through the power of his free will and the proper instruction in its doctrines by those who are its “teachers” and “holy men”. We can see this false concept creeping in among the sheep, quite soon after the establishment of the LORD’s church in the earth. (see Mat. 13:24-30) This is the common path of the flesh.

HE had sent HIS apostles into the world with the commission to declare the truth to all who would hear it and to baptize them in HIS NAME. It was not long before there arose contentions and divisions among them, based largely upon preferences of personalities towards those who were sent with this commission. Paul warned the Ephesian elders of this reality.

Sadly, many who find themselves in places of leadership (as they were) often capitalize upon this “position” to seek out those who will “follow” them as they establish “congregations” who are taught to rely upon the “pastor’s” expertise in obtaining knowledge of heavenly things, rather than being encouraged to scrutinize their teaching, and to seek truth for themselves

This is, in part, referred to by Paul, when he said; *“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.”* (2Tim 4:3-4) This is the natural course which the flesh will take, since its pull is strong, and the concept of heeding religious “holy men” is endemic to that flesh.

False doctrine gains its foothold through strong personalities who love “followers” and promote the notion that great reliance should be placed upon what they say, and how they say it, rather than inviting scrutiny and questions from their “hearers”. (see I Cor.14:29-33) Out of this arises the “cult of the authoritarian preacher” whose word is to be received as inviolable. Those who raise questions are usually viewed as “troublemakers” or worse.

The preaching of the truth, is one of the great blessings which the LORD has given to HIS saints, yet men will always corrupt that which is holy, and because of the weakness of the flesh will turn that which is of great service to the sons of GOD to that which serves the flesh. It is a strange phenomenon of the flesh that it will seek out a king, (even as Israel of old did).

Because of this, the flesh will usually gravitate towards strong and oratorically gifted men (such as Apollos). Divisions will arise over these “performers” and their “performances” as more emphasis is placed upon the ability of the preacher than upon the ministry of the members of the body one to another, which results in CHRIST alone being glorified since there is no other object to focus upon.

Paul was disappointed at the report of such “divisions” which had arisen among the Corinthians, and he admonished them about these departures from the basis of the Christian FAITH. *“For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?”* (1Cor 1:11-13)

He plainly exhorted them that the basis of true faith is not that which is conveyed by men but rather through the power and operation of the SPIRIT of TRUTH. *“That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.”* (1Cor 2:5) Thus he declared his determination to preach only one message which was not enhanced by flowery phrases or orations which were designed to tickle the ears and impress the hearers, in order to get them to follow him like the Pied Piper of preaching.

Even as Paul solicited no monetary gain from his hearers, so too should all who are given teaching gifts, be diligent to deflect all praise of those gifts to the only ONE who is worthy of praise and to encourage their hearers to have no confidence in any man regardless of his gift. In addition the encouragement of each part of the body to minister to the whole must be emphasized even as Paul did to the churches which he ministered to. (see Eph.4:15,16) The only AUTHORITY that exists among the saints of GOD is that which is found in CHRIST and manifested in the activity of the body as a whole. (see Mat.16:19).

Paul demonstrated the difference between that “religion” which is, completely, of and in the SPIRIT and that which is of the flesh. In doing this he used the example of two quite diverse groups, to manifest the fact that regardless of what religious or non-religious bent men may have, they are nonetheless united in their opposition to the TRUTH of GOD, and consider the declaration of the Gospel to be “foolishness”. Though their perspectives are quite different their conclusions are the same.

He said *“the Jews require a sign.”* This is descriptive of the superstitious nature of man in the flesh. Jews are here representative of the religious multitudes, which are either entrenched in their traditions or are those seeking some experience in the flesh, which they feel might confirm their weak belief in that which they profess to believe or perhaps to give them grounds to believe. In either case they require a “sign”, or external evidence which would cause them to feel better about themselves and those practices which they have a level of comfort in.

This “sign” may be the traditions of their fathers and their cultural allegiance to that which they would call “their faith” or it may be a desire to have some new experience, which they believe will “prove” to them, that which they are unable or reluctant to fully embrace. The LORD said, *“An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign.”* (Mat 12:39) HE was speaking directly to the Jews, yet we must not disregard the fact that this admonition applies to all who, desire to look for miracles and supernatural occurrences. The religious world is full of charlatans and shamans who make merchandise of men through such foolishness.

Then he said, *“the Greeks seek after wisdom”*. It was of these men of Athens that we read Luke’s description, *“(For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)”* (Act 17:21) While the Jews were characteristically “superstitious or religious”, the Greeks are representative of those who relish in intellectual pursuits and love to debate about great matters of philosophy and worldly wisdom. They are typical of those who think that matters of faith can be intellectually attained, even though by its very definition would be at odds. They would strongly believe in the free will of men.

Regardless of whether one is a “Greek” or a “Jew”, Paul is clear that neither point of view can give a man a heart which is submissive to the LORD and one which cries out for mercy. The Jews sought a sign, and the LORD did miracles under their noses but they did not believe. When HE described the evil and adulterous generation which seeketh a sign, HE said they would be given one. HE then rose from the dead, but they did not believe.

The Greeks cried out for “knowledge”, and the LORD sent the “LOGOS” (the LOGIC) into the world, but they said this MAN’s words are foolishness. They would not believe. *“Therefore the flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not strengthen his force, neither shall the mighty deliver himself: Neither shall he stand that handleth the bow; and he that is swift of foot shall not deliver himself: neither shall he that rideth the horse deliver himself. And he that is courageous among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day, saith the LORD.”* (Amos 2:14-16) *“Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.”* (Zec 4:6) mam