

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

UNDER THE SYCOMORE TREE

Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycomore fruit.

Amos 7:14

Recently I read some excerpts from a speech by Robert Ingersoll, (1833-1899). Ingersoll was a relatively famous "agnostic" who went around the country (and the world) lecturing on the subject "Why I Am an Agnostic". His views were quite controversial, especially at the time, yet in reality he spoke much truth even though he was not aware of the exact points where his ramblings and the truth coincided.

His main point was that it is impossible to know about GOD. He did not exactly deny the existence of GOD, he just did not believe that it was possible for man to recognize GOD or know anything about HIM in a meaningful way, so as to shape man's outlook.

David said "*The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.*" (Psa 14:1) While Ingersoll would not say that he didn't believe that there was a supreme being, he did, nonetheless fall into the category of those that David described. For the essence of what David was saying was not that the man who engages in an intellectual admission that there is "a" god, avoids being a fool, but rather that man is a fool who says that there is no absolute, predestinating, GOD before whom he will bow his knee and worship, or simply put "there is no GOD for me."

Paul said that, "*the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.*" (Rom 1:20) Man intuitively knows that this creation is presided over by its MAKER and DIRECTOR. The folly of man is that he will not fall down and worship at the feet of this Absolute GOD, being blinded by his own innate lust to exalt his own free will and self determination, denying that GOD has a right to do with HIS own as HE wills..

Because of man's blindness (due to his carnal and corrupt nature) he cannot (and thus will not) glorify the TRUE GOD. For by his nature (which he cannot escape) he prefers that which he sees with his natural eye to that which he cannot. "*Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.*" (Rom 1:21-22)

Loving his own free will and convinced that he is able to shape his own future, he has designed his own gods (and accompanying religions) which he is comfortable with. "*And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man:--(having) ---changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever.*" (Rom 1:23-25)

Ingersoll correctly identified the fact that the gods (and resulting religions) which men serve are mere figments of their imaginations, and are futile attempts on their part to make sense of the world around them, along with their own existence. What he did not recognize was the fact that man is innately corrupt and unable to "know GOD", not because of intellectual inhibitions but rather due to the fact that he is dead in trespasses and sins and cannot by searching (in his own

power) find HIM out. He looked at all of this as an “intellectual exercise”, and thus he in reality describes modern day “Christianity” in general which embraces the same notion.

Most of those today who claim to be preachers of the gospel go about this task by appealing to the free will of men, to their intellect, their emotions, and of course, their pocketbooks. They believe that a man must be equipped to do this by schooling in the higher institutions of learning and in various “preacher schools” of one type or another. They assume that in order for a man to declare the truth of GOD he must be prepped to do so by “learning the Bible”.

Now to be sure, the LORD has spoken to us by and through HIS written word which is complete and without any lack. *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”* (2Tim 3:16-17) Not only that but Paul exhorted Timothy to instruct others in this WORD. *“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”* (2Tim 2:2) Yet this “preparation” does not equip men to declare the unsearchable riches of CHRIST, for to do so requires “unction” rather than “education”.

The LORD’s hand is not shortened to save by many or by few, and HE is able to use *“ignorant and unlearned men”* as well as those who have sat at the feet of great teachers, as Paul did. The common denominator in these “ministries” was not an appeal to the “intellect” but rather an operation upon the very hearts of the hearers by ONE who is greater than the “preacher”. Modern day religion has lost sight of this fact and touts its “featured speakers”, and eloquent orators as the key to “declaring the gospel” as they set the mood with the proper music and use the right kind of methods, to persuade men to do something. Thus they assume that by this “persuasion” they can produce believers and “lead men to the LORD.” In this they forget what the LORD said, *“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.”* (John 6:44)

Amos was a man sent by the LORD to deliver a message of judgment upon the inhabitants of the lands wherein Amos traveled. (Syria, Tyre, Edom, etc) Included in those “judgments” was both the house of Israel and the house of Judah whose sins were a stench in the nostrils of a HOLY GOD. Now while he declared destruction upon the cities and nations which were around him, his major purpose was to reveal the sin of Israel and Judah, *“For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God.”* (1Pe 4:17), that HIS people among them might be brought to repentance according to the purpose of GOD. (see Acts 5:31; II Pet.3:9)

The purpose of his prophecy was to announce certain judgment and utter destruction upon the inhabitants of the earth but also to declare the unsearchable riches of GOD’s grace to that remnant which HE would preserve. HIS preservation of them was not because they were more righteous than the others but because HE would make known the glories of HIS grace in restoring the years that the *“palmerworm had eaten”* (see Amos 4:9, Joel 2:25) *“In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this.”* (Amos 9:11-12)

Amaziah, the priest at Bethel, (just like religious men will do) told Amos that he should be silent and not declare his prophecy in Bethel. Amaziah, being religiously prudent, recognized that Amos’ message would cause great consternation among his congregation. He assumed that Amos’ decided to preach (just like he did) according to a decision of his own free will or at least was following a family tradition of preachers.

Yet Amos declared to him the same thing that Paul said, *“Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel.”* (1Cor 9:16) He also declared that he had no particular qualifications for the job (as men would view it) since he was not even the son of a prophet but rather a humble gatherer of *“sycamore fruit”*. He claimed to be no prophet, but merely one sent with a message which he was compelled to deliver. *“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.”* (1Cor 1:18) mam