

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

THE FALLING AWAY

This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me; of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes. II Timothy 1:15

The earliest days of the New Testament church saw a great ingathering of many who professed faith in JESUS CHRIST as the SON of the LIVING GOD, who was crucified, dead, buried and risen again as the SAVIOR of sinners. It is quite often true that many are swept into the external Kingdom of the LORD during various outpourings of the SPIRIT according to the LORD's purpose. Just as surely as HE calls HIS sheep in this manner, there are generally many goats among them who are caught up in their midst for one reason or another. The LORD illustrated this fact in the parables of the tares and the wheat and the sower. It is often very difficult to discern the wheat from the tares, thus we are told to leave them alone until the time of the harvest, when HE comes to gather the good grain and to cast away that which is not HIS, to be burned.

Yet it is common to see the tares manifest themselves, to be exactly what they are, long before that great and terrible day when the REAPER shall put in HIS scythe. When the LORD began HIS ministry, multitudes flocked to hear HIM. Their numbers increased steadily as they heard of HIS healing power and HIS feeding of the multitudes. Those who have no root will soon wither, however, and we see this manifested as many turned away from HIS "hard saying(s)" as time went on. "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?" (John 6:66-67)

This question produced one of the most iconic statements of faith that we find in the New Testament, which the LORD caused Simon Peter to utter, as he replied; "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." (John 6:68-69) Yet all, who will follow the LORD for a season, do not possess this FAITH and, will in time turn aside from that which they profess.

We live in an age of "easy believeism" when it has been drummed into the heads of the majority of those who have some profession of faith in CHRIST, that they can believe and follow CHRIST according to the dictates of their free will and natural choice. Those who are given no understanding by the SPIRIT of GOD (either of their own depravity or the absolute Holiness of GOD and the rigor of HIS law) will ultimately reject the truth of GOD in favor of whatever religion is more suitable to them. They might not reject what they think is the Gospel, but they will count the truth to be a lie, and a lie to be the truth. They are those who have "received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved." (2Thes 2:10) "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:" (2Thes 2:11)

Paul told Timothy that "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) Paul knew that this was the way of men and he forewarned Timothy that he should not be surprised when this occurred. It has happened in every age and the one in which we live is a stark testimony to the truth of Paul's observation. Every man, who professes faith, will turn his back to the truth and depart from the way of the LORD, unless the LORD shall keep him from falling. The sow that is washed will always return to its wallowing in the mire apart from the LORD's mercy to prevent it.

This is a very sobering truth and the LORD uses the examples of those who turn aside from the Gospel in order to stir, HIS own people, up with even greater desire not to be found among them. The road to the Celestial City is littered with the bones of those who got out of the WAY for one reason or another. The sons of GOD tremble when they read of those like Ananias and Sapphira, Demas, or Phygellus and Hermogenes. They desire to heed the warnings about listening to those who would preach *“another gospel, which is not another”*. They are stirred by the admonitions to *“walk circumspectly”* and this which Paul spoke to Timothy, *“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.”* (1Tim 4:1)

These are not warnings for some time in the distant future, but just as they were applicable to the day in which Timothy lived, much more are they so in the present. *“Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.”* (1John 2:18-19) Paul warned the Ephesian elders of this very thing when he said, *“For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.”* Acts 20:29-31)

Seldom do any embrace the tenets of Christianity with the thought in mind of departing from the truth which they profess to believe. Yet the fact that many do so, serves to remind the true sons of GOD that they do not stand in the power of their flesh, *“Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.”* (Psa 127:1) *“Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.”* (Zec 4:6)

These departures are generally gradual, as error creeps in little by little. Many, who at one time seemed solid in faith, swerve ever so gently at first until they ultimately turn from that which they once claimed to believe. Those who go forth as deceivers appeal to the reason of the flesh and usually fill some need that these apostates have while fulfilling their own love of gain, whether it be gaining a following or a place of preeminence; as Diotrephes. (see I Pet 5:2; I Tim.6:10) In any event those who would depart from the faith and those who lead them down this path are suited for one another and as the antithesis of the sheep of the LORD’s pasture, they do serve as a counterpoint to that which the LORD said of HIS own sheep. *“And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.”* (John 10:4-5)

We don’t know very much about the specifics concerning Phygellus’ and Hermogenes’ defection from Paul. It would seem that they were probably, at one time, “apparent”, men of faith who followed and taught, the doctrine of Paul to the churches which the LORD enabled him to plant in parts of Asia. In reading the letters of Paul to the various churches, it is obvious that even very early on there were some who were seeking to corrupt the one clear doctrine that Paul was faithful to declare which was as he described it to the Corinthians, *“For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”* (1Cor 2:2)

There is no appeal to the flesh in such a singular and unadorned message. Only those who are bought with this precious blood can find complete satisfaction in dwelling upon this topic. The natural man desires to delve into many secrets and to pursue topics which satisfy his curiosity, much like the Athenians who sought to know *“some new thing”*. (see Acts 17:21)

The natural man, especially those with a religious bent, cannot be convinced that there is not something which he can do to either gain or enhance his standing with the LORD by his own efforts. It is not surprising then to see men get bogged down in endeavors to keep the “law” and thereby in some measure to establish their own righteousness. Most (if not all) of those who come teaching *“another gospel”* (see Gal.1:6) appeal to this innate bent of men (see Rom.2:15) and scratch the itch which men naturally have. Great followings are established in this manner.

It is necessary that sects arise and false doctrines be preached so that the LORD might manifest that which is HIS by winnowing the wheat. *“For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.”* (1Cor 11:19) *“Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.”* (2Tim 2:19) mam