

# GRACE GAZETTE

Volume XIX

Issue 22

*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*

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## THE SHEPHERD AND BISHOP

*For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls. I Peter 2:25*

In every age, religious men have sought to corrupt the WORD of GOD and to turn those things which are meant for the blessing of GOD's people into institutions which exalt men and bring bondage upon the backs of those who have been set free in CHRIST. Those offices which HE has ordained primarily to exhibit humility and service, they have turned into convenient opportunities to subject the freeborn sons of GOD to a form of rulership which exalts themselves above the people. I believe this is likely that "*doctrine of the Nicolaitans*" which the LORD revealed to John (see Rev. 2:6,15) that HE hated. The development of a hierarchical system which sets apart a ruling class (commonly referred to as the clergy) while subjecting the "common believer" (often referred to as the laity) to their leadership and government.

The LORD has ordained Earthly governments as a means of subduing the unruly. In this they demonstrate the function of "the law" in punishing evildoers. The lawless and disobedient must be corralled and it is by such institutions and offices of power that HE has determined to do so. So, as we survey the institution of Earthly governments we are reminded of the innate depravity of men. Such places of power and rulership over the people are indeed necessary in the world, and there must be men who desire to occupy such positions in order to achieve a semblance of decorum in the world. Since evil men abound, governments must exert power over them.

Yet when we look at the "order of society", which is found among the saints of GOD in the church, (which is the fulness of HIM that filleth all in all) we find neither example nor need for such a ruling class. Peter describes the station of each of those who are called out of darkness and into the light. "*But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.*" (1Pet 2:9-10) The sons of GOD are ruled, not by the law of sin and death (from which they have been set free), but rather by a much more powerful force not aided by men in any way. "*For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.*" (Rom 8:2)

Therefore, it is quite unnecessary to use the lash of the law which was given to Moses, to hedge about the church of GOD and demand of them carnal fealty to enumerated commandments. To be sure, the sons of GOD are instructed by the Law given to Moses and confess with the apostle Paul; "*Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.*" (Rom 7:12) Should they "disregard" that Law or count it an unholy thing? GOD forbid. Having an understanding of the killing nature of the Law, they rejoice that they have been set free from its demands and along with Paul recognize that they are indeed dead to sin and alive unto GOD. "*But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.*" (Rom 7:6) "*Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.*" (2Cor 3:6)

Thus, we are led to understand that those who are given the “office”, of “ruling” (see I Tim.5:17, Heb.13:7,17, 24) in the New Testament church, must do so with a completely different mindset than those who were declaring the Law written in tables of stone. *“Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.” (2Cor 3:3) “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass (i.e.; a mirror) the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” (2Cor 3:18)*

The scriptures tell us of ONE who has come, not only as the SIN-BEARER and REDEEMER of HIS people but as their EXAMPLE in all things. *“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.” (1Pet 2:21-23)*

HE alone is the SHEPHERD of HIS flock. HE does not “turn it over to others”, but rather directs the keeping of HIS sheep to those who are not instructed to be “lords over HIS heritage” but rather examples to them in both word and deed. HE directed HIS apostles in this work and most famously committed such into the hands of Peter, saying “feed MY sheep”. When we look at the word which is translated as SHEPHERD in I Pet.2:25, we discover that it is only translated once in the NT(out of 18 occurrences) as “pastors”, and even then it is plural. Yet there is almost a cottage industry of men who claim to be “the pastor” of “their” church and who generally relish the thought of being addressed by some title befitting their supposed “status”. Such a consideration is built out of tradition rather than the HOLY SCRIPTURES.

May we return to HIM who is the SHEPHERD of our souls. HE is the SHEPHERD of HIS sheep and the DOOR by whom they go in and out, finding pasture as HE sees fit to give them. *“But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.” (John 10:2)* Both the fold and the sheep belong to HIM.

HE is the GOOD SHEPHERD. *“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.” (John 10:11)* No sacrifice was too great, for HE determined to lay down HIS life in order to preserve that of HIS flock. HE contrasts the “GOOD SHEPHERD” with those who are but “hirelings”, or those appointed to tend the flock while HE is away. To a man they will fail the flock apart from their preservation by the GOOD SHEPHERD. Paul wept bitter tears in reminding the Ephesian elders of this fact. (see Acts 20: 27-35) The church is HIS flock which HE has purchased with HIS own blood. HE knows them that are HIS. (see John 10:14)

HE is the GREAT SHEPHERD. *“Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant. (Heb 13:20)* Those priests which ministered under the old covenant, could not continue their ministry by reason of death. Yet this ONE who is the GREAT SHEPHERD, ever liveth to make intercession for HIS sheep, having triumphed over death and led captivity captive. HIS presence at the right hand of the FATHER demonstrates HIS eternal advocacy in their behalf. This advocacy rests upon the immutability of that covenant of redemption, of which HE gladly became the EXECUTOR and TESTATOR. *“For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” (Heb 9:24-26)*

HE is the CHIEF SHEPHERD. *“And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.” (1Pet 5:4)* CHRIST told HIS disciples that if HE went away that HE would come again to receive them unto HIMSELF. Upon this testimony hangs all of our HOPE for the future. Until then Peter exhorts those under-shepherds not to do so for earthly gain but rather to be examples unto the flock which CHRIST has both purchased and will come again to be reunited in body and soul with them.

HE is the BISHOP (i.e.; overseer) of their souls. *“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.” (Isa 26:3)* While Diotrefes seeks such titles, CHRIST is the MINISTER of RIGHTEOUSNESS to the sons of GOD and HE will lose none of those for whom HE has come to call. Have you heard the SHEPHERD’s voice? mam