

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

MAKING DISCIPLES

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. 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. Acts 20:28-30

This is a sobering warning that Paul delivered to the Ephesian elders. He cautioned them to be on guard for grievous wolves (false teachers and prophets) which would enter the church from the outside and would wreak havoc among them without regard to the well being of the flock. He had spoken on other occasions of the teachers of false doctrine; even calling them enemies of the cross. (see Phil.3:18; Gal.1:7) The ages since that time have proven the prophecy of Paul to be true in this regard. Many cults and religious organizations of every ilk masquerade themselves as the true church of GOD. So many false teachers have arisen in the course of time that it is very difficult to find the purity of sound doctrine which is not mixed with the error of man's tradition and ideas. Deception abounds. Discernment of spiritual truth is seemingly non-existent among multitudes claiming to be the followers of JESUS CHRIST. (II Pet. 2:1-3; Mat.24:11; I Cor.2:14)

While the prediction which Paul spoke concerning the "grievous wolves" has obviously come to pass, it is the second part of his prophecy which we see as an even more insidious and dangerous reality. He said that "of your own selves" (i.e.; the Ephesian elders) would come some who spoke "perverse" (i.e.; wicked, twisted) doctrines designed to attract followers. Now we are quite certain that the LORD himself told HIS disciples (the twelve, minus Judas) to go forth preaching the gospel and teaching (discipling) men to follow the way of CHRIST. From that commission we can infer that we too are to proclaim the gospel of CHRIST to sinners. Yet nowhere are we taught to try to attract followers by any other method than the simple lifting of HIM up in that gospel message. And even then our only desire is that they follow CHRIST.

To say that we are inundated by those who seek to "draw away disciples" would be to understate what we see happening around us. Many eloquent and forceful "preachers" (of this and that doctrine) have arisen who are convinced that their mission in life is to gain a following. We do not criticize their zeal nor their earnestness in this endeavor. Many of them are tireless in their efforts. Bright and educated in the ways of psychology and entertainment they ply their trade tirelessly and effectively. The more shameless of them resort to manipulation and "miracle" working to impress the masses. The greatest among them even write books and conduct seminars to teach others how to duplicate their efforts and help others produce the same results. The measure of "success" in these endeavors is always seen in the great numbers of disciples that are generated. If one dares to question all of this he is most usually labeled as someone who is unconcerned for the salvation of sinners; as if these methods could produce such a thing.

One of the identifying marks of all of these "ministries" is that they are always asking for and concerned about "money". Their books and seminars all come at a price. They demand to be remunerated for their efforts. Somehow I cannot envision the apostle Paul charging a fee for his services. In fact he went to great lengths to avoid being chargeable to any man. (see I Thes.2:9)

Somewhere along the line the "preaching of the gospel" has become a career opportunity. Paul's plain statements that those who are ministered to ought to value the time and effort of those who minister the word and doctrine to them, has been morphed into men collecting salaries and unashamedly charging for that which they must do. (see I Cor.9:16) Some even flaunt the "wealth" they gain in milking the sheep. They show off their affluence under the guise of demonstrating what can be expected if one is "faithful". The "tithe" is presented as an investment opportunity wherein men are promised wealth in return for "sowing" to these "ministries". There will be great judgement on those who "preach" the gospel for gain; whether it be for filthy lucre or for "followers". Brethren we'd better be preaching simply for the glory of CHRIST or that which we will produce is nothing more than wood, hay, and stubble. (see I Cor.3:11-15; II Tim.3:1-9)

Another identifying mark of such "ministries" is that they place a great deal of importance on making their message and "program" appealing to the masses. When I am exposed to most so called "contemporary worship", entertainment comes to mind. Everything is geared to making men, women, and children comfortable; from elegant and auspicious buildings to family activities and sports programs. They want to ensure that people will want to come and keep coming based on an appeal to the flesh. The only people to whom the gospel will ever appeal are those who have been convinced and convicted by the HOLY SPIRIT of the fact that they are unworthy sinners who deserve destruction. (see I Cor.1:18) The church is not a place for the masses to gather and be amused and comforted but is a place where GODs people meet to worship HIM as a body of believers, in SPIRIT and truth and to be built up in the most holy faith.

The LORD JESUS said that if HE was lifted up HE would draw men to HIMSELF. HE has given us the privilege of proclaiming the gospel of the glory of GOD in the earth. We seek no followers nor disciples. Yet we delight to see men and women embrace the truth of that gospel. We judge not the "success" of our endeavors by any "converts" that may or may not be produced in the preaching of it, but only in hearing our LORD and MASTER say "well done thou good and faithful servant."

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