

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

PARTAKING THE FRUIT

The husbandman that laboreth must be first partaker of the fruits.

2 Timothy 2:6

One does not have to look very far in an election year to be reminded that there is not a shortage of those who desire to be in the limelight and to be "in charge" of things. Most politicians will stop at nothing to reach their objective. Truth is a forgotten commodity as they all build a case for their suitability for office. Like the old adage: Q. How do you tell when a politician is lying? A. When his/her lips are moving.

Sadly; there are many who clamor to be pastors and teachers for the same reasons that the politicians seek office. In our modern day this "occupation" has become a profession that is pursued and carried out just like any other worldly endeavor, complete with salaries, pension plans, and paid vacations. Yet Paul has made it abundantly clear that this is a calling which cannot be escaped rather than an occupation one can be trained for by worldly wisdom and entered into for personal gain. James even issues a very stern warning to those who would desire to occupy such a place, "*My brethren, be not many masters (i.e.; instructors, teachers) knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation*" (James 3:1) Paul adds this admonition as well "*for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account,*" (Heb 13:17)

Paul plainly said that those who are called unto this work cannot choose to ignore it. He said, "*For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!*" (1Cor 9:16) This is a calling which is not necessarily entered into gladly since the grave accountability that is attached to it is quite stern, yet when GOD intends that a man should perform it he cannot escape from it anymore than Jonah could circumvent going to Nineveh.

Yet in spite of this there are many well meaning men who enter into this work without this calling and even some who enter into it for the praise of men or because they think they can perform some work of righteousness which will please GOD. Others have the gift of gab and think themselves suited to this ministry. Some just like the thought of being in front of people and having them do what they tell them to do. I laugh to myself when I think of this because I am convinced that one of the burdens which those who are called to preach must bear is the seeming disregard of most of what they teach; by those who hear them. Even the LORD Himself experienced this. "*But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honor, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.*" (Mark 6:4)

The popularity of a man's ministry is more often an indication of the shallowness of it than its depth. Those who maintain a large following for many years are not in keeping with the LORD's example who had multitudes follow HIM for a season but ultimately they could not endure HIS sound doctrine, preferring the loaves and fishes of which they even ultimately tired. I am not saying that a man should try to offend his hearers but it seems that the truth will be an offense enough by itself. Most large ministries compromise truth to some degree, thinking that to be preferable to a smaller circle of influence.

Those who are called to this endeavor of instructing the flock of GOD are referred to as "husbandmen" which we would probably recognize as a "vinekeeper" or "farmer". They are instructed to be "partakers" of the fruit. Now there is no shortage of those who are engaged in various "ministries" who are unashamed to strip the vines of all that can be of profit to them and who go about subverting their hearers for filthy lucre. This is not at all what Paul is instructing Timothy about however. He is telling Timothy the same thing that Peter said; *"Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock."* (1Pet. 5:2-3) It is difficult to instruct the saints of GOD on the fruits of the SPIRIT if those things are absent in the instructor.

The fruit of the SPIRIT is not something which can be produced by men anymore than a man can be instructed by men on how to perform the work of preaching. It can be produced in men but not by them because it is the fruit of the SPIRIT. Apart from the LORD causing it to be found growing on the branch, no amount of fertilizer or effort on the part of men can produce it. Those whom GOD is pleased to call to this work HE is also pleased to equip to perform it. Nothing but confusion results from those who would preach that we are to be kind to one another yet they demonstrate unkindness in their words and deeds. How can a man exhort men to forgive one another when he harbors an unforgiving spirit? Can a man admonish the saints of GOD to mortify the deeds of the body when he is engaged in fulfilling the lusts of the flesh? Can those who flaunt their "liberties" expect that those they instruct should have a proper consideration of true "freedom"? Paul made a bold statement when he said, *"Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an example."* (Phil. 3:17) Such is the calling of those who would be "vinedressers". One only need look at the "qualifications" of an elder to see this demonstrated. One's ability to teach is a minor part of those credentials, (see I Tim.3:1-7), but sadly that is usually the main criteria that men look for. This ought not so to be.

Those who are to be "vinedressers" (husbandmen) need to be aware that:

They are not the VINE nor the true HUSBANDMAN. *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman."* (John 15:1) They are only undershepherds of the flock and tenders of the vine. They have no real power to do anything profitable for the VINE or the branches.

They did not plant the VINE. The LORD said that HE is the VINE and we are the branches. (see John 15:5) HE is the source of all nourishment that can come to the branches. All things transpire for good to those whom HE is pleased to nourish, who are the called according to HIS purpose

They did not graft the branches onto the VINE. HIS skillful hand alone has caused those whom HE has grafted in to grow and to live. (see Rom.11:17-24) Many men overestimate their value to the branches thinking that they alone possess what the branches need. The need of the branches can only be supplied by the VINE.

HE alone can produce fruit on the branches. *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts."* (Gal 5:22-24) Since they themselves are one of the branches they need not forget that HE alone can cause them to produce that fruit which is necessary for their ministry.

HE alone will have all of the glory in the harvest. Too many preachers think that they can share even just a small place of glory. But HE alone will be exalted. Let the name of all men perish from off the face of the earth but let HIS name endure forever, for HE is worthy of our praise. *"Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day."* (Isa 2:10-11)