

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

A TREASURE IN EARTHEN VESSELS

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. II Corinthians 4:7

The power of the gospel rests not in the zeal with which it is proclaimed. Nor does its communication depend upon the level of oratory or theological depth with which it might be delivered by men. Rather its power is seen in the simplicity of the truth which defines it and its declaration is effectual unto the salvation of its hearers, only as it is accompanied by the presence of the SPIRIT of GOD to open the eyes of the blind to see its truth and unstop the ears of the deaf that they might hear it.

Paul clearly understood this as he declared that he preached with no ulterior motive, nor any agenda which he was trying to accomplish. He told the Corinthians that he was compelled to declare it. *"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)*

So it is with everyone who is called by GOD to declare these unsearchable riches. This is not a "part time" occupation, nor is it a "profession" which is pursued by men desiring to enrich themselves with this world's goods or who expect that their every need should be supplied by others. Neither is it the calling of those who love to have the preeminence, gathering unto themselves a following of adoring hearers while promoting their status as a "prophet", "teacher of mysteries", or anecdotal genius.

The preaching of the gospel is not for the purpose of gaining converts, though it is certain that some will hear it and believe according to GOD's sovereign purpose. (see Acts 13:48) The preaching of it is not for the purpose of gaining members in a local congregation, though some will indeed hear it and will be added to the church. (see Acts 2:47) Rather the declaration of the gospel of CHRIST is for the magnifying of CHRIST's name and eternal purpose in the unfolding of the work of redemption for lost and ruined sinners. It is also given as a testimony against the hardness of those men's hearts who will not receive it or HIM. (see I Cor.4:3,4; II Cor. 2:15-16)

Thus there is no useful purpose in "handling the word of GOD deceitfully," nor walking in craftiness, much less being dishonest in our declaration of HIS word. So we read Paul's statement, *"But (we) have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." (II Cor 4:2)* *"For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ." (II Cor 2:17)*

The most common form of "walking in craftiness" and "handling the word of GOD deceitfully" is found as some preachers (so called) shun to declare the whole counsel of GOD (see Acts 2:27). They do this by declaring only those parts of scripture which seem to agree with their distorted notion of a gospel which requires the participation of men. Many of them pay lip service to

believing that salvation is by grace alone but they belie their true sentiments by seeking to use this world's wisdom to gain "converts" or "win souls". They dishonestly declare that CHRIST has paid the debt of sin, while also declaring that men must believe it in order to make it effectual. This would be no "payment" at all but merely a "partial deposit" which depends on a further transaction. Such is not the Gospel.

Paul said *"For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake."* (II Cor 4:5) His preaching was not an exercise in displaying human talents nor trying to persuade men to believe by sophistry and eloquent arguments designed to appeal to the natural reason of men. He had but one message, which is the very heart and soul of the gospel, which is, *"JESUS CHRIST and HIM crucified"*. The LORD JESUS said, *"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."* (John 12:32) Sheer folly and pride would cause a man to declare any other message than this.

Those who are given grace to be proclaimers (preachers) of this gospel are nothing more than servants to those who are appointed to be the heirs of eternal life. They have no status which would cause them to become lords over their hearers. Paul did not bill himself as a "rock star" nor expect that his message would be heard because of anything which he either was or promoted himself to be.

He clearly stated that the only means whereby the message which he preached would be "heard" was if the LORD was pleased to shine upon it with the LIGHT which only HE could grant. *"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."* (II Cor 4:6) He knew that the only way for any man to see this truth was to be shown it in the same fashion as he was.

The only place that the glory of GOD can be seen at all is in the PERSON of JESUS CHRIST. *"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."* (John 1:18) It is impossible that a man could ever be acquainted with GOD in any sense, except that he be given eyes to behold JESUS CHRIST who is the *"fullness of the GODHEAD bodily"*. This is exactly what HE meant when HE declared, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."* (John 14:6) *"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."* (John 14:9)

Seeing the glory of the redemptive work which HE has performed and the office which HE occupies as the REDEEMER of sinners is part of the revelation of HIS glory which HE is pleased to shine in the hearts of HIS elect. None of HIS disciples could in any wise claim that they had arrived at this conclusion through human reason. HE plainly revealed this to Peter after Peter's confession of faith, *"And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven."* (Mat 16:17)

Someone has said that the testimony of GOD's people, one to the other, is just one beggar telling another where he got his bread. So too is the preaching of the gospel. The glory thereof is in the MESSAGE not the messenger. It is not in the wisdom of those who would proclaim it. This is illustrated for us by the reaction of the Jewish hierarchy to the common men who were HIS disciples. *"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus."* (Acts 4:13)

Thus Paul declares that the preaching of the gospel is like a treasure which is in an "earthen vessel", or literally an unadorned clay pot. Nothing about the pot can add anything at all to the glory of the treasure that is placed within it, nor would any desire the treasure because of that pot. Such pots are cheaply made and easily replaced. *"Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."* (Eph 3:7-8) *"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."* (Gal 6:14)