

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 MYSTERY OF THE FAITH

Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. 1 Timothy 3:9

Paul knew that his days upon the Earth were drawing to a close (see II Tim.4:6). Thus, he wrote two letters to Timothy desiring to instruct him in taking care of the flock which the LORD had called out and placed in his care. *“That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” (1 Tim 3:15)* Just like the family is the “foundation” of society, so too is the local church the footing of the faith once delivered to the saints and the fountain from which the preaching of the gospel springs.

The LORD calls HIS sheep out of darkness and is pleased to place them in fellowship with one another in local assemblies. Each one of these assemblies is unique in fulfilling the needs of those who are gathered in them. Each assembly has a life span and usefulness of its own. This is quite in contrast to the notion that these assemblies are self-perpetuating and intended to carry on indefinitely by adhering to some model of decorum and practices which are prescribed by men. Thus, we see the error of “denominationalism” which seeks to standardize such assemblies and turns them into a monolith which promotes its own preservation above the benefit of the brethren.

The only “STANDARD” which is found among the churches of the LORD is the perfections of CHRIST. The only message they have is JESUS CHRIST and HIM crucified. This is what Paul taught when he wrote to the Ephesians, *“There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism.” (Eph 4:4-5)* It is pure folly for men to think that they can improve upon that which the LORD has given to HIS children or to add anything to it in the form of programs and innovations which are supposed to enhance the “experience” of the saints.

The LORD explained the simplicity of the gathering together of the brethren, *“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Mat 18:20)* HE did not say that HE was in the midst of all of those who decided to gather together, but rather among those who are gathered together, *“in HIS NAME.”* (i.e.; in HIS authority and according to HIS purpose) All gatherings are not anointed with HIS presence, but HIS presence is evidenced by those who worship HIM in SPIRIT and TRUTH with no ulterior motive but that. They gather together not to be seen, not to gain favor with the LORD or others, nor to be entertained. Rather they desire one another’s benefit as they mutually seek to bring honor and glory to the NAME of CHRIST. *“But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.” (Eph 4:15-16)*

The body of CHRIST (speaking specifically of the local assembly) is built up, not by the “ministry” of a few, but rather by the “work of the ministry” among the saints whereby they edify one another. HE has given gifts (i.e.; apostles, pastors, and teachers) to equip the saints for this “ministerial work” one to another. Untold damage is done to the body of CHRIST by those who love to have the preeminence and think that their teaching gifts preclude or overshadow the ministry of the saints one to another, or are somehow of great importance outside of helping to equip the saints for their ministry. Thus, Peter wrote to those with these gifts and calling, *“Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, (i.e. carnal gain whether money or prestige) but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.” (1Pet 5:2-3)*

These early churches had some among them with basic needs that were met by the gathering and distributing of funds. It was necessary that some be appointed among them to oversee this distribution and thereby to be the servants of those to whom they performed this "ministry". (see Acts 6:1-5) One particular group to which this distribution was made was to widows, since they did not, then, have the "social safety net" that is found in our society. Paul actually makes reference to this situation several times as he speaks of those widows which were "*taken into the number*" (1 Tim.5:9).

I believe it was primarily for this reason that he writes to Timothy and Titus concerning the setting apart (i.e.; ordaining) of some of their male members as "deacons". This word is more of a "transliteration" than it is a translation. The Greek word literally means, an attendant or one who waits upon others. Thus, we can simply call them "servants". Such servitude is ranked very highly in the Kingdom of GOD as Paul alludes to when he wrote, "*For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.*" (1Tim 3:13) Did not the LORD say, "*whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.*" (Mark 10:43-44) This calling to be a "servant" is that which is issued to each of GOD's children.

Yet we see this calling which is incumbent upon all of GOD's children, made an "office" (i.e.; a specific work to be performed) for which some were specifically suited. Thus, Paul writes to both Timothy and Titus concerning the "qualifications" which were to be in those who were set apart by the body, to carry out this specific function (i.e.; the distribution). Over time religious societies have lost sight of the purpose for which they were called and turned these offices into a sort of a hierarchy and ruling board which is an end in itself. A church does not have to have a "deacon" in order to operate since the necessity of this "office" is not always present. Sadly, today, many are made to be "deacons" who lack the necessary "qualifications" which he describes. Prominence rather than humility is often their main credential as men clamor to put men in positions of honor among them, and some love to have it so.

Paul writes that one of the main qualities which is to be found in those whom the church is pleased to set apart for the necessary task to which they are appointed, is that they hold "*the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.*" Thus, we are certain that these men were first and foremost to be of a "spiritual" mindset. They must not be duplicitous (i.e., saying one thing and doing another, or espousing contrary doctrines, based upon the company they are with).

Paul uses the word "mystery" seventeen times in his letters. Most often referring to the revelation of the Gospel, its purpose, and its triumph. He says that this "mystery" was hidden from the foundation of the world and now is clearly revealed as CHRIST is plainly declared as the SUM and SUBSTANCE of the gospel which is now sent into all the world. This "mystery" is now unveiled in the work which CHRIST came to perform and that manner in which HE presently dwells with HIS people. "*Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*" (Col 1:26-27)

If a man is not "in CHRIST" and "CHRIST in him" he cannot be the servant of the brethren let alone the servant of GOD. "*But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.*" (Rom 8:9-10) "*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*" (2Cor 5:17) So while these "qualities" must be manifest in those who are set apart unto this particular service, this is the very essence of that which must be found among those who profess faith.

The "mystery" of the FAITH is shown to be CHRIST and HIM crucified. A man who professes any other "doctrine" cannot do so with a "pure conscience". "*Unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.*" (Tit 1:15) "*And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*" (Heb 10:21-25) Are you holding the MYSTERY of the FAITH in a pure conscience?" mam