

# 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*

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## CONTENDERS, BELOVED BRETHREN, AND ENEMIES OF THE CROSS

*Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel.* *Philippians 1:15-17*

The LORD will have all glory in the furtherance of the gospel and the calling of the saints from darkness to ETERNAL LIFE. The very best of men are corrupt and left to themselves will demonstrate the innate depravity which permeates their flesh. This is true of those who have been born again as well as those who are bereft of the grace of GOD and are set in opposition to that which is true. The LORD will not, ultimately, let HIS children rest in their complacency or in their desire to gain the preeminence in the midst of the brethren. HE will deal with such imperfections in a manner in which it can be seen that the flesh of men can afford the saints, no resting place. *“For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”* (1Pet 4:17-18)

In his third epistle, John speaks of Diotrephes, *“who loveth to have the preeminence”*. It is, sadly, quite common to find many like him among those who have “gifts” of oratory and persuasiveness among the saints. We have no knowledge as to whether or not Diotrephes was indeed a true believer, but we can unequivocally state that he demonstrated a very “unchristlike” spirit. Unfortunately, he has spawned many followers who think themselves to be something when in reality they are nothing. *“For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.”* (Rom 12:3) *“For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.”* (Gal 6:3) *“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.”* (2Cor 3:5) *“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.”* (Php 2:3)

Paul warned the Ephesian elders of this tendency and of the dire consequences which would arise out of such prideful actions and desires to have places of prominence among the saints. *“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) We see this played out in some measure in, what I call, “preacher games”.

Little “cliques” often develop (and are encouraged) where it becomes fashionable and beneficial to say, *“I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.”* (1Cor 1:12) Mutual admiration societies are formed and “personalities” are preferred. This is but a precursor to divisions (heresies) which arise and separate brethren into these various “camps.” This occurred quite early in the churches and continues to this very day. In such foolishness the LORD will demonstrate the folly of men and the glory of CHRIST, because HE will manifest HIMSELF as the only ONE worthy of

remembrance. Let the names of all men be forgotten but that NAME which is above every name that is named will be exalted. All of the “works” of men will crumble and fade, *“Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.”* (2Ti 2:19)

There are many among the saints, whether they be the tares or the wheat (we cannot always tell) who seem to be “contenders”. They love religion, desire to manifest an outward conformity to what they often describe as the “moral law”, (usually placing great emphasis on carnal sabbath keeping) and are intent upon laying the demands of such upon all that they come in contact with. In many cases they declare the truth concerning CHRIST and HIM crucified, yet seem to desire to find a place in which to glory by setting themselves apart as those who would not stoop to the low levels of others who they deem to be “lawless”. They are much like those whom Paul says, *“preach CHRIST of contention”*. *“Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?”* (Gal 3:3)

Paul writes to the saints in Philippi with much affection, *“Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.”* (Php 4:1) *“Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace. For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.”* (Php 1:7-8) His continual concern was that the brethren be built up in the most holy faith, love one another without dissimulation (i.e.; hypocrisy, or two-facedness), and walk among the men of this world as the sons of GOD. *“That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.”* (Php 2:15)

Where such an attitude and characteristics are seen, brotherly love must of necessity continue and a quiet and meek spirit is the rule rather than the exception. Even as the LORD instructed HIS disciples; *“Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”* (Mat 18:3-4) *“Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.”*(Mat 23:10-12)

The LORD prayed for this unity to be apparent among HIS children, *“Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.”* (John 17:11) Paul describes this unity when he writes, *“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”* (Php 2:3-5) *“Let brotherly love continue.”* (Heb 13:1) *“Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.”* (Rom 12:10)

It is this “brotherly love” that moves the saints to be their “brother’s keeper” and is that which caused Paul to continually warn the saints to beware of those who came preaching some other message than JESUS CHRIST and HIM crucified. His concern was the welfare of his brethren and not simply that he might be regarded as a great “defender” of the faith. There are some who walk among the saints, in sincerity, with whom we have disagreements due to various levels of understanding and revelation. There are others, however, whose message strays from the declaration of “CHRIST and HIM crucified”, who must be considered as “enemies of the cross.” *“For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.”* (Php 3:18-19) No place of glorying in the flesh is to be found among the saints, whether it be in an adoption of the world’s values and ungodly practices or in promoting the notion that men can be considered “holy” by any means other than the completed work of CHRIST in their behalf. *“Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?”* (Col 2:20-22) CHRIST is ALL. mam