

“Knowing Therefore The Fear ...”

“... of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest unto God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your conscience. We are not again commending ourselves unto you, but speak as giving you an occasion of glorying on our behalf, that ye may have whereof to answer them that glory in appearance, and not in heart. For whether we are beside ourselves, it is unto God; or whether we are of sober mind, it is unto you” (2 Cor. 5:11-13).

In the immediate verses preceding these verses Paul writes of the fact that all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account of the deeds we have done in the body. Sometimes, it is true, the “fear of the Lord” means to have deep reverence for him (“Fear God, and keep his commandments”); but it is not likely that such is its meaning in this passage. The context requires that the “fear of the Lord” refers to a trembling of Him, His power and both His ability and will to visit proper punishment to those who have ignored his laws. That is a fearful prospect; one which ought to make each person pause and give serious thought to that awesome event. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31). At such a momentous occasion there lies ahead for all one of two destinies: heaven or hell. In view of such a moment Paul could not help but persuade men to proper behavior and conduct. In Jesus’ words, “Enter ye in by the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth unto destruction and many there are that enter in thereby” (Matt. 7:13).

“But we are made manifest unto God.” In this phrase Paul states his consciousness that his life was an open book to God for “all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13). Paul knew that God knew his motives and was aware of the sincerity of his deeds and the genuineness of his care for his Corinthian brethren and Paul was concerned that the Corinthians were equally aware of his sincere care for them. He had told them often enough. “For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children” (2 Cor. 12:14) and “I am willing to spend and be spent for your sakes” (2 Cor. 12:15). But, more importantly, the Corinthians had a demonstration of the apostle’s concern for them. They had witnessed his labors to provide for his needs and the needs of his companions that the gospel might be preached in their city. They knew the controversy which erupted there when unbelieving Jews opposed him and blasphemed and he had to separate the disciples and face the necessary opposition which comes at such times (Acts 18:6-7). He had clearly not worn a cloak of covetousness in his labors among them. They had ample reason to know his concern and interest in them was not feigned.

Paul is not boasting of himself when he expressed such a hope of a favorable reception from the Corinthians about the sincerity of his love toward them. But there were (when Paul wrote these two letters to Corinth) those in the church who denigrated Paul and sought to disparage him. In later chapters of the book the apostle strongly addresses such men. Likely the bulk of the church appreciated and loved Paul because he pioneered the saving gospel in their midst and most of them had first heard the gospel

from his lips. Paul reminds the faithful brethren of his sincerity (of which they could attest) so that they would be able to quell the false charges of Paul's detractors. Such opponents gloried in appearance, not in heart. They walked in the footsteps of those in Jesus' day who gloried in chief seats in assemblies and salutations of greetings in the market places and who forgot that "men look on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7).

"For whether we are beside ourselves." Those who despise the Way dismiss the zeal of the friends of the gospel by saying, "They're crazy." Jesus' friends felt He was beside Himself. Festus felt Paul was mad (Acts 26:24). But if some of Paul's earnestness and urgency in the preaching of the gospel proved he was "out of his mind," the Lord knew better. It is sincerity that God accepts, not hypocrisy; and if because of the lateness of the hour and the dire consequence waiting before those outside the gospel made Paul seem needlessly "bent out of shape" by his urgency in preaching, so be it. It was unto God. And if Paul seemed of sober mind, it was unto the Corinthians. He hoped that those brethren would see the rationale and the valid, genuine concern when the apostle urged one and all, "Be ye reconciled unto God" (2 Cor. 5:21).

Jim McDonald