

“Our Mouth Is Open To You ...”

“Our mouth is open unto you, O Corinthians, our heart is enlarged. Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own affections. Now for a recompense in like kind (I speak as unto my own children), be ye also enlarged” (2 Cor. 6:11-13).

There are few preachers in our fair land of America who can identify in his works as being like that of Paul’s. We may preach the same gospel as he, love the Lord, His Word or our brethren as did he; but few of us are the pioneer as was he. When we feel our work is done where we are and we believe it time for us to labor elsewhere, most of us as preachers begin to put out discreet feelers to see if there is some other congregation to which we can move and with which we can work. That is not wrong within itself — Paul acknowledge the need for such: “I laid a foundation and another buildeth thereon” he wrote the Corinthians (1 Cor. 3:10). He likened himself and Apollos as workers with the Lord: “I planted, Apollos watered but God gave the increase” (1 Cor. 3:6). Still, if God’s work is to spread, to grow, there must be seed sown that others may come behind and water. I understand that “sowing and watering” is done to some extent in existing congregations, but for the sake of the gospel and the spreading of the kingdom to all parts of the world, there needs to arise a multitude of men of faith who look at areas and regions where no congregation of God’s people exists and either ask churches to help support them there or else, like Paul, be willing to work with one’s hands to sustain one’s family and himself; while he heralds out the word in a virgin territory. When we do that, then we will sustain a unique relationship to that group: they will be our “children”. And the church is not going to spread as God intends until such men arise and take that challenge.

Please understand that there is nothing wrong with men moving from one congregation to another to work with them. Paul had established the Corinthian church but Apollos came to that group and did a mighty work with them, building upon the foundation which Paul had laid (Acts 18:27-28). Paul established the Ephesian church and tradition tells us that the beloved Apostle John spent his last years there working, very likely with some who had learned the gospel from Paul. Every member of the body is needed and every preacher is needed, but some of we preachers need to step out in faith as Paul and become pioneers, planting new works in places where previously there none.

The passage from 2 Corinthians 6:11-13 reflects something that occurs in real life. Parents make great sacrifices for their children, yet the children take those sacrifices for granted and neglect, if not abandon, the parents who sacrificed so much for them. It occurred in Jesus’ day. He charged the Pharisees as lawbreakers because they neglected their responsibilities to their parents all the while feigning great devotion to God (Mark 7:6-13). Paul’s feelings for the church which he had planted were those of a parent for a child. He wrote, “For though ye have ten thousand tutors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I begat you through the gospel” (1 Cor. 4:15). Later, in this 2 Corinthian letter, he explained his past sacrifices for them coupled with his intentions to continue the same by saying, “The children ought not to lay up for the parents but the parents for the children” (2 Cor. 12:14). Yet, no picture is more sad than

that of aged, ill parents, left alone and neglected by children who like Israel forgot that “God who gave them birth” forget the very ones who gave them life; protected and sustained them when they could not sustain themselves.

So Paul writes, “Our mouth is open unto you ... our hearts is enlarged.” Could the Corinthians doubt these words? Paul had come to their city and broken to them the good news of forgiveness of sins and of the glorious hope of a resurrection and eternal life. He had asked no material assistance from them, but rather had worked at tent making with Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:1-3). He had endowed them with spiritual gifts (although such gifts originated with God) so that “they came behind in no gift” (1 Cor. 1:7). What was their reaction?

“Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own affections.” From this letter it can be discerned that some made light of his claim of apostleship although he had clearly shown he was equal to the original twelve (2 Cor. 12:12). Some falsely charged him feeling it was improper to receive support from them; other charged him with partiality because he took support from others while refusing to take support from Corinthians! Still others said he was “afraid” to return to Corinth. How these unjust charges must have grieved the apostle had who sacrificed so much for them!

Human nature is such that we long for some word of appreciation for whatever we may have done that was good and so it was with Paul. “Nor for a recompense in like kind (I speak as unto my own children) be ye also enlarged.” “Make room for me,” the apostle says, no unjust, unreasonable, unrighteous request.

Appreciation is something all men should have. Appreciation for God for His daily, manifold blessings. Appreciation for parents who loved us with a self-sacrificing love. Appreciation for our companions, our mates, who stand by our side to help us in fair weather or foul. Appreciation for our brethren who have the same hope as we and who are there to help us when help is needed. Remember, appreciation means the most when it is volunteered, and not the result of asking for it!

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