

“Not That We Have Lordship ...”

“... over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for in faith ye stand fast” (2 Cor. 1:24).

Paul was acutely aware that some in Corinth were looking for even the smallest matter that they might charge him with “another failure”. Thus, when Paul defended himself from the charge that he was “fickle” because he had failed to make a proposed visit to them, he called God as his witness that his true reason was to “spare” them; he was sensitive that some might view that statement as “popish” on his part. Thus he wrote, “Not that we have lordship over your faith.”

Should one conclude from these words that the Corinthians were not bound to accept what Paul had preached to them, be it remembered that Paul, and all the other apostles were Christ’s spokesmen and that men would be accepted or rejected upon the basis of whether they accepted or rejected the apostles? Such were the Lord’s intentions and words. “He that receiveth you, receiveth me” were the Lord’s own words (Mt. 10:40). John wrote, “We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us, he who is not of God heareth us not. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error” (1 Jn. 4:6). No one can read the following verses and conclude that man is NOT liable before God for his failure to heed His messengers. “Whoso goeth onward and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God” (2 Jn. 9). “These things I have written ... that ye may learn in us not to go beyond the things which is written” (1 Cor. 4:6). “If any man speak, speaking as it were oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11). “Though we or an angel from heaven should preach any gospel unto you other than that which we have preached unto you, let him be anathema” (Gal. 1:10).

Having said that, we must understand that however necessary it is to believe and obey the words of the apostles, man is a free moral agent. He must not act because of duress brought upon him; he must act because he both believes the instructions given him and wants to obey them in order that he might please him who offers His grace to him. Obedience that comes because one is pressured to simply cannot please God. Just as in giving one is not to give “grudgingly or of necessity” (2 Cor. 9:7), so in all other acts of service rendered to the Lord.

Attempting to “whip into line” every member to do the right thing might bring about the desired result but not please God if that action was made because one felt compelled. Such service would be vain, no matter that the action was the right action. Diotrephes doubtlessly brought about compliance among the members where he “prated against us with wicked words” and cast out all of the church who dared to disagree with him (3 John 9-10). Even had he been right (which he was not), his action was wrong. Peter wrote to elders that they were not to lord it over the flock among them; they were to make themselves ensamples to them (1 Pet. 5:1-2). The apostle did not mean that the only way elders can lead or rule is by example (as some mistakenly argue); he meant that elders should act out in person what they call upon the flock to do. There is a vast difference between “Don’t do as I do, do what I say” and “Follow me, as I show you.”

Paul sought to help the joy of the Corinthians. How did he do that? First, he helped by not adding, by his bodily presence, to their distress his letter must have brought to them. Second, he helped their joy by his assurance that what reproof he had given them was, although necessary, the efforts of one who truly cared for them and was concerned with their well being. It is always a comfort to know someone truly cares for us and loves us.

In their faith they “stood fast”. Faith enables us to stand when Satan’s fiery darts of doubt are hurled. Faith allows us to stand when we are in the midst of grievous trials and sore persecutions. It comforts and assure us. And, faith help us to stand when we are rightly rebuked for wrong on our part. True chastening is never pleasant but with chastening comes also knowledge that chastening comes for our good and believing that helps us take the necessary steps to correct the wrong which brought about the chastening. So, in faith we stand fast.

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