

Men Doomed To Death

"Already are ye filled, already ye are become rich, ye have come to reign without us: yea and I would that ye did reign, that we also might reign with you. For, I think, God hath set forth us the apostles last of all, as men doomed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, both to angels and men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye have glory, but we have dishonor. Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; and we toil, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things, even until now" (1 Cor. 4:8-14).

In these verses the apostle switches back from irony to seriousness and gravity. It is evident that when he wrote: *"Already ye are filled, already ye are being rich, ye have come to reign without us ..."* He engages in irony for he adds: *"And I would that ye did reign, that we also might reign with you."* And when he writes, *"We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong, ye have glory, but we have dishonor,"* again the language is ironic. The remaining portions of the verses are, however, things which came from the apostle's heart; expressing exactly the state of the apostles: Men doomed to death. The apostles had been forewarned by the Savior to expect such kind of treatment from those who were opponents of the gospel (Mt. 23:34), and most of them did endure such indignations. What the apostle means when he said God placed the apostles *"last of all"* as men doomed to death is not so easily discerned. Some think that he refers to the finale of the gruesome games Romans loved to watch, the gladiators fought to the death in the arena. A spectacle to the world is a bit easier to understand. Men are watching -- some to learn, others to gloat. A diverse audience from that of Hebrews 12:1f when the writer told the Hebrews that the ancients whose faith had pleased God, were the witnesses which encompassed them.

Then he speaks of the further deprivation of the apostles: they hungered, thirsted, were naked, had no certain dwelling place and were buffeted. It was a privilege to be the Lord's apostles, but not without cost to them. Paul spoke of his own trials, but he was not unique: others before had been imprisoned and martyred. Others before him had been naked, without a certain dwelling place. Such was the lot of all the apostles.

We toil, working with our hands. Other of the apostles may have had support for a time (1 Cor. 9); but there was certainty to it. *"Being reviled, we bless."*

When they did this, they followed in the steps of the Savior. "*Being persecuted, we endure.*" Just as those in Jerusalem who endured would be saved, so those who "*endure to the end,*" also will be saved. "*Being defamed, we entreat.*" Perhaps the apostle meant that he entreated those who defamed them to amend their ways; perhaps, like Stephen, they entreated God "*lay not this sin to their charge.*" They were made the filth, the offscouring of the world; worthless.

It was a hard life the apostles lived, but not without reward. In his second letter Paul told the Corinthians, "*Our light afflictions, which are for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly and eternal weight of glory*" (2 Cor. 4:15f). Let us view life and its adversities in the same light!

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