

"I Write Not To Shame ..."

"... you, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have ten thousand tutors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I begat you through the gospel. I beseech you therefore, be ye imitators of me" (1 Cor. 4:14-16).

Here is one of those "not/but" expressions that are often found in the scriptures. One part of a truth is denied to emphasize the greater, more important point. Jesus told the Jews, *"Work not for the food which perisheth but for the food which abideth unto eternal life,"* which illustrates quaint Jewish language (Jn. 6:27). Such language appears earlier in Paul's letter: *"God sent me not to baptize but to preach the gospel"* (1 Cor. 1:17). WE ARE to work for the food which perisheth; GOD DID SEND Paul to baptize; and Paul DID WRITE to shame these brethren. But, as with the other two illustrations, Paul's ultimate object was to admonish them to a better, nobler life.

How tragic that a child should look with disdain on a father who worked at a task many looked down upon: a garbage collector, street cleaner, gas station attendant; the purpose of which job (however menial it might be), was to put food in his child's mouth and clothes on his back. Imagine the child ashamed of his father because of the nature of his work! These Corinthians (at least in their estimation) were filled, rich, and reigning; they were wise, strong and had glory; which qualities they felt Paul lacked! They should have been ashamed and there is little dispute Paul wrote ironically of their strength, compared to his weakness; then launched forth to discuss the suffering of the apostles, all for the gospel's sake and for the benefit of those who "looked down their noses" at apostles.

It was not, however, for the sake of shaming them that he wrote; it was to admonish them. And he had a right to so speak because he was their "father in the gospel." He had come to their city from Athens; had been in their midst with fear and trembling; waiting for the proverbial second shoe to drop! He was with them in weakness and trembling yet he did not shrink from teaching the word which had wrought for him great suffering; which would ultimately bring him captivity and death. He toiled, was reviled, was as the filth of the earth for the Corinthians' benefit. Paul had begotten Corinthians through the gospel. Peter wrote the same: *"been begotten again, not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible through the word of God which liveth and abideth forever"* (1 Pet. 1:23). Paul wrote of the gospel's power to the Romans (Rom. 1:16). Both Old and New Testament writers identify God's word as quickening power. The Psalmist wrote, *"This is my*

comfort in my affliction; thy word hath quickened me” (Psalms 119:50). Jesus said that a man must “be born of the water and the Spirit” (Jn. 3:5). He also said, “It is the Spirit which quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing. The words that I speak unto thee, they are spirit and thy are life” (Jn. 6:63).

We may have many instructors in life: many who had lent great help to our understanding of the word -- some who had a great part in molding and shaping us to better service of the Lord; but each of us owe a debt of gratitude to him or her who planted in our hearts faith in the word, faith in God, and faith in Christ and the gospel. Others may supplement; others may have a decidedly great influence, but none can ever take the place of the one who introduced us to our Lord!

Thus Paul urged these brethren to imitate him; being willing, as was he, to suffer shame and loss for the Lord Jesus. *“Suffer hardship with me as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Tim. 2:3).*

Jim McDonald