

TENT-MAKING IN CORINTH.

Among the Jews in early times it was customary to teach all the children the full details of some useful calling.... And here now in a verse we learn that Saul of Tarsus had been reared to the trade of a tent-maker in his early years, and resumed it as an occupation when, as Paul the apostle, some necessities fell upon him to undertake the work of personal support. There will be profit in our contemplating him in this altogether new character as a working-man about his business.

I. Let us begin with a careful examination of the singular artisan life he lived in Corinth.

1. Our earliest point of notice is found in the fact that he chose a decent and reputable calling. This trade was an honorable one for the craft was composed of industrious citizens, and their products were useful and valuable. Now this explicitly. Some occupations there are which no one can follow, and keep his Christian profession clean and clear. ...

2. Then we must observe that Paul sought consistent partners in his business. God guided him when he "found" such amiable people as Aquila and Priscilla already established there in the strange city...

3. But most of all, in these degenerate times of ours, we must notice that Paul pursued the work of his calling honestly. ...As this small, tired man sat there, in the midnight and the noon, sewing industriously till his feeble eyes ached with the overstrain, talking meanwhile with Aquila and his bright wife, we have not the slightest doubt that he always knotted his thread when he took up his needle, that he pulled each stitch through conscientiously as in the sight of God, and that he fastened the end of it when he finished

the seam. For we do not see how those people could have had family prayers, unless they knew they had been "doing successful business on Christian principles."

4. Once more: we must observe that Paul held his business cautiously in hand. No doubt his tents brought excellent prices, and it is likely the trade increased. But he looked on tent-making as a means to an end; and he did not set himself just to gain money. He never let his business run away with him, or interfere with his religious life.

5. Hence, we are not surprised to discover that Paul used his opportunities wisely even when hardest at work. We do not suppose that Aquila and Priscilla were Christians previous to Paul's arrival at Corinth....Probably Paul was the instrument in their conversion. Think of the glorious talks they had together!

II. So now we reach a second question: What was the effect of this apostle's working at his trade upon his profession as a Christian preacher? We answer, It gave vast force to it.

1. For one thing, it illustrated his often-repeated maxims concerning the **[R619 : page 8]** dignity of honest labor. If an able-bodied follower of Jesus Christ refused to work, he had no right to eat. 2 Thess. 3:7-13. This vigorous and busy apostle evidently believed that there remained no room whatsoever for drones in a Christian hive....If any further illustration is needed than is furnished in these words already quoted, think of his address down there by the lonely seashore, when he bade farewell to the elders of Ephesus. Oh, how that scene rises on our minds! See the worn man as he stands there on the sands; every line on his face shows labor and care: he is true and genuine, and can be trusted. Acts 20:32-35.

2. But now let us lay alongside of this another consideration: Paul's tent-work in the shop of Aquila added immeasurable force to his ministry, because it removed all ground of cavil as to his making a gain out of godliness. There was some reason for his peculiar solitude in this vain and fastidious city; we know he did not refuse money sent him from other places. It is worth our while to ascertain exactly what was Paul's whole doctrine on this subject. 1 Cor. 9:4-14. We understand from a passage so extensive and so explicit as this that Paul never intended to prejudice the rights of others, or surrender his own. He instructed his young friend Timothy to preach on this point. 1 Tim. 5:17,18. But when indiscreet men caviled, Christians must avoid the very appearance of evil. So this cheerful-hearted preacher laid hold of his needle, pulled the silesia up over his knee, and went on sewing tent-coverings five days in each week. He afterwards told them frankly that he used some of the Philippians' gifts to him to help out that season. 2 Cor. 11:7-12. And he seems rather proud and glad as he tells them so. –

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