

## **PERILS AMONG FALSE BRETHREN.**

– 2 COR. 11:26. –

Our Christian experiences differ; no two have exactly the same: because our temperaments and talents differ as well as our surroundings. But we may rely upon it that no real son of God is exempted from the needed trials of patience, faith and love. No matter how strong the character or how seemingly impregnable to the ordinary besetments, we may rely upon it that such have as great trials and crosses as others – perhaps greater – perhaps such as would prostrate weaker ones, whom the Lord will therefore in love and mercy not suffer to be tempted above that they are able to bear.

Even our blessed Lord Jesus, though perfect, had to pass through an experience to test and prove his complete submission to the Father's will. Looking at our Lord's testing, we cannot doubt that his strong character was measurably unmoved by the sarcastic, bitter words and threats of the Scribes and Pharisees, and that likewise he speedily and firmly settled Satan's temptations negatively. And none of these things which would have been the greatest temptations to others seemed to move or even to greatly annoy him. He answered coolly and often sarcastically and ironically the attacks of open enemies.

It was when those who "dipped in the dish with him, lifted up the heel against him" and left him, that his heart was troubled; – wounded by professed friends. The only discouraged expression recorded, relative to his work, was toward the close of his ministry when the test became more and more severe and "many went back and walked no more in his company," saying of his doctrines, "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" His unreproachful but sorrowful words, then expressed to the twelve specially staunch, were full of

pathos and disappointed grief: "Will ye also go away?" The prompt response of Peter – "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of lasting life" – must certainly have come as a comforting balm to that noble, loving heart whose only impulse was to do good and bless others.

And yet, as it came to the close of his ministry, the time came that he must still further suffer wounds from those he most loved. And catching a clear view of how his sacrifice was to be completed, how all his bosom disciples would forsake and disown him, and how one of them would betray him with a kiss, no wonder that was one of his most sorrowful trials and disappointments. He was sorrowful, troubled in spirit, and testified, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of *you* shall betray me." And when Peter courageously said, "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee" – and so said they all – Jesus saw that all would be scattered, forsaking him in his most trying hour, and that courageous Peter would be so terribly sifted of Satan and prove so weak that he would even swear that he had never known him. Truly *these* trials from "brethren," some of whom were only weak, and some false at heart, must have been among the sorest of our Lord's experiences, during his period of trial. Yet none of these things moved him or for a moment influenced him to choose another course. He cheerfully followed the narrow path and left it for God, in his own time, to bring forth his righteousness as the light of noonday. He was obedient to God, and faithful to the truth, and it was thus that he suffered not only at the hands of evil men but also from the misunderstandings of his closest friends, who did not clearly understand the situation, nor see how needful it was that he should first be Redeemer before he could become Restorer and King.

The same lesson of perils among false brethren, and among brethren who had not so fully as himself grasped the Truth, was the Apostle Paul's experience too.

We never hear from him a complaint about the way the world rejected his message and spoke evil of him and maltreated him as the leading exponent of the unpopular doctrine of the cross of Christ, which was opposed both by the stumbling, blinded Jews and by the worldly-wise philosophies of the Gentiles. Indeed, instead of being downcast or discouraged at his past experiences and in the future prospect that bonds and imprisonments awaited him, he boldly and cheerfully declared, "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself." – Acts 20:19-24.

But, like the Lord Jesus, Paul had his severest trials from "false brethren;" who, instead of being faithful yoke-fellows and co-workers with Paul as good soldiers of the cross, became puffed up, heady, anxious to be leaders. These, being unwilling or unable to see the truth as fully and clearly as did Paul, because of their wrong condition of heart, and being envious of his success, and the results of his zeal and labor, followed after him in the various cities where he had labored, and by misrepresentation of his *character* as well as of his teachings sought to lower him in the esteem of the household of faith, and to thus open the way for various sophistical theories which would reflect honor upon them as teachers of what they claimed were *advanced truths*, though actually subverting the real truth in the minds of many.

The only annoyance ever manifested by the Apostle Paul, in any of his letters, was upon this subject of his misrepresentation by false brethren. Referring to these false apostles by name, that they might be known and recognized as such (See 1 Tim. 1:19,20; 2 Tim. 4:10,14-17; 2 Cor. 11:2-23), he clearly exposed their unholy motives, of pride, ambition and envy, which scrupled not to make havoc of the church and of the truth. Especially did he point out that in their attempt to be leaders, they had manufactured a different *gospel*, built upon a different foundation than the only true foundation – the death of Christ as man's ransom-price.

Paul was zealous for the truth's sake, lest these false apostles should, by smooth words and by misrepresentations of his character and the truth, use that as a lever to turn men aside from the true gospel.

He warns them against those teachers, not to keep himself uppermost in their hearts, but to put them on their guard, lest receiving the new teachers they should be injured by the *false* teachings they presented, and lest in rejecting him and losing confidence in him as an honest and true man and teacher they should discard his teachings which were the truth. Hence his reference to himself was not a self-defence and self-laudation but a defence of the truth and an endeavor to have them see that his character and career as a true teacher comported well with the true message he bore to them.

And he fearlessly pointed out that men might *claim to present* the same Jesus, the same spirit and the same gospel, and yet be false teachers and deceitful workers transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And he says, marvel not at such a thing as that men should be great workers in the name of Christ from ambitious motives: "No marvel, for Satan himself fashioneth himself into an angel of light. It is no great thing, therefore, if his ministers also transform themselves as ministers of righteousness."

Paul's letter to the Galatians, too, was written evidently to counteract the false representations of false brethren. (See Gal. 1:6; 3:1.) To re-establish confidence in the gospel message he had delivered, it was needful that he should rehearse to them something of his history. In doing so it was necessary to again refer to the *false* brethren (Gal. 2:4), who claimed to be of the same body and who yet in opposition to the truth brought again upon God's children the bondage of errors already escaped from.

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