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"AS DECEIVERS AND YET TRUE"

"Giving no offense in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed; ...by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true." – 2 Corinthians 6:3,8.

HOW varied are the experiences of an active Christian – experiences of honor and of dishonor, of being well reported and evil reported, of suffering for righteousness' sake, of being called deceivers, etc.! Some may have a greater amount of publicity than do others and thus attract more attention. Some may have a wider field of service and greater opportunities than do others. But every faithful disciple of Christ will have more or less of these experiences enumerated in our text and in its context. Some will speak well of us and others will speak ill. Throughout the entire Gospel Age it has ever been true that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." (2 Timothy 3:12.) Especially has this been true of these last days.

Amongst the brethren of Christ all of the Lord's saints should have honor. While none should *seek* for honor of the brethren, nevertheless a great deal of esteem should attach to every one who has taken the great step of full consecration to God – no matter how ignoble the person may be according to the flesh. The fact that God has begotten any one of His Holy Spirit should make us wish to respect those whom the Lord has thus honored. Each of the saints, however humble, is greatly loved of our Lord Jesus; and therefore all of the children of God should take heed how they treat even the least of His little ones – their brethren.

"As deceivers, and yet true." On many occasions the great Apostle Paul was dishonored; at other times he was honored. He had evil reports spread abroad concerning [R5774 : page 291] him, as well as good reports. He was considered a deceiver by many who

professed to be the people of God. Yet all the while he was true to the Lord and to His people. He was considered a renegade Jew, because he was not teaching obedience to the Law Covenant as the only hope of everlasting life. He was teaching what was far superior – salvation through faith in the merit of the sacrifice of Christ; and this doctrine made the Law look inferior. Therefore his fellow Jews accused him of being unfaithful to the Law of their fathers. To a Jew this was considered a great dishonor.

As a result, very evil reports of St. Paul went broadcast among the unbelieving Jews everywhere. He was branded as one of the greatest deceivers ever known. Everybody was warned against him – "Watch out for that man Paul; he is coming! Whoever will kill that fellow will do God a service and glorify His name!" "Why?" might be asked by some. "Because he is deceiving the people by telling them that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah – telling them that when they die to the Law they become alive through this man Jesus – telling them that the Law which we have had for sixteen hundred years is of no account! He is trying to draw people after that Nazarene!"

Then St. Paul was also accused of trying to draw followers after himself. Yet he was true to God in every sense of the word. He was true to the nation of Israel, to the Law, and to the Prophets. He was true to God and to the Lord Jesus Christ. He was no deceiver in any sense; he was merely *called* a deceiver by those who were blinded by the god of this world. He seemed "*as* a deceiver" to his blinded Jewish brethren and to those who served false gods.

CONCESSIONS FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS

The Apostle's earnest desire and endeavor was to give "no offense in *anything*, that the ministry be not blamed." The word ministry is frequently used today in reference to the clergy as a whole. The ministers, or preachers, of the churches are spoken of as the ministry; such as the Presbyterian ministry, the Methodist

ministry, etc. But we think St. Paul had a broader thought; namely, that of proclaiming the true Gospel of Christ or of serving the Lord in whatever manner. He used the word in the sense of *service*. A minister is a servant. All who serve the Lord, whether publicly or privately, are ministers, and should endeavor to live so true a life, so honorable a life, that even though they may be called deceivers, nevertheless others will take note of their exemplary walk. Each should try to live in so inoffensive a manner that the world will call it good, proper living. Live above reproach. Give no just cause for offense. This is the Apostle's thought, that we should not give any one just reason to be offended at us.

Among the Jews, for any one to eat pork would be an offense. He would be looked down upon and not considered properly religious. In our day, the eating of pork is not condemned by many. But failure to observe Sunday as the Sabbath would be considered a violation of a Divine command. We might, so far as our own consciences are concerned, do certain things; yet the ministry, the service of the Truth, might be blamed for our so doing. Many are very scrupulous as to Sunday observance as the Sabbath. So, as the Apostle enjoins, **[R5774 : page 292]** we should, as children of God, be so careful in our conduct as to go to the extreme of faithfulness, wherever possible. The conscientious scruples of an individual are not to be treated lightly.

In some parts of the world it is the custom to remove the shoes before entering the house. If we were in such a locality we should conform ourselves to the general custom. We should ever be willing to adapt ourselves to the custom of those around us where we can do so without violating our conscience, if by conforming to their ways we would avoid offense or increase our influence for good. To fail to do this would be a lack of love and consideration, and hence in some manner, an injury to the Lord's Cause.

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