

## A Prisoner “Not Ashamed!”

Most evangelists receive numerous letters from a variety of sources. Occasionally a call comes from an imprisoned person who is incarcerated in order to pay his “debt to society,” the society which has been adversely affected by his crime. In the New Testament, Timothy, an evangelist, 2 Tim. 4:5, also received a letter from a prisoner; a prisoner who was a “*debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise,*” Rom. 1:14. However, this prisoner was imprisoned; not because of trying to welsh out of his debt, but for having sought to fulfill his obligation. This prisoner’s name was Paul. His debt was being “paid” in preaching the gospel. His “crime” was in making known “*the testimony of our Lord,*” 2 Tim. 1:8. The society affected by his “crime” was greatly blessed by the gospel he preached.

Many prisoners, when recalling their past, are ashamed of the crimes which led to their imprisonment. Not Paul! He said “*nevertheless I am **not ashamed**: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day,*” 2 Tim. 1:12. Many of his friends had left him, 2 Tim. 4:10-16); imminent death was awaiting him, but he was a happy prisoner, one who was “*not ashamed.*” But why should he have been ashamed? Souls had been saved, God was obeyed, and Paul, “*ready to be offered,*” had in prospect “*a crown of righteousness,*” 2 Tim. 4:6-8.

My how times have changed! Or could it be that **people** have changed? So many of us desire every eternal blessing anticipated by Paul, but are unwilling to undergo any temporary hardship. How many are really ready to “*fight the good fight of faith,*” 1 Tim. 6:12? How many are willing to “*endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ,*” 2 Tim. 2:3? It appears that a huge percentage of “Christians” have a morbid fear of standing up and speaking out for Christ, lest they be branded as religious fanatics, or possibly lose coveted friendships. It all boils down to this: many of us are ashamed of what Paul was “**not ashamed!**”

This is a dangerous situation for a “Christian” to be in, for Jesus said “*whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in His own glory, and in His Father’s, and of the holy angels,*” Luke 9:26.

However, when we pause to consider the facts, we wonder why any follower of Jesus would be “*ashamed*” either of Him or of His “*words!*” After all, Jesus is “*the Son of the living God,*” Matt. 16:16; He came “*to seek and to save that which was lost,*” Luke 19:10; He died for **our** sins, Heb. 2:9; His gospel is “*the power of God unto salvation,*” Rom. 1:16, and Jesus is ready and eager to receive those who “*come unto God*” through Him, John 14:6. “*Gospel*” means “good news,” and the good news is that even though “*all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God,*” Rom. 3:23, Jesus is “*the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him,*” Heb. 5:9. Hence, the gospel message is not a message of which we should be “*ashamed,*” but a message for which all of us should be exceedingly thankful, and eager to share with others. After all, good news is news which all of us should be eager to tell. We therefore conclude with these words penned by the apostle Paul to Timothy, “*And the things that thou hast heard of me among*

*many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also,” 2 Tim. 2:2. Beloved, think on these things!*

—Bobby Witherington

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## Fellowship

*“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have **fellowship with us**: and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin,” I John 1:3,7.*

Much is being said and written these days regarding fellowship; with whom may we have fellowship, and with whom may we **not** have fellowship? Some appear bent on feeling “the pulse of the brotherhood” before they know how far to go in determining who to fellowship and who not to fellowship. Admittedly, it can at times become somewhat difficult to know how far the lines of fellowship extend. However, it must be remembered that Scriptural fellowship has been determined by the Lord and not men; therefore, any extending of the lines of fellowship beyond, or any shortening of the lines of fellowship from that which He declared must necessarily be a violation of His will which, if pursued, will result in a severance of that which must be maintained at all cost; i.e., **fellowship** “*with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.*”

The apostles preached Christ. They “*declared*” unto men that which they had “*seen and heard*,” the purpose being that we might “*have fellowship*” with them and, consequently with those whom they (the apostles) had fellowship; namely, “*with the Father and with His son Jesus Christ.*” We are plainly informed that **if** we “*walk in the light*” of revealed truth we then “*have fellowship one with another*” and are cleansed by “*the blood of Jesus Christ.*” On no other basis can we enjoy both the fellowship of God and “*fellowship one with another.*”

If I am in fellowship with God (and remain therein), then my fellowship can only knowingly be extended to those who also are in fellowship with God. Inasmuch as fellowship with God is based upon walking in the light of revealed truth, then in order for me to determine whether or not to fellowship certain persons, I must know what they believe, teach, and practice; are they or are they not walking “*in the light*?” Especially is this made evident in 2 John 9-11, wherein we are informed that those who abide “*not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God,*” and that those who bid “*God speed*” to false teachers partake of their evil deeds, and, therefore, forfeit fellowship with God.

Therefore, any “peace offensive” in behalf of fellowship which results in an aggressive and zealous effort to determine the Scriptural basis of fellowship and urge men to submit thereto is laudable and commendable, but on the other hand, any “peace offensive” which compromises truth and overlooks error, in order to be at peace with those not at peace with God, is indeed, a “peace offensive” — “**offensive** to God and to those who insist in walking in the “*old paths.*” Let us ever, therefore, submit to the authority of Him Who “*is our peace,*” Eph. 2:14, and hasten to be “*peacemakers,*” Matt. 5:9, but let us also refrain from the errors of the false prophets of old; namely, the practice of crying “*peace, peace, when there is no peace,*” Jer. 6:14. Consider ye well!

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