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Paul's Consistency in Ministry

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In Deuteronomy chapter three and verse 28 we see that a command was given for Joshua to be encouraged. Encouragement often times strengthens the Christian to continue to fight the good fight. Joshua indeed was encouraged

*But charge Joshua,
and encourage him,
and strengthen him*

- Deut 3:28

through doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction, and thus was used mightily by God.

It is often times very sad that in Christian circles we find that there are more discouragers than encouragers. We have heard the old saying time and time again that Christians are the only army that shoot their own soldiers on purpose. While we need to hold fast to sound doctrine, we also need to take time to be an encourager.

Many things about Paul make my heart beat with anticipation. Knowing that one day I will be able sit and rejoice with him over his ministry and walk with the Lord Jesus, thrills my heart. One thing in particular has recently struck me while reading through Paul's epistles. It was his unwavering love for the people, and more so his faithfulness as a great encourager.

It is interesting to note that of the 16 times that the word exhort is used in the New Testament, it was used 11 of those times by Paul, while of the 24 times the word comfort was used, it was used 19 times by Paul, and also of the 30 times that the word beseech was used, it was used 21 times by Paul.

As I read from Thessalonians to Timothy, I see that no matter what situation that Paul was called into, weather one of reproof, correction, or doctrine of instruction, there was always a word of encouragement that either preceded or followed his message.

As for the Thessalonians, they were less than ready to receive Paul's message of the gospel from the beginning (Acts 17:11). How exciting it

must have been for Paul to write his first epistle back to the Thessalonians and be able to open it with his thankfulness for them (v1:2) and his joy over the faith, love and hope that they possessed (v.1:3). In order to encourage them, that not only did he recognize their walk but also communicated that those in other places, namely Macedonia, Achaia and abroad (v.1:7-8) spoke of their

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind,

- Acts 17:11

faith. This must have been extremely encouraging for them. He also took time between his instruction to them to encourage them as to their "brotherly love" (v.4:9) for one another.

Even as Paul gave a much deserved rebuke to those in Corinth, he still found opportunity to encourage them. In chapter one, verse four, he expresses his thankfulness for them, even in their current state. Also, in chapter four verse 14, Paul makes it a point to restate his goal, which was not to shame them but to warn them, an encouragement of care that is cumulated in the final verse of 1 Corinthians as he expressed his "love" (16:24) for them all in Christ Jesus.

There were times however, that Paul was unable to begin with a word of encouragement. His love and concern for the Christians at Galatia brought him to send a letter that began with strong rebuke as they were being led away by "another gospel" (1:6), and caused him to refer to them as "foolish Galatians" (3:1). However, Paul in all his rebuke, still finds time once again to give a word of encouragement to them in chapter four, verse 12 through 14. Paul was encouraging them that there was indeed a time that they had held to sound doctrine.

Then we come to Paul's final epistle of 2 Timothy in the fall of AD 66. Once again, Paul begins with thanksgiving and remembrance of Timothy.

Not only does Paul instruct Timothy as to his walk (2 Timothy 2:15, 2:24) and warns him as to those things and persons to beware of, but he also encourages Timothy through responsibility. It is a great encouragement when someone see in us the God given ability to carry out a task. It was just that, when Paul (2

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

- 2 Tim 2:15

Timothy 4:1-2) charged Timothy to "Preach the word; be instant in season and out of season". It is also encouraging to know your enemy, and Paul's warnings and instruction serve just that purpose; that Timothy might know his enemy.

What encourages me most about Paul is his consistent desire to bring forth the encouraging message of the Gospel. He did so with the continual remembrance of who he was and who he served. This is demonstrated in 1 Corinthians 15:9-10.

For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. 1Co 15:9-10

By the grace of God, might we be the encouragers that Paul was !