

"NOTHING BEYOND WHAT IS WRITTEN"

I Corinthians 4:6

This subject is a translation of an expression found in the sixth verse of the fourth chapter of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. It is part of a very interesting scripture. Its setting reads thus: "And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes, that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another."

Paul is talking about Apollos and Cephas and himself, and the divisions in the church at Corinth over these preachers. In the first verse of this chapter Paul states the business of the preacher. He is a steward of the truths of God. Human nature is a peculiar thing. It runs so to extreme. It either lauds a man or it lambasts him. It will deify him or despise him, and sometimes in almost the same breath.

Knowing that being found faithful is God's requirement for His servants makes the judgment and criticism of men a very small matter to Paul. He felt that way about the censure of the Corinthians. They had said of him, "his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible," to which the Apostle replied, "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment." Realizing as he did that he had just One Person to please, what did it matter if the Corinthians felt as they did about him? He could carry on blind to how they acted and deaf to what they said. Such an attitude has scriptural approval. David said, "But I, as a deaf man, heard not; and I was as a dumb man that openeth not his mouth." Psalm 38:13. That sort of thing is vital to any minister's usefulness. If he allows some people to bother him, it will become a tool in the hands of Satan to cripple his ministry. Paul said, in substance, I am not concerned whether you think me faithful.

Furthermore, Paul declined to judge himself. He refused to appraise his own ministry among the Corinthians. Although he could find nothing against himself, this did not mean that he was blameless. There may have been things about which he was unaware. Knowing the subtle pride of the flesh, Paul could not trust himself to judge his own labors lest he judge in favor of himself. No man ever hated his own flesh. This being so, no man can accurately appraise himself. But there is One Who judges, and His judgment is true for it is based entirely on things as they really are. To Him Paul is glad to commit the matter of appraising. With such confidence, what did it matter what others said? Very little you may be sure.

"Nothing beyond what is written" is a well-known expression to which Paul could make reference and be understood by his readers in Corinth. This expression would not sound unnatural to ears that were accustomed to Greek practice of negative expression of truth.

In reminding the members of the church at Corinth, a Greek city, of the words of our text, Paul was giving to them in negative form the truth which Christ had expressed in positive form in the days of His temptation in the wilderness. When Satan tempted Christ, the Lord replied, "It is written"—the identical word here used by Paul who stated it, however, in negative fashion thus, "Nothing beyond what is written."

These words are used here with reference to the fidelity of a preacher and the consequent acceptance of his spiritual leadership. Paul gives as the basis of fidelity in a preacher and, therefore, as the basis of acceptance of his leadership that he shall be faithful as a steward of the mysteries of God. These mysteries are revealed in the Word of God. It is a preacher's business to be faithful to that Word. His watchword, his motto, should be "Nothing beyond what is written," and the acceptance of him and his leadership should be on that basis.

Who shall decide whether the preacher is faithful? Not human judgment. "With me it is

a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment." Not the preacher's conscience. "My conscience does not convict me of unfaithfulness; yet am I not hereby justified." A preacher's conscience might be wrong and might not accuse his stewardship of the mysteries of God. How then shall faithfulness be determined? "But He that judgeth me is the Lord." We are, therefore, to take as the basis of faithfulness not what man thinks nor what conscience determines, but what God thinks, and what God thinks is revealed in His Word. Therefore, "Nothing beyond what is written."

This subject and text are a particular application of a law that holds for all of Christian life and living.

I. The Finality Of Judgment.

The finality of judgment is not man's judgment, nor conscience, but God's Word. Do you want to know whether a thing is right or wrong? Who shall decide it? Shall conscience decide it? No. Paul says, "Nothing beyond what is written." What says the Word of God? For every question of right and wrong, for every question of unfulfilled duty and for every problem of life, it can be decided only by what is written. "Nothing beyond what is written."

II. The Finality Of Authority.

The finality of authority is not man's judgment, nor conscience, but God's Word. The world is now in a state of seething turmoil because of the assertion of conflicting authority. The world has set up many authorities. Man says, "I will be an authority unto myself." A church may have a group of members who say, "We will be the authority."

There is an educational authority abroad in the land. Men who by dint of hard work and earnest study have come to occupy positions of trust and prominence dare to claim authority and challenge that which is written, even classing as fools those who do not accept the findings of their educational authority.

There is a commercial authority asserting itself in these days when men of means, thinking that money is power, have asserted their authority, and even try to tell preachers the kind of messages they should bring and to tell churches what to do.

There is a social authority asserting itself in the land when men and women by virtue of God-given graces have come to occupy positions of prestige in the social world and dare to lay heavy hand on community and church in the assertion of a social authority which ostracizes those who do not accept its mandates.

Authority is asserting itself on all hands, but the finality of it is expressed in the words, "Nothing beyond what is written."

III. The Finality Of Revelation.

When Moses was being prepared to lead the children of Israel from the bondage of Egypt to the promised land of Canaan he was tried in the science of Egypt, the best that the world had then. But his education in Egypt did not give him the revelation he needed most. He was taken off into the desert of Midian and there one day he saw a bush that burned and was not consumed. The sight tickled his scientific curiosity and whetted his scientific appetite. He decided to open his desert laboratory and see what that thing meant. He determined to do a little scientific investigation of that strange phenomenon. But God thundered from heaven and said, "Moses, Moses, draw not nigh hither; put off thy shoes from thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." Reverence precedes revelation. A mere laboratory investigation of the burning bush would give Moses only what the scientists of Egypt knew. God wanted to prepare him to go beyond this knowledge so that when they reached their limit they might say of God's doing: "It is the finger of God."

One of the up-to-date things in medical science is the antitoxin treatment. Serums made in the laboratories of men have robbed of their fatality those diseases which were once considered fatal. There was a time when diptheria was feared as fatal, but now there is an antitoxin for it. It was discovered that a serum made from the blood of horses that were immune would counteract the poison of diptheria. Fine horses that were physically perfect were selected and inoculated with doses of the toxin until finally they were immune to diptheria and from their immunized blood a serum was made for diptheria. This serum injected into the blood of a patient effected a cure.

The Great Scientist of the Universe offers to those who are dead in trespasses and sins an antitoxin for sin. He has not made it from the blood of the finest horses of earth, but from the blood of His own Son, the finest that heaven has. He has made Him Who knew no sin to be sin that He might take the kick out of sin and make His blood an effective cure for sin. Here is scriptural finality of science.

We may confidently take the Word of God and say "Here is the finality of revelation--for time and for eternity." When Christ comes to culminate His revelation it will be "Nothing beyond what is written" and when we get to heaven we will understand more fully but it will not be beyond what is written. Throughout eternity we will be more and more delighted at the fuller understanding of what we get here in glimpse as we accept in simple faith what is written.

IV. The Finality Of The Gospel.

The words of our subject give us the finality of the gospel: "Nothing beyond what is written."

Salvation is not of sentiment nor sensation nor sense but of scripture--God's Written Word.

Salvation is not in man's might nor method nor merit but in God's way--God's Incarnate Word.

Salvation is in Christ--the Christ of the Word--the Christ revealed in the Word--dead and buried and risen according to the Word--believed in according to the Word.

Christ came to fulfill the Word because He was the Word. God will no more go back on Him than He will go back on His Word, and He will no more go back on His Word than He will go back on His Son.

Is it any wonder, then, that the devil does not want people to believe the Bible? Is it any wonder that He slanders it in every possible way? He knows full well that it is the Word of God. He knows just as well that it is through the Written Word that the Incarnate Word is revealed to the hearts of men for the salvation of sinners and the direction of saints.

God help us to go from this place hugging to our hearts anew the glorious truth of our subject and text: "Nothing beyond what is written."