

THE SHADOW BOXERS IN THE CHURCH

1 COR 9:26-27

INTRODUCTION

IN THIS LETTER THAT THE APOSTLE PAUL PENS TO THE SAINTS AT CORINTH, HE ADDRESSES THE ISSUE OF SPIRITUAL TRAINING.

HE WANTS HIS READERS TO RECOGNIZE THAT THERE IS A PLAN, AND A PURPOSE BEHIND HIS ACTIONS.

LISTEN TO WORDS AS EXPRESSED BY THE KING JAMES VERSION OF THE BIBLE: " [26] *I THEREFORE SO RUN, NOT AS UNCERTAINLY; SO FIGHT I, NOT AS ONE THAT BEATETH THE AIR : [27] BUT I KEEP UNDER MY BODY, AND BRING IT INTO SUBJECTION: LEST THAT BY ANY MEANS, WHEN I HAVE PREACHED TO OTHERS, I MYSELF SHOULD BE A CASTAWAY.*"

LISTEN TO THE WORDS EXPRESSED BY THE LIVING BIBLE PARAPHRASED: ": [26] *SO I RUN STRAIGHT TO THE GOAL WITH PURPOSE IN EVERY STEP. I FIGHT TO WIN. I'M NOT JUST SHADOWBOXING OR PLAYING AROUND. [27] I DISCIPLINE MY BODY LIKE AN ATHLETE, TRAINING IT TO DO WHAT IT SHOULD. OTHERWISE, I FEAR THAT AFTER PREACHING TO OTHERS I MYSELF MIGHT BE DISQUALIFIED.*"

I WANT TO RAISE THIS QUESTION THIS AFTERNOON AND OFFER THIS CHALLENGE, "ARE YOU FIGHTING TO WIN. OR ARE YOU JUST SHADOW BOXING?"

ON THE SURFACE THIS QUESTION MAY SEEM A BIT SUPERFLUOUS, BUT I ASSURE YOU THAT IT IS NOT.

FOR THERE ARE MANY MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH WHO ARE NOT , NECESSARILY, IN THIS FIGHT TO WIN.

1. **SOME OF ARE JUST GOING THROUGH THE MOTION.**
2. **SOME ARE IN IT AS A MATTER OF TRADITION.**
,
3. **SOME ARE IN IT BECAUSE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP CARRIES ALONG WITH A SENSE OF MORAL RESPECTABILITY.**
4. **SOME ARE IN IT BECAUSE IT IS A GOOD PLACE TO MAKE BUSINESS CONTACTS.**
5. **SOME ARE IN IT BECAUSE THEY ARE IMPRESSED WITH AN ARTICULATE AND GIFTED PULPIT.**
6. **SOME ARE IN IT BECAUSE THEY ARE TOUCH BY A MELODIOUS AND MESMERIZING MUSIC MINISTRY.**
7. **SOME ARE IN IT BECAUSE IT AFFORDS THEM THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE DIVAS IN THE CHOIR STAND!**
8. **SOME ARE IN IT BECAUSE THEY CAN PROMOTE THEIR OWN PERSONAL AGENDAS.**

BUT I STOPPED BY TO TELL YOU THAT IF YOU ARE IN IT FOR ANY OTHER REASON BUT TO WIN, THEN YOU ARE SHADOW BOXING. OR AS THE KJV PUTS IT JUST BEATING AT THE AIR.

FIRST WE ARE TOLD TO FIGHT.

TO FIGHT MEANS TO ACTIVELY ENGAGE IN THE PROMOTING OR THE PROTECTING OF ONE'S POINT OF VIEW OR TERRITORY.

IN THE REALM OF THE SPIRITUAL THE BELIEVER IS CHARGED TO ENGAGE IN WARFARE FOR THE PROMOTION OF THE FAITH IN WHICH WE HOLD DEAR.

THEN SECONDLY, WE RUN AND FIGHT WITH A PURPOSE IN MIND.

THAT PURPOSE IS TO SHARE OUR FAITH WITH THE LOST AND THE PERISHING.

FAITH IS DEFINED AS OUR CREED, OUR DOCTRINE, OUR SET OF BELIEFS IN THE WORD OF GOD.

AND IF IT IS DEAR TO US, THEN IT IS WORTH CONTENDING FOR.

1. IT IS **WORTH** GOING ON THE **SPIRITUAL BATTLEFIELD** FOR.
2. IT IS **WORTH** **STRIVING** FOR.
3. IT IS **WORTH** **ENGAGING THE ENEMY OF SOULS** FOR.
4. IT IS **WORTH** **TAKING A STAND** FOR.
5. IT IS **WORTH** **LABORING** FOR.
6. IT IS **WORTH** **HOLDING FAST** FOR.
7. IT IS **EVEN WORTH** **DYING** FOR.

THE NEXT ITEM WE NEED TO CLEARLY UNDERSTAND IS WHAT DOES THE TERM APOSTASY MEAN?

THE WORD APOSTASY IS TRANSLATED AS BACKSLIDING. IT IS ALSO USED TO DESCRIBE WHAT THEOLOGIANS CALL A FALLING AWAY OR SPIRITUAL DEFECTION.

PAUL DESCRIBES IT THIS WAY IN [1 COR 9:27] " *BUT I KEEP UNDER MY BODY, AND BRING IT INTO SUBJECTION: LEST THAT BY ANY MEANS, WHEN I HAVE PREACHED TO OTHERS, I MYSELF SHOULD BE A CASTAWAY.*"

IN MILITARY TERMS, IT IS CALLED DESERTION; IT REFERS TO ONE WHO EMBRACES CERTAIN POLITICAL AND MILITARY BELIEFS AND BECAUSE OF FEAR FALLS AWAY.

HE OR SHE IS NO LONGER WILLING TO ENDURE HARDSHIP FOR THE FAITH.

WE CAN'T RUN TO WIN UNTIL WE:

1. LAY DOWN OUR OWN AGENDAS . . .
2. LAY DOWN OUR OWN THOUGHTS . . .
3. LAY DOWN OUR OWN SWORDS . . .
4. LAY DOWN OUR PREJUDICES . . .
5. LAY DOWN OUR GOSSIP . . .
6. LAY DOWN OUR PETTINESS
7. LAY DOWN OUR BITTERNESS
8. LAY DOWN OUR ENVY

UNTIL THEN WE ARE JUST SHADOWING. WE ARE JUST BEATING AT THE AIR AND CONTRIBUTING NOTHING TO THE KINGDOM BUILDING PROCESS.

TRANSITION TO THE TEXT

IN THIS LETTER THAT THE APOSTLE PAUL ADDRESSED TO THE CORINTHIANS, IS ULTIMATELY ADDRESSED TO EVERY BELIEVER WHO HAS ENLISTED IN THE ARMY OF THE LORD, TO CONTEND FOR THE FAITH.

IN THE FACE OF APOSTASY THE BELIEVER ENDURES HARDNESS LIKE A GOOD SOLDIER.

FOR IF WE DON'T CONTEND AND ENDURE IN THE MIDST OF HARDSHIP, THEN WE MAKE OUR TESTIMONY OF NON EFFECT.

IF YOU FALL APART JUST AS SOON AS THE WINDS OF ADVERSITY START BLOWING YOUR WAY, THEN HOW ARE YOU GOING TO TELL THE SINNER THAT GOD IS ABLE?

LIKE A GOOD SOLDIER IN THE ARMY OF THE LORD, THE BELIEVER MUST LEARN HOW TO ENDURE HARDNESS.

WHEN HE IS:

- 1. PERSECUTED, HE MUST ENDURE;**
- 2. LIED ON, HE MUST ENDURE;**
- 3. FORSAKEN, HE MUST ENDURE;**
- 4. IS MISTREATED HE MUST ENDURE;**
- 5. WOUNDED, HE MUST ENDURE;**
- 6. PINNED DOWN BY HIS ENEMIES, HE MUST ENDURE;**

LIKE A GOOD SOLDIER IN THE ARMY OF THE LORD, THE BELIEVER MUST LEARN TO HOW TO RUN AND

HOW TO FIGHT, HOWEVER, HE WILL NEVER BE A GOOD SOLDIER, HE WILL NEVER LEARN TO CONTEND FOR THE FAITH IF HE NEVER ADVANCES BEYOND FOUNDATION CLASS.

ANOTHER THING HE NEEDS TO LEARN IN SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION CLASS IS HOW TO HAVE VICTORY OVER SIN.

FOR IF YOU DON'T EXPERIENCE ANY VICTORY IN FOUNDATION CLASS THEN YOU AREN'T LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE ANY VICTORY OUT ON THE BATTLEFIELD.

FAR TOO OFTEN, WE USHER NEW BELIEVERS OUT ON THE BATTLEFIELD AND INTO POSITIONS IN THE CHURCH WHICH REQUIRE SPIRITUAL STRENGTH THAT THEY JUST DON'T HAVE!

INSTEAD OF DIRECTING NEW BELIEVERS TO BIBLE CLASS , WE ASK THEM WHERE DO THEY WANT TO SERVE.

THEY DON'T HAVE THE STRENGTH TO SERVE ANYWHERE, BECAUSE THEY ARE IN NEED OF SERVICE THEMSELVES.

AS NEW BORN BABES IN CHRIST THEY NEED TO BE SERVED THE SINCERE MILK OF THE WORD.

IF YOU PUT A NEW BELIEVER IN AN AUXILIARY AND HE ATTENDS ONE OF THOSE MEETINGS WHERE THINGS PERHAPS AREN'T GOING PARTICULARLY SPIRITUAL THAT NIGHT, IT WILL BLOW THAT NEW BELIEVER RIGHT OUT OF THE SADDLE AND CHANCES ARE THAT HE IS NOT COMING BACK.

INSTEAD OF PUTTING THEM TO WORK, ENCOURAGE THEM

TO ENROLL IN A CLASS WHERE THE WORD OF GOD IS BEING TAUGHT.

PUT THEM IN A CLASS WHERE THEY CAN LEARN TO CONTEND FOR THE FAITH

IN SOME CHURCHES THEY HAVE FOLK IN STRATEGIC BATTLEFIELD LOCATIONS TRYING TO CONTEND FOR THE FAITH WHEN THEY OUGHT TO BE BACK IN FOUNDATION CLASS.

THEY HAVE FOLK IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS WHO DON'T EVEN KNOW WHETHER OR NOT THEY ARE SAVED.

ANOTHER MISTAKE WE MAKE IS THAT WE THINK THAT A PROFESSION IN THE SECULAR AUTOMATICALLY QUALIFIES THAT PERSON TO BE EXCEPTIONAL FOR A SIMILAR POSITION IN THE SPIRITUAL. NOT NECESSARILY SO.

1. JUST BECAUSE A PERSON CAN CONTEND IN THE CORPORATE WORLD DOES NOT MEAN THAT THEY CAN CONTEND IN THE SPIRITUAL REALM.
2. JUST BECAUSE A PERSON IS A FINANCIAL WIZARD IN THE SECULAR WORLD DOES NOT AUTOMATICALLY MAKE THAT PERSON A GOOD CHURCH TRUSTEE.
3. BEING ON THE TRUSTEE BOARD IS SPIRITUAL BATTLEFIELD POSITION.
4. THERE ARE MANY SHADOW BOXERS SITTING ON TRUSTEE BOARDS.

WHEREVER YOU WANT TO SERVE OR WHEREVER YOU ARE ASSIGNED TO SERVE THEN YOU MUST RECEIVE SOME TRAINING IN THAT AREA.

BUT, BEFORE YOU CAN SERVE ANYWHERE YOU

HAVE TO *FIRST* OF ALL, ADVANCE BY BUILDING ON THE *SURE* FOUNDATION CLASS.

1. GOD WANTS US TO ENDURE HARDNESS LIKE A GOOD SOLDIER.
2. HE WANTS US TO GROW UP AND MATURE IN THE FAITH.
3. HE WANTS US TO ADVANCE *BEYOND* FOUNDATION CLASS STATUS.

LIKE THE CHILD OUTGROWS THE NURSERY, THE BELIEVER MUST *OUTGROW* FOUNDATION CLASS.

1. THERE IS SOMETHING *TERRIBLY* WRONG WITH A PERSON WHO ENLISTED IN THE ARMY *THIRTY* (30) *YEARS* AGO, AND THEY *STILL* HAVE FOUNDATION CLASS *MENTALITY*.
2. THERE IS SOMETHING *TERRIBLY* WRONG WITH A PERSON WHO *REFUSES* TO GROW IN GRACE AND UNDERSTANDING OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST.
3. THERE IS SOMETHING *TERRIBLY* WRONG WITH A 16-YEAR OLD WALKING AROUND WITH A BABY BOTTLE.
4. IT'S ALRIGHT TO DESIRE THE SINCERE MILK OF THE WORD FOR A SPIRITUAL BABY BUT, THERE OUGHT TO COME A TIME WHEN YOU *SHOULD* BE ABLE TO *EAT MEAT*.
5. EATING THE *MEAT* OF GOD'S WORD IS A SIGN THAT *SPIRITUAL* GROWTH *IS* TAKING PLACE.
6. EATING THE *MEAT* OF GOD'S WORD IS A SIGN THAT YOU ARE *READY* TO CONTEND FOR THE FAITH.

HOWEVER, IF WE REFUSE TO GROW UP. WE WILL BECOME *COMPLACENT* IN OUR *IMMATURITY*.

IN OTHER WORDS, WE WILL BECOME *SATISFIED* BEING *SPIRITUAL INFANTS* TOSSED TO AND FRO BY EVERY WIND OF DOCTRINE.

ILLUSTRATION

THERE WAS THIS WOMAN WHO WAS A MEMBER OF A BAPTIST CHURCH FOR MANY YEARS. SHE WAS A TEACHER AND AN OFFICER IN THE CHURCH.

ONE SUNDAY SHE VISITED A CHURCH OF ANOTHER DENOMINATION WITH A FRIEND OF HERS.

SHE ATTENDED A COUPLE OF BIBLE STUDY CLASSES. THEY TAUGHT HER THAT IF SHE DIDN'T SPEAK IN TONGUES THAT SHE WASN'T SAVED AND DIDN'T HAVE THE HOLY SPIRIT.

SO SHE WENT OUT ON A TARRYING MISSION TRYING TO FIND THE HOLY SPIRIT.

SHE HAD ALREADY BEEN BAPTIZED BUT, THIS CHURCH TOLD HER THAT IT WAS WRONG FOR HER TO BE BAPTIZED IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND THAT SHE HAD TO BE BAPTIZED IN THE NAME OF JESUS ONLY!

THEY TAUGHT HER THAT WEARING MAKE-UP WAS WRONG SO SHE QUIT WEARING MAKE-UP.

SHE WAS TOSSED TO AND FRO BY EVERY WIND OF DOCTRINE.

SHE MADE THE SHADOW BOXING CIRCUIT.

1. YOU CAN NOT SUCCESSFULLY CONTEND FOR THE FAITH IF YOU ARE NOT CERTAIN OF YOUR FAITH;
2. YOU CAN NOT RUN THE RACE UNLESS YOU FIRST OF ALL GET IN THE RACE.
3. YOU CAN NOT OBTAIN THE PRIZE UNLESS YOU FIRST OF STRIVE FOR THE PRIZE.
4. AT BEST, ALL YOU CAN DO IS STAND ON THE SIDES, AWAY FROM THE MAIN EVENT AND JUST SHADOW BOX, JUST BEAT THE AIR.

SOME OF OUR MEMBERS TAKE UP PERMANENT POSITION ON THE PEWS AND THEY NEVER ADVANCE, THEY NEVER MOVE IN THE BATTLEFIELD ARENA OF CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH.

THEY SIMPLY GO FROM BEING A NEW BABE IN CHRIST TO AN OLD BABE IN CHRIST. AND THAT'S A MIGHTY PITIFUL SIGHT.

THEN THERE ARE THOSE WHO NEVER GET AROUND TO CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH BECAUSE THEY ARE SO BUSY CONTENDING FOR THOSE THING THAT ARE OF NO ETERNAL SIGNIFICANCE.

LIKE LITTLE BABIES, THEY THINK ONLY OF THEMSELVES.

AND WHEN THEY DON'T GET THEIR WAY THEY SCREAM AND HOLLA.

LIKE LITTLE CHILDREN, THEY CONTEND FOR POSITIONS ON THE PLAYGROUND, THEY FUSS AND FIGHT OVER POSITIONS IN THE CHURCH.

IF THEY CAN'T BE UP TO BAT FIRST, THEN THEY WON'T PLAY AT ALL.

LORD FORBID IF THEY OWN THE BAT, THEY WILL TAKE IT AND GO HOME.

THEY ARE NOT READY TO CONTEND FOR THE FAITH.

IF THEY CAN'T BE THE LEADER OR THE DIRECTOR, THEN THEY DON'T SUPPORT THE PROGRAM.

THEY ARE NOT READY TO CONTEND FOR THE FAITH.

IF THEY CAN'T BE THE CHAIRMAN OR THE PRESIDENT THEN THEY ACT LIKE NOTHING IS GOING ON.

THEY ARE NOT READY TO CONTEND FOR THE FAITH.

IF I AM NOT SINGING THIS SUNDAY, I AM GOING TO STAY AT HOME.

LIKE LITTLE CHILDREN THEY ARE IMMATURE. THEY ARE NOT READY TO CONTEND FOR THE FAITH.

BUT, WHAT THE IMMATURE MIND DOESN'T REALIZE IS THAT ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS BE WILLING TO SERVE THE LORD IN ANY CAPACITY.

AND IF YOU DO THAT, IF YOU HAVE LEADERSHIP ABILITY, LIKE CREAM IT WILL RISE TO THE TOP.

FINALLY IF WE ARE GOING TO SUCCESSFULLY

CONTEND FOR THE FAITH WE MUST MAKE OUR WAY TO THE BATTLEFIELD . . .

GOD DOESN'T WANT US TO REMAIN SPIRITUAL INFANTS.

HE DIDN'T DESIGN FOUNDATION CLASS FOR US TO TAKE UP PERMANENT RESIDENCE THERE.

FOUNDATION CLASS WAS DESIGNED FOR US TO RECEIVE OUR INITIAL TRAINING.

THE MISSION IS:

1. NOT IN HERE,
2. ITS OUT ON THE BATTLEFIELD,
3. THE MINISTRY IS NOT WITHIN THESE FOUR WALLS,
4. ITS OUT ON THE BATTLEFIELD.

DON'T BE TELLING ME HOW GOOD GOD IS, I ALREADY KNOW . . . GET OUT OF HERE AND TELL THE LOST AND THE PERISHING . . .

GET OUT OF HERE AND CONTEND FOR THE FAITH. GET OUT OF HERE AND GO OUT THERE AND HOLD UP THE BLOOD-STAINED BANNER FOR MY LORD.

NOTE THE SONG WRITER DOES NOT SAY 'ONWARD SHADOW BOXERS', HE SAYS:

"ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIER MARCHING AS TO WAR, WITH THE CROSS OF JESUS GOING ON BEFORE.

CHRIST THE ROYAL MASTER LEADS AGAINST THE

FOE
FORWARD INTO BATTLE SEE HIS BANNER GO . . .

ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIER MARCHING AS TO
WAR . . .
WITH THE CROSS OF JESUS GOING ON BEFORE”.

ARE YOU RUNNING AND FIGHTING AS THE
APOSTLE INSTRUCTED OR ARE YOU JUST SHADOW
BOXING ?

ARE YOU KEEPING YOUR BODY UNDER
SUBJECTION? : OR ARE YOU JUST SHADOW
BOXING ?

1. PAYING DUES INSTEAD OF PAYING TITHES,
2. SINGING BUT NOT LIVING WHAT YOUR ARE SINGING,
3. PREACHING BUT NOT LIVING WHAT YOU ARE PREACHING,
4. USHERING WITH A FROWN INSTEAD OF A SMILE,
5. TRUSTEE, BUT YOU CAN'T BE TRUSTED,
6. ONLY SERVE BECAUSE YOU ARE THE PRESIDENT...