

## *A Family of Addicts*

There are a host of little known characters in the Bible, yet sometimes they are great examples. One such example is Stephanas, found only in two passages (1 Corinthians 1:16; 16:15-17). The second biblical citation reads, "I urge you, brethren – you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints." Notice that Paul said that the household of Stephanas had "devoted" themselves to the ministry. Stephanas was enthusiastically dedicated to God and His work. It could also be said that he was addicted, not just him, but his whole household. We often think that any addiction is bad. Multitudes of people today are addicted to various harmful or even evil things, such as drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, etc. Many would also think that an over commitment to religion is likewise bad. The term "religious fanatic" carries a bad connotation. However, when we are truly committed to God and His ministry, addiction is good.

Stephanas did not look for an excuse not to be involved in the work of the Lord, nor did he expect others to do the work. He could not sit idly by while either the work was undone or others labored. Sometimes one may say in jest, "Work doesn't bother me a bit. I can sit and look at it all day." When it comes to religion, that humorous statement is true far too often. It seems that the majority of church members can sit and look at the work of the church all day, yet never try to do much. The old preacher joke is that 10% of the church does 90% of the work, and it seems that the joke is not far from the truth. Stephanas was undoubtedly part of the 10%.

Stephanas was one of the few who was personally baptized by Paul (1:16), and his house is said to be the "firstfruits" of Paul's labors in Achaia. His family understood that faith without works is dead (James 2:20). They understood about priorities. Many intend to do things for God, but other things keep getting in the way. However, when a person is addicted or devoted to something, nothing gets in the way. A drug addict will do virtually anything to get his drug. Stephanas was part of the church in Corinth, a church with many problems. The congregation did not have enough concern for Paul, but Stephanas and two others did the work the entire church should have been doing (1 Corinthians 16:17). Their desire to help Paul and his ministry was their number one priority. Where is the church in your list of priorities?

An addiction compels you to do something. It becomes something that drives you or constrains you. Addicts will often say they want to quit, but their addiction controls them. The love of Christ should compel us as well. "For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus; that if One died for all, then all died"(2 Corinthians 5:14). Paul said he was a debtor to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, to the wise and to the unwise (Romans 1:14). We are to be controlled by the Spirit. "And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit"(Ephesians 5:18). When we place ourselves under the control of the Spirit, His Word, then we will be compelled to do things that may seem foolish to the world. We will be busy working for the Lord.

God and His church need many more to addict themselves to service. An addict does not wait for someone to offer to satisfy his addiction. He seeks it out. Thus, one devoted to the service of God does not wait to be asked to do something. God was a volunteer. God voluntarily gave His Son on the cross. Jesus voluntarily gave His life. When God needed a messenger, Isaiah said, "Here am I, send me." David volunteered to fight Goliath. Nehemiah volunteered to go back and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. All of these people, and others as well, took it upon themselves to do what they knew was a duty. They considered it a privilege and would not shirk the work. Yet, many Christians will not do anything unless asked, and even then, they act as if they are doing you a favor by helping. We need to remember that we do not work for any man; rather, we are working for God.

The work of the church is for every member, not for "them" (whoever that might be). The unsaved always needs to be taught. The sick, the mournful and the aged always need help and encouragement. We must do our duty and not wait for some "organized program." We can rest assured that God will reward our labors. "For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward his name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister" (Hebrews 6:10). Alvin York, the great military hero of WWI, was once asked why he did the deeds of bravery that he performed. He simply stated in his Tennessee mountain English, "I seen my duty and done it." Could you make that same statement regarding the work at your congregation?

*By: Jerry Bates*