

Title: Assurance in Persecution

Text: Ephesians 3: 1-13

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Place: SGBC, New Jersey

Ephesians 3: 1: For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,...13: Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

Natural man wants a preacher well-regarded by the masses, a gospel well-received by the masses and a Jesus accepted by the masses. Natural men need to see things to assure them their gospel is true.

Yet, the apostle Paul, sent of Christ himself, was so despised by the masses that they beat him and put him in prison. His gospel was so despised by the masses that they called it anti-law, licentious and blasphemous. And our Lord Jesus was so despised by the masses that they crucified him. Sinners are still as depraved, today. The truth is still in the minority in our day.

Knowing such rejection could cause discouragement to believers, Paul gives 5 words of assurance in Ephesians 3. These are 5 things that Christ had done for Paul.

Remember, the things Paul writes here, he writes under the inspiration of the Spirit of God. This is Christ himself comforting his people through Paul.

Title: Assurance in Persecution

Proposition: When we are rejected for Christ's sake, we should assure our brethren that it is reason to rejoice.

Now, as an apostle, Paul experienced things, and was given gifts, in a greater measure than preachers in our day are given—there are no apostles in our day. Yet, these 5 things are things which every God-sent preacher, to a lesser degree, must experience in order to be Christ's preacher. In fact, this is how every believer is made a servant and steward of Christ. These things shall and must be experienced by every elect, redeemed sinner in order to be saved.

I. FIRST, PAUL ASSURES HIS BRETHREN THAT CHRIST GAVE HIM A STEWARDSHIP FOR THEM—Ephesians 3: 2:...ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:

Dispensation

Christ gives his preacher a stewardship to dispense the gospel of God's grace to the Lord's household. An illustration of "dispensation": Paul said

1 Corinthians 11: 23: I have received of the Lord, that which also I delivered unto you.

Here he says "the dispensation [the stewardship] of the grace of God [of the gospel] is given to me, to give to you. That is how a dispensation works.

Christ's Dispensation

The chief dispensation is given from God the Father to his Son, the God-Man, to give to God's elect. After Christ accomplished the redemption of every elect child of God, God the Father exalted Christ to be Head over all things to the church. **Read Ephesians 1: 20-23**

Application: What comfort to you and I who are called to suffer for Christ's sake! Our Head is the governor with all power over all.

Paul assured his troubled brethren that the church is the fullness of Christ. He has made himself so one with his elect that he is as incomplete without us as we are without him. Christ is filling all, in all his elect, in all his body. All grace that God the Father has for each of his elect children, Christ our Head, shall dispense to each of his redeemed children, in time, through the gospel through the Holy Spirit.

Given to Suffer

Besides this, when the Lord Jesus called Paul, he showed Paul the "great things he must suffer for Christ's name's sake." (Acts 9: 16) So he has us.

Matthew 10: 24: The disciple is not above *his* master, nor the servant above his lord. 25: It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more *shall they call* them of his household? 26: Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known. 27: What I tell you in darkness, *that* speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, *that* preach ye upon the housetops. 28: And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Therefore, Paul declares to his brethren, that he was not ashamed for the things he suffered. Doing so, Paul pointed them from things below to Christ above.

Application: In this, Paul gives us an example to follow. We should always assure the saints that all is well. Christ gave me this privilege to suffer for his name's sake.

The only way we will not faint, but continue ministering to Christ's people, even when rejected, even when imprisoned, the only way we will continue trusting Christ to work in his people, is by having been made a steward by Christ himself.

II. SECONDLY, EVERY BELIEVER, EVERY PREACHER, MUST BE GIVEN A REVELATION OF THE GOSPEL--v3: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery;

Certified Gospel

Paul gives assurance that his gospel is the certified gospel given by divine revelation from Christ himself. He declares what Christ taught him. (the parenthesis refers back to the first 2 chapters—Paul had a great understanding **in the mystery of Christ.**)

- Here in verse 6, Paul declares again that God chose an elect people, in Christ, before the foundation of the world—**v6: That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs,**
- That Christ redeemed each one by fulfilling the law for us, making us—**v6: of the same body.**
- That Christ sends his preachers, sends the Holy Spirit, gives life, faith and repentance, making us—**v6: partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.**
- He assures them "**Whereof I was made a minister.**"

Application: The gospel is such a mystery to a dead sinner, God is so hated by unregenerate sinners—that no preacher, nor any other sinner, can believe and bear witness of Christ until Christ himself sends us the gospel and by divine revelation makes known unto us the mystery of the gospel. So Christ moves Paul to assure his brethren

that he got his gospel from Christ himself. Doing so, Paul assures them that his suffering had not made him ashamed of the gospel. And that they should not be.

Romans 1: 16: For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. 17: For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

Illustration: A preacher in 1700's was imprisoned for preaching the gospel. He said, "I glory and take delight [in my chains], esteeming them at a higher [value] than chains and rings of gold....The rattling of my chains is...music in my ears...because I am bound...for maintaining the truth of the gospel."

**III. THIRDLY, HE ASSURES HIS BRETHREN HE WAS CALLED BY GOD'S EFFECTUAL GRACE—
Ephesians 3: 7: Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.**

Effectual Grace

The only man who preaches and bears witness of God's effectual grace, faithfully, is the man who has been saved by effectual grace. The very reason the gospel is the power of God unto salvation is because Christ is the Power of God. He dispenses his grace effectually to his people.

Application: What comfort! Paul knew that Christ was overruling everything in his life by that same power. Men did not put him in prison. He gladly says, V1: **"I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus."**

He said, "seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not." (2 Cor 4: 1) How did we receive mercy?—By the gift of the grace of God, BY HIS EFFECTUAL POWER. So by that same power we faint not.

Application: This is one reason men, turn from preaching Christ. It is why believers deny Christ, when the pressure becomes too great. We must be preserved by the same irresistible power of God that called us to faith in Christ. After all his suffering, Paul still declared, "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." (2 Cor 4: 7) By this, Paul assures his brethren that this same irresistible grace shall keep us till we meet Christ face-to-face! What assurance!

**IV. FOURTHLY, PAUL ASSURES HIS BRETHREN THAT HE IS NOTHING AND CHRIST IS ALL—
Ephesians 3: 8: Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;**

Nothingness

Christ made Paul behold his nothingness—**Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given,** Grace is for sinners; grace is for those who are "less than the least"; grace is given—freely, not works or grace ceases to be grace!

Application: When we declare that it pleased God to save by preaching, men will accuse us of preaching Roman Catholic doctrine. I have had that happen to me. But we are in good company. They said of Moses, "You take too much on yourself. We are all holy." **So we assure our brethren, WE ARE NOTHING. Christ is All!**

When Christ made Paul know his nothingness. Then Christ became All to him. Before, Paul had his letters, he was riding high in the saddle, he was doing what he would do. After Christ put him in the dust...

Acts 9:6: And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt **thou** have me to do

Preach the Gospel

What did Christ command him to do?—**v8:...that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; 9: And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:**

When stripped of our counterfeit riches then men will preach **the unsearchable riches of Christ.**

Illustration: There is no good news in message of salvation by works. Take a man paralyzed from his neck down. The message of salvation by works would not give that man any hope. Every sinner is just that unable to save himself by his works. The message of grace is the message by which God shall save and keep his elect.

Isa 40:6 The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass...but the word of our God shall stand for ever....52: 7: Thy God reigneth!

V. FIFTHLY, PAUL ASSURED THEM THAT WHATEVER CHRIST GIVES US TO SUFFER, CHRIST IS USING IT TO MINISTER TO HIS SAINTS.

For Your Good

Notice Paul says at the end of v13, my tribulations are “**for your glory**”—your good. (Turn to 2 Cor 1)

2 Corinthians 1: 3:...the God of all comfort; 4: Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. 5: For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. 6: And whether we be afflicted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation. 7: And our hope of you *is* stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so *shall ye be* also of the consolation.

In his suffering, Paul was comforted by Christ. So Paul was able to assure them, by experience, that Christ would do the same for them. It was for their good. By Paul’s imprisonment Christ taught Paul that his grace is sufficient. So, Paul was able to teach his brethren, by experience, Christ’s grace would be sufficient for them. It was for their good.

Illustration: Donnie and Mary Bell

I would have never preached many of the messages God has given me, were it not for suffering rejection for Christ. The Savior we preach is a man of sorrows acquainted with grief. He shall make his ministers “men of sorrows, acquainted with grief.” The servant is not above his Lord.

Yet this is for our good and for your good. It is the only way we can minister by experience, to Christ’s needy people, assuring them his grace is sufficient.

Application: Let me point out one more thing. Paul assured his brethren in v12: In [Christ] we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith OF HIM. Then in verse 14 Paul says, “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,...”

Application: Brethren, in [Christ] we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith OF HIM. May Christ make us to bow our knees for grace to help. When we truly are driven to pray, those are the hardest times. But those are the times when we really learn that this work is his work. Brethren, stay at Christ’s feet!

Oh, we will see men come and go. When scandalous things are spoken against our Savior, against our gospel, or against God’s preacher, men who are already offended will use it to justify leaving. But may we always reassure our brethren, to never be discouraged, rejoice, continue steadfast believing Christ—this is for his glory and for your good—always! Christ shall keep those who are his. He shall not lose one!

Amen!