

-STUDIES IN EPHESIANS- #40

-PETER'S PREJUDICES-

"Paul the prisoner." Eph. 3:1.

Purposely we are skipping right now the words "For this cause." You will find them again in verse 14. If you would get the connection here, you should read chapter 2 and then go right on to 3:14. In doing so you will note that 3:1-13 is parenthetical.

This is not the first time that Paul has been a prisoner. But it is the first time that we meet with the expression "Prisoner of Jesus Christ," or "Prisoner of the Lord," as we find in 4:1.

There is another thing to be noted, too, in this connection. In times past his prison experiences were an outcome of enmity of the Jews on account of his gospel of grace or on account of tradesmen who saw their gains disappearing because of the gospel being preached. All these imprisonments were aimed at the person of Paul. But after Acts 28:28 things began to shift. The person of Paul is not so much aimed at as his message. We are not sure that this imprisonment here was at the instigation of Jews or for some other cause. The reason no longer seems important, so it is not mentioned.

Neither, primarily, is Paul a prisoner of the Roman government; he speaks of himself as the prisoner of Jesus Christ.

When a prisoner first at Jerusalem and then at Rome, he spoke of being in bonds for the hope of Israel. But that is no longer the reason. He is now a prisoner for the Gentiles. In past centuries this has been a great puzzle to many a Bible student.

There must be some deep reason why that Paul makes this digression of Eph. 3:1-13. Does his apostleship need defending? If so, is it the same apostleship as that of Gal. 1? Has this apostleship any relation to the decision at the council in Jerusalem as recorded in Acts 15? These are some of the questions that come to mind as we begin this chapter.

Besides the references to this prison ministry in Eph. 3:1 and 4:1, we find it again in 6:20. There he is an ambassador in bonds. Then we meet with it again in Phil. 1:13 and there he speaks of his bonds in Christ. He speaks to the Colossians (4:3) of being in bonds for the mystery of Christ and at the end (4:18) he asks them to remember his bonds. In 2 Tim. 1:8 the testimony of our Lord is linked with Paul His prisoner.

So these four epistles, Eph., Phil., Col., and 2 Tim. are called the prison epistles. In them we find the doctrine and walk for the member of the church of the dispensation of the mystery.

We need not be ashamed of Paul's prison record. We are reminded of how that at one time Joseph was sold as a slave into the land of Egypt. But he told his brothers that "God did send me before you to preserve life." So the prison ministry of Paul is a message of hope to us today. It is a revelation of the highest and best God has ever offered to mankind at any time. Let us be thankful for it.

There has been a great deal of criticism of Peter and his prejudices. It is said that he just could not get it into his head that he was to preach to the Gentiles. So let us examine the facts of the case.

In Matt. 10:1 the Lord calls His disciples to Him; in verse 5 He tells them that they are not to go into the way of the Gentiles, nor into any city of the Samaritans; but rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Here it is evident that the Lord did not intend for the 12 to preach to the Gentiles.

In Matt. 28:19, 20 we have an apparent contradiction of this command. Here they, that is, the 11 are to go to all nations. But as we read on into Acts we find that they never did do this. Peter is the only one of the 12 that we have any record of ever preaching to Gentiles. And Peter did it only once.

In the opening of Acts we find that the apostles preach to Jews only. The message is repentance in order that the Messiah might come back and restore all things to Israel, according as the prophets had said. So at the feast of the Jews called Pentecost, Peter was preaching to Jews only.

Now Peter must have known that the promise made to Abraham included Gentiles in the blessing, for God has said "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Gen. 22:18. But God did not make known how this was to be accomplished. If we were to know that, maybe the puzzle would not be so hard to solve.

In Exodus 19 we find that Israel was destined to be a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. There you have it. A priest is a mediator. So Israel was to be a go-between for the nations and God. Has Israel ever been that? Not yet. That still is future. But when Israel does take that position, then the great commission of Matt. 28 will go into effect. In resurrection, during the thousand years, the 12 will lead a great revival campaign among the nations. Now we begin to see why there was no preaching to Gentiles in Acts by the 12 save in the one instance where Peter, in the house of Cornelius opened the doors of the kingdom to the Gentiles and made way for the ministry of Saul of Tarsus.

In Acts 15 this matter came before the council in Jerusalem. The decision was that Paul should go on with his ministry among the Gentiles, but the apostles were to keep to the circumcision. This decision was no mistake. It was in keeping with the will of the Lord.

There was an instance when Peter was a little afraid of the Jews at Antioch. He had been freely eating with Gentiles and seconding the work of Paul among them, but as soon as some Judaisers came in from Jerusalem, he took an about face in the matter and even Barnabas was influenced not a little. Paul told Peter to his face that he was wrong.

Never mind Peter and his prejudices. He knew the will of the Lord and did not stray far from it. If only you and I could obey just a fraction as well as Peter!

-WHY STUDY THE BIBLE?-

-THE GOOD DEPOSIT-

I. "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so." Acts 17:11. These folks studied with a purpose in mind. They ransacked the Scriptures. Because of this they were noble. So it may be that many Christians are not noble, just poor peasants. They should study and join God's nobility. They should search for truth. In our ransacking, we should have these goals;

1. To see the Lord. "(Ye) search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me." John 5:39. From Gen. 3:15 to the end of the Bible there is a continuous thread of testimony concerning the Christ. If we would know Him, every bit of this testimony should be read and evaluated. Any idea we may have outside of what is there revealed is just idolatry. Idols may be in the mind as well as expressed in sticks and stones.

2. For personal growth. "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." Acts 20:32. It is by the Word that we grow. It is our food. In Deut. 8:3 we are told that a man does not live by bread (the kind that perishes) alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord. Our Lord declared that He was the bread of life.

3. To be furnished for work. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. That the man of God may be perfect, thoroly furnished unto all good works." 2 Tim. 3:16, 17. Works we may think good may not at all be the good works that were before ordained that we should walk in them. So it is best to get all instructions from God's Word rather than going by what we think. After all, all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags in the sight of God. Of ourselves there is nothing we can do that will be pleasing to Him. Only His will is acceptable.

4. To be approved of God. "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. This is not a matter of standing, but of state. Our standing before God in Christ needs no improving. But our state, our works do need improving. So we should strive diligently to be approved.

5. To be kept from sin. "Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee." Psa. 119:11. The secret is; if we would get away from the bondage of sin, we must have the Word, not in our library, nor yet just in the mind, but it must become a very part of our being. We must eat the bread of life, so that it will become a part of us, hid in the heart. We do not cease sinning by resolutions or reforms. They are not strong in that respect. There is power in the Word. It can do the work.

This deposit, or something entrusted to one's care occurs 3 times in the NT, 1 Tim. 6:20 and 2 Tim. 1:12, 14. Paul is the writer in each instance, so it is Pauline truth, whatever it may be.

"O Timothy, keep in safe custody thy deposit, avoiding the profane, empty babblings and oppositions of the falsely-named knowledge, which, some professing, have erred concerning the faith."

In looking over the epistles to Timothy, we seek what that deposit might be. It has to do with the gospel of the glory of our blessed God. It concerns the faith into which Timothy was begotten. It is more than the grace that was preached to Gentiles during Acts. It is concerning the glory. So it must be the secret, the dispensation that had been hidden from all the ages and generations till it was revealed to Paul. Now Paul gives over this sacred deposit to the keeping of Timothy.

Paul has suffered many things in his experience in the holding of the good deposit. Thru them all he was not ashamed. So he says, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to guard my deposit (which He hath committed unto me) against that day. Hold fast the pattern of sound words, which (words) thou didst hear from me, (hold them fast) in faith and love, which (are) in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit which dwells in us by Holy Spirit."

Others had boasted of their science and knowledge and had failed. Others had turned away from truth to fables. But Timothy is told to hold fast.

Not only is Timothy told to hold fast this truth, but to seek out others apt to teach and of good report who will also take care of the good deposit. How can we apply this today?

Just as in that time, we find that many who received the truth gladly at the first, in time when persecution was turned on or they began to boast in their knowledge, withered and died. They turned from the truth, preferring fables which tickle the ears of the fickle crowd. Fables also bring in the cash. From the most ancient times beggars have told tales for a bit of cash.

So we look about today to see who might be occupying Timothy's position, and holding his trust. They are few. Few pulpits are devoted to the good deposit. Few papers are sending forth the good news. At that time all Asia had departed from Paul (and his good deposit). Now all Christendom has done the same. They are too busy trying to make up a corporate unity here on the earth, that they have no time keeping the unity which has already been made.

For those who in humility of mind and heart have been able to grasp the great secret and its implications, there is a great responsibility to keep the good deposit. If a man is determined to preach it, he may have to go to work to help make his living. He may lose a lot of friends. He may be thrown out of his ministry. But the command is, KEEP.....

-ETERNAL TRUTHS-

-BEGINNERS' CORNER- #6

Some truth was truth for yesterday, some truth is truth for today, and some truth is truth for all time, eternal truth. So in John 17 are some truths that were for yesterday, but which even remain as truth for today. We too are included in that wonderful prayer, for He says "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me thru their word."

I. We are given to Christ. Seven times He says so (vv. 2, 6, 6, 9, 11, 12, 24). Today we are His inheritance (Eph. 1:18). God said to His Son, 'Ask of Me and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance.' We are the heathen (Gentiles), no question of that!

II. We are not of the world (v. 14, 16). No, we cannot be of the world if we are seated with Him in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:6). Any one who is a friend of the world is the enemy of God. Our sphere of desires and actions must be higher than the world. The world exalts man; the Christian exalts Christ. The two have nothing in common. It is true that church members belong to worldly organizations and are in all the reform movements that one can think of, but these are of the world.

III. We are left in the world (v. 11, 15). And so we should walk as children of light (Eph. 5:8). We are not to withdraw ourselves and live in monasteries, but to be a witness to the world. We need not fear for the Lord prays that we shall not fall in the evil of the world.

IV. We are sent into the world (v. 18). As Christ was sent into the world, even so are we. But we are not to set our affections on the things of the earth or world, but on the things above where Christ sitteth (Col. 3:1, 2). We should so walk and love one another that the world will know Whom we follow.

V. We are hated by the world (v. 14). It is strange, but the world respects the man of God and at the same time hates him. His life condemns the world and that makes the world angry. The Christian who would make friends with the world by compromise or any other course becomes the enemy of God. It is impossible to please God and the world at the same time.

VI. We are kept from the evil in the world (v. 15). We have an advocate within that we may not sin. We also have an advocate at the right hand of the Father to intercede if we do sin. We have a double protection. Hide the Word of God in your heart that you may not sin against Him (Psa. 119:11).

VII. We are to witness for Christ in the world (v. 20). It is thru our witness that folks are brot to God. If our witness is dimmed or marred in any way, then we may cause some to stumble. We must be very careful in our walk as well as witness that we lift up the Christ that all may see. He will draw all men (without distinction) unto Himself.

There is one great saying in this chapter that should make us think; I HAVE GIVEN THEM THY WORD. What a responsibility we have there! What shall we do with it? Let us glorify God and manifest the Father's name.

Peter stood up after Pentecost and said these words, as recorded in Acts 2 & 3, "Ye men of Israel... this same Jesus of Nazareth whom ye crucified, God hath raised up... because it was not possible that he should be hidden of it... therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ."

"Now when they heard this they were pricked in their hearts and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter said, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost... For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."

Now the question arises in our minds and rightly so, What was the promise and to whom? If we know this, then we can proceed with our study of Acts, rightly divided. If we were orthodox we might say the promise was to any believing Christian and make a fine sermon of it. But if we will turn to our Scriptures for our interpretation, it will show us to be quite wrong.

Peter distinctly made the address to, "Ye men of Israel... Men and brethren... let all the house of Israel know..." Then he said, "That He would raise up Christ to sit on His throne (the throne of David)!"

In 3:25, 26 he said, "Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, "And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus sent Him to bless you,"

If any of these passages gives an inkling that the Gentiles were to benefit in this, Unto you first... blessing, I have overlooked it!

Also Peter spoke of the promise. Was this to Gentiles? In Gen. 12:7 God said to Abraham "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee..." In 2 Sam. 7:24 "For thou hast confirmed to thyself thy people Israel to be a people unto thee forever and thou Lord art become their God." And in Jer. 31:31 "Behold the days come saith the Lord that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah."

So the people were not Gentiles, and the promise was not made to Gentiles. So all we have left are those afar off, and as many as the Lord our God shall call. But even this slim hope fades if we turn to the original Gr. For here it reads, "For to you is the promise (Israel) and to your children and to those at a distance, as many as may call the Lord our God."

There is not a shred of evidence from the 12th chapter of Gen. to Pentecost that the Gentiles had been given any hope or promise. Peter said the Jews crucified Jesus thru ignorance. Are we determined to do the same thing? They had the prophets and the Scriptures to believe. We have all that and a risen Christ too. Are we too going to sell our inheritance for cunningly devised fables? DENTON C. ADEBY

-DO YOU KNOW?-

-YOUR EDITOR SPEAKS-

31. Q. When did certain believers begin to be quickened, raised, and seated in the heavenlies in Christ?
- A. In the Acts period we find a three-fold identification of the believer with Christ. It is with His death, burial, and resurrection. See Rom. 6:3-5. Since the hope of those believers was the kingdom, there is nothing there about being seated with Him. But when we come to Eph. 2:4-6, for the first time we have the gospel of quickening, raising, and session with Christ in the heavenlies.
32. Q. When did believers cease to look for an earthly kingdom and begin to have a hope of going to heaven at resurrection?
- A. During Acts the hope was the so-called rapture of 1 Cor. 15 and 1 Thess. 4. This was the coming of the Lord to set up the Davidic kingdom of prophecy. It must be noted that Paul also included himself in this hope. But this is all changed after Acts 28:28. Paul no longer speaks of the Lord's return, but of the being manifested with Him in glory in the heavenlies. Also Paul ceased to look for the being taken up alive and in his second epistle to Timothy he speaks of his departure or: decease.
33. Q. When did the calling "from the foundation of the world" cease and the calling "from before the foundation of the world" begin?
- A. The time element of the kingdom and its purpose is expressed as "since" or "from" the foundation of the world. See Matt. 25:34; Rev. 13:8. But the purpose of the mystery has an earlier dating. The choosing there is from before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4).
34. Q. When did Gentiles cease to be partakers of the Word which was sent to Israel and receive a gospel of their own?
- A. Gentiles began to be partakers of the Word which was sent to Israel when Peter preached in the house of Cornelius. In Rom. 15:27 Gentiles are said to be partakers of the spiritual things of Israel. It all came by the Word. Gentiles are said to be Abraham's seed in Gal. 3:27-29. This is by faith in Christ. But they partake of the blessings of Abraham. In Eph. we find this arrangement has ceased. No blessings now thru Abraham. All are in Christ. Eph. 1:3,4.
35. Q. When were the Jewish Christians, who were zealous of the law, released from the obligations of the law?
- A. Acts 21:20 speaks of Jews who were believers and at the same time zealous of the law. Nothing was wrong with this. But after Acts 28:28 there was a sure word about this. See Col. 2:16,20-23. Also read Eph. 2:14-16. The law was a part of the wall of partition which has been abolished. Circumcision was the main block in this wall of enmity. All these differences in the flesh are gone.

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