

Series: Ephesians

Title: Rejoice When Persecuted for the Gospel

Text: Ephesians 3: 1, 13

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Ephesians 3: 13: Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

Years before this, the apostle Paul had preached the gospel in Ephesus. Christ called out many of his redeemed saints in Ephesus. They loved Paul for the gospel he preached unto them. Most of those members were older now. Many new member had never met Paul.

The last time those older believers saw Paul he was going up to Jerusalem. Imagine their heartbreak when the news came that Paul was now in prison. False rumors spread through the churches. Paul was accused of, “teach[ing] all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place.” (Acts 21: 28) It was because of the message Paul preached.

Imagine if I travelled to preach somewhere else. Word came to you that your pastor was in jail. Men said, he is preaching against God’s people, he is preaching against the law of God, against the place where we worship and he has taken up with rebels against God and has polluted everything we regard as holy.

If you had not heard from me, personally, that would cause great confusion in your minds. It would greatly discourage many. Some would have their faith shaken. Without hearing from me, personally, you really would not know what to think.

That was the situation between the apostle Paul and the church at Ephesus. Paul is writing this letter to set the record straight—to assure them his persecution was reason to rejoice, rather than faint. To assure them, in spite of the persecution and scandal, this was for their good and Christ’s glory.

Ephesians 3: 13: Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

Proposition: When we, as believers, behold God’s preachers, suffer persecution, rejection or false accusations from men for preaching the gospel, never become discourage, but rather rejoice and continue steadfast believing Christ, assembling to hear that gospel.

Title: Rejoice When Persecuted for the Gospel

We have reason to rejoice in persecution when it is because of the gospel of Christ which we preach and believe and by which we are saved.

You would think after reading the first two chapters, the statement would be, “For this cause, I Paul, was received gladly for the gospel sake.” Instead, we read

Eph 3: 1: For this cause I Paul, the prisoner...

Why are men offended at the gospel of Christ? Sinners are just as offended today by the gospel as they were in the apostle Paul’s day. Why is that? What would cause men to imprison, beat and kill believers for the sake of the gospel? We will take the four things they accused Paul of as our outline. This is why men are offended at the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I. FIRST, MEN ARE OFFENDED AND ACCUSE US AS THEY ACCUSED PAUL SAYING HE PREACHES AGAINST THE PEOPLE.

They meant against the earthly Israel, the natural sons of Abraham. In our day, men think the same thing—that we are preaching against them, their father’s, mothers, preachers and brethren who believe another gospel—when they hear the gospel of Christ. It is because the gospel declares God’s holy nation, his house, his church and kingdom, is not earthly but spiritual.

Our Natural State is Sin

Every sinner’s natural born state is sinful. Nothing about our natural born condition contributes to our salvation: not even if you were a direct son of Abraham himself—Ishmael was cast out; not even if you were born in natural Israel; not even if you were of the tribe of Benjamin, a Pharisee of Pharisee’s. Paul was all that before being born of God. Paul said, “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ...And do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.” (Philippians 3: 7-8)

God’s Holy Nation is Spiritual

God’s holy nation is spiritual. Made up of God’s elect chosen in Christ from before the foundation of the world—elect Gentiles, as well as elect Jews. We are redeemed out of every nation into his holy nation by the blood of Christ Jesus. God’s people are freeborn into his holy nation—of God the Holy Spirit by Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2: 17: [Christ] came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.
18: For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

Please understand, to say any natural thing contributes to our salvation—even to say God will call sinners in Israel because they are natural sons of Abraham—is to attribute salvation to the sinner. Salvation is by God’s grace. Salvation is not because of anything natural about us.

God is a Spirit

The woman at the well was a Samaritan, a heathen woman. She worshipped idol gods at an earthly mountain separate from earthly Jerusalem in earthly Mt. Zion in earthly Israel. But she was a chosen child of God, about to be born again by the Holy Spirit, through the gospel Christ declared to her. So he said to her,

John 4: 22: Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. 22: Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews.

By “Jew” he meant, not natural-born Jews, but as Paul said in Romans 2:

Romans 2: 22: He is not a Jew which is one outwardly, neither is circumcision outward in the flesh, But he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God.

John 4: 23: But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. 24: God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

Paul declared this clearly in the first two chapters of Ephesians so he writes here in:

Ephesians 3: 3: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, 4: Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) 5: Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; 6: That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:...11: According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:

So when Paul preached that God elected his people, regenerates and gives faith, makes us one by Christ's body, it offended those whose confidence was in their flesh, in natural, earthy things.

Today, naturally religious men are offended when they hear nothing natural about them makes a difference in their salvation. They may not imprison you but they will separate themselves from the gospel. The gospel strip away his false refuge.

This is the cause for which Paul was in prison. So he says in **Ephesians 3:13: Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.**

II. SECONDLY, MEN ARE OFFENDED AND ACCUSE US, AS THEY DID PAUL, SAYING WE PREACH AGAINST THE LAW.

Christ is our Righteousness

They accused Paul of preaching against the law because Paul preached what he wrote in Ephesians 2, that Christ alone fulfilled the law on behalf of God's elect thus breaking down the middle wall of partition between us, making us one with God and each other, by the body and blood of Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2: 13: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. 14 : For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*; 15: Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, *so* making peace;

Why is this offensive to men? It is because men who are trusting in their law-keeping are going about to establish their own righteousness. Therefore, they hate to hear,

Romans 10: 4: For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

The law is holy and just so it must be and can only be fulfilled by one who is holy and righteous and that one is Christ Jesus the GodMan Mediator between God and his people.

Christ is our Sanctification

Also, they claim they grow in sanctification by their law-keeping. The gospel declares we are sanctified through the Spirit, the flesh profits nothing.

Philippians 3:3: For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

See, the gospel takes away the cloke—the disguise—which men use to cover their sins. This is why they crucified Christ and why they would crucify us if they could. Paul says my suffering is for this cause, for preaching the gospel of Christ and him crucified. So Paul says in **Ephesians 3: 13: Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.**

III. THIRDLY, MEN ARE OFFENDED AND ACCUSE US AS THEY DID PAUL SAYING WE PREACH AGAINST THEIR PLACE.

They accused Paul of preaching against this place, meaning, their earthly city Jerusalem and their earthly temple. In our day, when men hear the gospel of Christ they hear the gospel speaking against their denomination, their tradition, and so on.

Fellowcitizens and of the Household of God

Paul declared all God's saints are fellowcitizens of a greater city than earthly Jerusalem. We are fellowcitizens of heavenly Jerusalem. Paul declared all God's saints are of a better temple. The LORD God Almighty and the Lamb is our temple. Believers are a holy temple in the Lord, a habitation of God through the Spirit. (Eph 2: 19-21)

Ephesians 2: 19: Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; 20: And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*; 21: In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: 22: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Today, men are just as offended. Naturally religious sinners are of the earth so they want earthy things they can see and do: touch not, taste not, handle not, an earthly kingdom, an earthly nation, an earthly city, an earthly temple, an earthly priesthood, offering up earthly sacrifices. Paul called that "Elements of the world", "weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage." (Gal 4: 3, 9) He called it a "vain show" that no way mortifies the flesh! So called fleshly mortification which is of the flesh actually puffs up the flesh. Men are proud of it! So Paul said to believers,

Colossians 2: 20: Wherefore, if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, 21: (Touch not; taste not; handle not; 22: Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?

No Spiritual Discernment

Why do men love earthy things, rather than the truth that our city is in heaven, our temple is God our Savior, our worship is spiritual? It is because the earthly man has no discernment of spiritual things.

1 Corinthians 2: 12: Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. 13: Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 14: But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.

I encourage everyone in this place to use a King James Bible because that is what I am teaching you from. I can assure you that you won't believe the gospel by a modern translation, neither by my words, my arguments or my illustrations. God has to give you spiritual discernment. Then you will have an unction from the Holy One and ye will know all things. (1 Jn 2: 20) They rejected Paul because their affection was on the earthy, rather than things above.

Romans 8:5: For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.

So Paul says, "For this cause, for the gospel's sake, I Paul, am a prisoner." Therefore, Paul writes to his Ephesian brethren saying, in **Ephesians 3: 13: Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.**

IV. LASTLY, THEY ARE OFFENDED AND ACCUSE US, AS THEY DID PAUL, FINDING FAULT WITH OUR BRETHREN.

Judging by Looking at the Flesh

They accused Paul of polluting their earthly place because he was seen in fellowship with Gentiles who they judged to be unclean simply because they were uncircumcised in the flesh. In our day, earthly religious men only judge earthly judgment and so reject Christ's saints, because they do not see us measuring up to their standards. Christ said,

John 8: 15: Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man.

We No Longer Judge by Looking at the Flesh

2 Corinthians 5: 16: Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we *him* no more. 17: Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. 18: And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;

The believer given a new spirit, knows the flesh profits nothing so he no longer judges after the flesh: old confidences, old prejudices, old standards are all passed away. He sees all things new. We still have that old fleshly man that God must mortify through the Spirit but now we know in our inward man, being made a new creature by the blood of Christ, by his Spirit creating us anew, that this is how we are saved.

Yet, the only judgment the fleshly man judges with is fleshly judgment. Before being born of God, Paul did the same so he imprisoned men and consented to their death. After being born of God, he ceased fleshly, vain judging and began preaching the gospel of Christ and waiting on God to put a difference between his people and the world. So his former religious friends now imprisoned him and treated him like fleshly men do.

So Paul says, **Ephesians 3: 1: For this cause, I Paul, [am] the prisoner.** Yet, he would have his brethren remember, it is by this same gospel that we suffer, we are saved. Therefore, we must persevere trusting Christ to preserve us. So Paul says, **v13: Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.**

Amen!