

Paul's Bonds

"Now I would have you know, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the progress of the gospel so that my bonds became manifest in Christ throughout the whole praetorian guard and to all the rest; and that most of the brethren in the Lord, being confident through my bonds, are more abundantly bold to speak the word of God without fear" (Phil. 1:12-14).

Twice, in these verses, the venerable apostle spoke of "my bonds." In both instances his bonds had had a beneficial effect; establishing his point that the things which had happened unto him *"had fallen out ... unto the gospel."* Paul had had a number of years to reflect on his bonds. He went to Jerusalem with the knowledge that *"bonds and afflictions"* awaited him there (Acts 20:23). Hatred for him incited a mob and, had it not been for the intervention of a Roman centurion, he would have been beaten to death (Acts 21:31f). He was chained and heavily guarded and escaped a scourging from his captors only by revealing his Roman citizenship (Acts 22:24-29). Efforts to defend himself before Jewish audiences only ended with massive demonstrations and further clamors for his life. So malicious were his adversaries that a plot to assassinate him was foiled only by God's providence. His captor, being made aware of Jewish intentions, whisked him away by night to a more secure prison in Caesarea (Acts 23:18-24). A knowledgeable governor kept him in prison, knowing he was innocent, in hope that Paul's friends would secure his release through ransom (Acts 24:22). An ignorant, bumbling governor displaced the former one and, desiring to placate the Jews, asked Paul to return to Jerusalem to stand trial. Paul appealed to Caesar, a privilege his Roman citizenship provided him, preventing that (Acts 25:7-12). Two years he was captive in Caesarea; at the conclusion of Acts he had spent two more years in Rome. Yet Paul said these trials had promoted the gospel. How? Why?

"My bonds became manifest in Christ throughout the whole praetorian guard." Paul did not mean to say that the guards had simply come to know he was a well-known prisoner; he meant to say that his guards became sympathetic to him, believing him to be unjustly imprisoned. That, of course, was evident before to the notable personages who heard him when he spoke before Agrippa while in Caesarea for their consensus was *"This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds"* (Acts 27:3). Even Agrippa (whose family had long been persecutors of Christ and his disciples, from Herod the Great onward) concluded, *"This man might have been set at liberty if he had not appealed unto Caesar"* (Acts 26:32). Yet, although Paul was bound, the word was not! His tireless preaching produced believers even among

Caesar's own household (Phil. 3:22)! Paul's bonds had an equally beneficial effect upon brethren.

"Most of the brethren ... being confident through my bonds, are more abundantly bold to speak the word of God without fear." Paul's steadfastness, faith and patience in trials made his brethren more diligent in preaching the word. And, of course, when the word is spoken boldly and confidently, faith will be produced in hearts of good and honest souls for *"faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"* (Rom. 10:17). The care Roman brethren had shown for Paul as word reached Rome that he was slowly moving toward that city, prompted two groups of brethren to travel from Rome to meet him, who, when Paul met them he *"thanked God and took courage"* (Acts 28:15). As brethren had comforted Paul, Paul strengthened the faith of brethren. They could, and did see that Paul's confidence was genuine and such begat similar confidence in them. They knew first hand the confidence Paul wrote of in his last letter to Timothy. *"For which cause I suffer these things. Yet I am not ashamed for I know him whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed unto him, against that day"* (2 Tim. 1:12). The effects of Paul's bonds upon honest folks is a classic example that God can turn evil into good. Truly, his bonds were instrumental in promoting the precious gospel of Christ.

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