

“I Die Daily”

“Why do we also stand in jeopardy every hour? I protest by that glorying in you, brethren, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If after the manner of men I fought with beasts at Ephesus what doth it profit me? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (1 Cor. 15:30-32).

In this passage Paul continued to show the unreasonableness of actions which man might do if there was no resurrection. He had previously shown the unreasonableness of men being “baptized for the dead” if the dead are not raised (refer to the previous article for thoughts on “baptism for the dead”). He continues with that line of thought by asking, “Why do we also stand in jeopardy every hour?” Paul was ever conscious of the constant dangers to which he was exposed. He “laid his life on the line” every day. And for what reason would he have done this if this life is all there is to life? Thus he wrote, “I protest by that glorying in you, brethren, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Determining precisely what Paul meant by these words is challenging. First, consider his words “I protest.” We would ordinarily conclude that he objected to some matter (for this is the thought the word conveys to us in 21st century English). We are told however, that the word in the first century was a strong, affirmative oath, thus Paul was “strongly affirming” something, which “something” involves “glorying” (“rejoicing,” KJV). But is the glorying that on Paul’s part or on the part of Corinthians? The KJV seems to favor the glorying to be on the part of Corinthians as also does the ASV in a footnote on the word. But there is the added phrase “which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily,” showing Paul also gloried and thus the “glorying” of the Corinthians was also the “glorying” of Paul. It appears the apostle is saying that because of the hope which both he and Corinthians possessed, he died daily: he was not only exposed to death; he resolutely faced death every day because of his hope in Christ.

Then follows his words “if after the manner of men I fought with beasts at Ephesus, what doth it profit me?” (1 Cor. 15:32). Once more we are confronted with a perplexing statement; another of which various views are rendered.

Some view that Paul literally fought with beasts in Ephesus. That was certainly possible; in later years of that first century it was a common thing during the persecutions against Christians by Roman Caesars that Christians should be exposed to lions in their games. But two objections rise to view.

First, how many Christians survived such a contest? Consigning a Christian to fight with lions in arenas was a death sentence. If Paul had fought with literal beasts, he had survived the contest. True, Daniel survived such a contest, but miraculously. Yes, other apostles were miraculously delivered from prison: all the apostles (Acts 5) and then Peter (Acts 12). God could have miraculously delivered Paul from beasts he was exposed to.

But, if he was so delivered, it seems odd that neither the historian recorded such an event in his record of Paul's labors in Ephesus nor that Paul did not himself put such an event in his list of sufferings he endured for Christ in his second letter to this church. In 2 Corinthians 11:23-27 Paul was compelled to "glory" and he listed numerous things he suffered as an apostle: stripes, imprisonments, being stoned, perils. Yet, he made no mention of so spectacular a matter of fighting with beasts at Ephesus if that is what he did. Such an omission by no means rules out that the event occurred, but since such an event would have been of much recent occurrence and of such a singular, spectacular matter, it seems strange the apostle would omit any mention of it.

Others believe the apostle used the phrase "beasts at Ephesus" to describe his encounters with evil and dangerous men. Without dispute, that occurred at Ephesus. Demetrius, the silversmith and his confederates, set the city in an uproar and so dangerous was the situation that even those who were not Christians but were friends of Paul begged that he not adventure himself in the midst of the protests (Acts 19:23-31). Earlier in Paul's sojourn in Ephesus he encountered the wrath of Jews who spoke evil of the Way (Acts 19:9). It must be acknowledged that Paul did, on occasion, refer to men as "animals" (cp. Philippians 3:2; Titus 1:12). In the context of these two verses, however, it is easily perceived the apostle has men in mind when he speaks of "beasts". It is not so apparent in 1 Corinthians 15:28.

There is a third alternate explanation for his words "I fought with beasts at Ephesus" and that is that the apostle is not recording something he did, but something he might have done. He begins his statement "If after the manner of men I sought with beasts at Ephesus" with the word "IF". "If" is a statement of condition and the statement of condition is "after the manner of men I fought with beasts at Ephesus" because I preached Christ (and thus died as a consequence); if I willingly suffered martyrdom for Christ and yet there is no resurrection from the dead, what profit would there be for me to do so? Thus his conclusion is "If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (1 Cor. 15:32).

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