

TITLE: THE PERSECUTION & PERSEVERANCE OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTER

TEXT: 2 CORINTHIANS 4:8-18

INTRO: In speaking of the minister's preaching in v. 1-7, Paul has just said that the enormous treasure of the gospel was given by God, yet conveyed to mankind through humans – weak, earthen vessels. Now he speaks about the weakness of these vessels – persecuted by men but strengthened by God.

I. OUR CONDITION (v. 8-9):

We are troubled (afflicted; pressed, crowded, thronged) *on every side, yet not distressed* (straitened, crushed); *we are perplexed* (have no way out), *but not in despair* (utterly at loss; no hope); *Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.*

- A. (v. 8a) We're pressed on every side (it seems there's no relief anywhere we turn -cf. "*narrow is the way*"-Mt 7:14), but we're *not* crushed (cf. "*strait is the gate*"-Mt 7:14). These words Paul uses to describe his difficult situation are the very words Jesus used to describe *the way* (i.e., Christianity)! Paul's situation was *not* the exception! No wonder there are "few" that *choose* to find it!
- B. (v. 8b) We're perplexed, in doubt, seem to have no way out, **BUT not** without hope! No physical hope, but still spiritual hope!
- C. (v. 9) Literally, we're persecuted but not forsaken (by God, or His people); ...not destroyed (we're not dead yet)!
- D. We can easily see that Paul is saying that things are bad, but never beyond hope. We're never distressed, in despair, destroyed. Does this mean that they are beaten, but never killed? Obviously not (cf. Acts 12:2 - James). Church tradition says Paul & many other Christians were martyred. So what is he saying? Clearly this is a spiritual encouragement; God may allow men to "kill the body," but not the soul (Mt 10:28). And although he doesn't express it here, we know Paul's comfort in these two verses is because God is with them. He made this clear in 1:3-4 - God comforts us! He'll express this at the end of this chapter as well.

II. OUR CONVICTION (v. 10-11):

- A. (v. 10) *Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.* The suffering & death of Christ was continually seen in Paul because he too was persecuted for the same cause.
 - 1. Jesus endured extreme persecution, even being killed. But He was raised to life again.
 - 2. Part of our Christianity (part of what God expects) is that if we endure persecution (even to the point of death – Rev 2:10), then we too will be raised to eternal life (Jn 5:29). But those who choose to depart from Christ when persecuted do not have this promise. If we aren't willing to bear in our body the *dying* of Jesus (i.e., endure the persecution non-Christians present), then we can't make manifest Jesus' life. If we give in under the pressure of persecution and refuse to stand up for Christ, His Word, & His church, we not only *stop* proclaiming His death, but we stop proclaiming His life!
- B. (v. 11) *For we which live* (spiritually – Christians) *are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.* Spiritually speaking, if we suffer with Him, we'll live with Him (eternally; 2 Tim 2:11-12—"If we died with him, we shall also live with him. If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us"). But physically speaking, our obedience to Christ, even unto death, displays Christ's life (His teaching, His authority, etc.) "in our mortal flesh" (i.e., *Christ's* life is seen in *our* lives)!

III. OUR CONFIDENCE (v. 12-15):

- A. (v. 12) *So then death worketh in us, but life in you.* Paul's *knew* that his suffering for Christ had **huge** benefits for the church! The Corinthian brethren were the result of Paul's willingness to continue preaching in the midst of persecution. What if he'd quit after the persecutions in Philippi & Thessalonica, never making it to Corinth? What if we quit when someone makes fun of us?
- B. (v. 13) *We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, 'I believed, and therefore have I spoken'; we also believe, and therefore speak.* Here he quotes David in Psa 116:10 & says we have the same spirit of faith as David. We believe (we trust in God) & therefore we speak. We believe what? What did they believe which motivated them to keep speaking? (v. 14)
- C. (v. 14) *Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.*
 - 1. We trust that the one for whom we are persecuted (Christ), though He died, was raised by God. And so He'll raise us too!
 - 2. Notice Paul's confidence in the Corinthians ("...shall present us **with you**."). In spite of their problems & weaknesses, Paul continues to express confidence in their capacity for obedience (& even their willingness to suffer – 1:7).
- D. (v. 15) *For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might, through the thanksgiving of many, redound* (excel, overflow) *to the glory of God.* Everything is for you, as in 1:6 (if we're afflicted, or if we're comforted, it's for you). It's intended that you will thank & praise God even more for this. In all things (persecution & comfort), **GOD** is to be glorified.

IV. OUR COMFORT, CONSOLATION, CONTINUATION (v. 16-18):

- A. (v. 16) *For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.*
 - 1. We don't faint (grow weary). This implies the fact that, in spite of persecution, they were going to continue preaching!
 - 2. The outward man may perish (the body may feel the pain), but the inward man is renewed (the spirit is encouraged)! Their attacks can't overshadow the promise He's give us, and therefore cannot dissuade Paul from his mission! What about us?
- B. (v. 17-18) *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding & eternal weight of glory; While we look **not** at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. **These are the "perspective" verses!***
 - 1. "*Light affliction*" – compared to Christ's suffering, compared to Hell, compared to Heaven! Keep the proper perspective!!
 - 2. "*For a moment*" (temporal -v.18) – the worst persecution ever is still temporary. Keep the proper perspective!!
 - 3. "*Far more exceeding & eternal weight of glory*" – the reward is eternal (Rom 8:17-18). Keep the proper perspective!!

CONCLUSION: As the liberal, God-haters take over this country, we don't know what the future holds for us. We do know Jn 15:20—"If they've persecuted me, they will also persecute you." But we also know Heb 13:5—"I'll never leave you nor forsake you." We know 1 Pet 4:13-14—"But rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when his glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy." And we know what Paul said here in 2 Cor 4 – that the eternal reward far outweighs the light affliction! And so, we faint not!