

Nuggets and Gems from the Bible

PAUL'S SUFFERING
FOR THE GOSPEL
AND
HIS ENJOYMENT
OF GRACE

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Living Stream Ministry

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In this booklet we shall consider Paul's suffering for the gospel and his enjoyment of grace. It is easy to understand the matter of suffering for the gospel and of enjoying grace in a natural way. However, in approaching spiritual things, we need to go beyond the natural or traditional understanding. According to the book of Philip-
pians, to suffer for the gospel and to enjoy grace are both deep matters.

To suffer for the gospel means that you are on earth solely for the interest of God's economy. To suffer for the gospel is to care for the accomplishment of God's economy. The gospel includes God's economy, and suffering for the gospel requires that we participate in God's economy. Thus, to suffer for the gospel actually means to share in the carrying out of God's economy.

Paul's writings indicate that he suffered for the gospel. However, the gospel for which he suffered

was not low or superficial. He suffered for the gospel in the sense that he was on earth for the carrying out of God's economy. In preaching the gospel according to God's economy, Paul renounced religion, law, culture, ordinances, customs, habits, and every kind of "ism." The gospel Paul preached slaughtered everything that was apart from God's economy. It slaughtered religion, politics, and culture. In a sense, Paul's gospel slaughters even us. Because Paul preached such a gospel, he was regarded as a troublemaker, a pestilent fellow ([Acts 24:5](#)).

Even though his preaching of the gospel slaughtered everything contrary to God's economy, Paul referred to the gospel as the gospel of peace ([Eph. 2:17](#); [6:15](#)). In [Ephesians 2:17](#) Paul points out that Christ, after His crucifixion and resurrection, came to the Gentiles preaching the gospel of peace. Peace is possible only when everything contrary to the gospel has been slaughtered. In order for there to be peace between us and God and with one another, religion, politics, culture, ordinances, and the law had to be terminated. Because Paul preached a gospel that involves the slaughter of so many things, his preaching was not pleasing to men. He could please neither the Jews nor the Gentiles.

Paul could please only God Himself. His preaching was an offense to religion, politics, culture, and every kind of ism.

If we preach the gospel in the way Paul did, we also shall suffer. But if we preach the gospel in a sugar-coated way, we shall be universally welcomed. In such a case, we shall not be those who suffer for God's economy.

In preaching the gospel, our aim is neither to please people nor to offend them. It is simply to sound forth the truth of God. However, God's truth will slaughter many things. Therefore, those who preach the gospel for the carrying out of God's economy on earth will suffer for the sake of the gospel.

Along with suffering for the gospel, there is always the enjoyment of grace. If you suffer for God's economy, you will have this enjoyment. Suffering for God's economy brings in the supply of grace. This enjoyment of grace is related to suffering on behalf of the gospel.

To enjoy grace is to have the genuine experience of Christ, for the grace we enjoy is Christ Himself. I do not believe that those who preach the gospel in a way that pleases men know anything of the enjoyment of grace. To be sure, those Judaistic believers who preached the gospel in

rivalry with Paul did not have the enjoyment of Christ as grace. Their preaching could not bring in Christ as grace for their enjoyment. Grace is nothing less than the Triune God processed for our enjoyment. Some may question this understanding of grace, wondering whether it is true to say that grace is the Triune God processed for our enjoyment. Consider Paul's word in [2 Corinthians 13:14](#): "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." Here we see the Triune God for our enjoyment. Grace, therefore, is the experience of the indwelling Christ, who is the processed God as our enjoyment. The more we suffer for God's economy on earth, the more we enjoy such a Christ.

According to the book of Philippians, Paul suffered not simply because he preached the gospel, but in particular because he defended the gospel and confirmed it. We have seen that the gospel is related to God's economy, to His move on earth for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose. When Paul wrote to the Philippians, certain preachers were perverting this gospel of God's economy and distorting it. Paul rose up to declare that in the gospel of God there was no place for Judaism or for Greek philosophy. He was set for

the defense of the gospel ([Phil. 1:16](#)). Furthermore, Paul confirmed the gospel by preaching two mysteries: Christ as the mystery of God and the church as the mystery of Christ.

IN BONDS

When Paul wrote to the Philippians, he was suffering for the gospel. In [Philippians 1:7, 13, 14,](#) and [17](#) he refers to his bonds, that is, his imprisonment. This indicates clearly that the book of Philippians was written from prison. Although Paul was a prisoner, his prison became a house of wine, a banqueting house, for there Paul was enjoying the Lord. [Verse 7](#), in which Paul speaks of partaking of grace, indicates this. Paul was in bonds, but he was enjoying grace. This verse indicates clearly and strongly that for Paul prison was a place of feasting and not merely of suffering.

DEFENDING THE GOSPEL ON THE NEGATIVE SIDE FROM PERVERTING AND DISTORTING HERESIES

The defense of the gospel is related, on the negative side, to the perverting and distorting heresies, like Judaism dealt with in Galatians and

Gnosticism dealt with in Colossians. Judaism was perverting the gospel, whereas Gnosticism and Greek philosophy were distorting it. Paul defended the gospel against all heretical perversion and distortion. Consider his experience with Peter at Antioch. Although Peter had received the vision concerning the Gentiles in [Acts 10](#), he withdrew from eating with the Gentile believers in Antioch. In this matter, Peter did not stand for the truth of the gospel. On the contrary, he perverted this truth. Therefore, Paul withstood Peter to his face and rebuked him.

In defending the gospel against perversion and distortion, Paul was unique. According to the record of the New Testament, he was the one who stood the strongest against anything that perverted and distorted the gospel. This was the reason for much of his sufferings. However, the grace he enjoyed surpassed these sufferings.

**CONFIRMING THE GOSPEL
ON THE POSITIVE SIDE
WITH ALL THE REVELATIONS
OF GOD'S MYSTERIES
CONCERNING
CHRIST AND THE CHURCH**

The confirmation of the gospel is related, on

the positive side, to all the revelations of God's mysteries concerning Christ and the church as unveiled in Paul's Epistles. In the writings of Paul, the two great mysteries—Christ as the mystery of God and the church as the mystery of Christ—are unveiled. No other apostle unveiled these mysteries as adequately as Paul did. To be sure, his teaching and preaching were a confirmation of the gospel and of God's economy.

FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE GOSPEL

In [Philippians 1:12](#) Paul says, “Now I want you to know, brothers, that the things concerning me have turned out rather to the advancement of the gospel.” The Greek word rendered advancement refers to the advancement made by pioneers who cut the way before an army to further its march. Paul's sufferings made such an advancement for the gospel. Paul was a pioneer cutting the way so that the church as the army of God could march on. He knew that his sufferings were preparing the way, even the highway, for the advancement of the gospel. Apart from such sufferings, there would not have been this advancement. Even we today are marching on the way cut by Paul in his sufferings for the gospel.

ENCOURAGING THE BROTHERS TO SPEAK THE WORD OF GOD WITHOUT FEAR

In [Philippians 1:14](#) Paul goes on to say, “And most of the brothers being confident in the Lord in my bonds are more exceedingly daring to speak the word of God without fear.” Far from being a discouragement, Paul’s imprisonment was an encouragement, an encouragement to the brothers to speak the word of God without fear.

STRENGTHENING THE BROTHERS TO SUFFER FOR CHRIST

Paul’s suffering for the gospel also strengthened the brothers to suffer for Christ ([Phil. 1:28-30](#)). In [1:28](#) he charges us not to be frightened in anything by the opposers. He says that this would be proof to them of destruction, but of our salvation. Destruction here refers to the destruction of all the opposers are and do, whereas salvation denotes the salvation of all we are and do. Paul’s strong example of suffering for Christ strengthened the brothers and made them willing to suffer for Him in carrying out God’s economy on earth.

In [1:29](#) Paul says, “Because to you it has been given on behalf of Christ not only to believe in

Him, but also to suffer on His behalf.” The Greek word translated “in” means into. The use of this word here implies the organic union the believer has with Christ through believing in Him. To believe in Christ is to have our being merged into His that the two may be organically one. To suffer on behalf of Christ, after receiving Him and being made one with Him through believing, is to participate in, to have the fellowship of, His sufferings ([Phil. 3:10](#)), that we may experience and enjoy Him in His sufferings. This is to live Him and magnify Him in a situation that rejects and opposes Him.

In [Philippians 1:30](#) Paul concludes, “Having the same struggle which you saw in me and now hear to be in me.” Paul was a pattern set up by God’s grace for His New Testament economy ([1 Tim. 1:14-16](#)). The New Testament believers should experience and enjoy Christ by living and magnifying Him as Paul did in his sufferings for Christ, that they may be partakers with him of grace.

PAUL’S ENJOYMENT OF GRACE

In [Philippians 1:7](#) Paul tells the Philippians that they “are all partakers with me of grace.” Partakers of grace are those who share and enjoy

the processed Triune God as grace. The apostle was such a one in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, and the saints at Philippi were joint-partakers with him in this grace. By grace Paul endured all the sufferings for the gospel. Participating in this enjoyment of grace with Paul for the furtherance of the gospel, the Philippian believers were one with Paul both in his suffering and in the enjoyment of grace.

In [Philippians 1:8](#) Paul went on to say, “For God is my witness, how I long after you all in the inward parts of Christ Jesus.” This verse indicates that Paul experienced the inward parts of Christ. The Greek word rendered “inward parts” means bowels. It signifies inward affection, then tender mercy and sympathy. Paul was one with Christ even in His bowels, the tender inward parts, in longing after the saints.

[Verses 7 and 8](#) belong together and should not be separated. Notice that [verse 8](#) begins with the conjunction “for.” This indicates that grace is related to the inward parts of Christ. Paul partook of grace, for he longed after all the saints in the inward parts of Christ. To enjoy Christ is to be one in Christ’s inward parts. This refers not only to enjoyment, but also to living Christ. To

live Christ is to abide in His inward parts and there to enjoy Him as grace.

Elsewhere in this chapter Paul speaks of magnifying Christ and living Christ. Experientially, to magnify Christ and to live Christ require that we remain in the inward parts of Christ. In simple words, this is to abide in Him. If we would be those in Christ, we must be in His inward parts. We need to be in His tender heart and delicate feelings. If we abide here, we shall enjoy Christ as grace and experience Him in a very practical way. As we experience Christ and enjoy Him as our grace, we shall be sustained in suffering for the gospel by caring for the accomplishment of God's economy on earth today.

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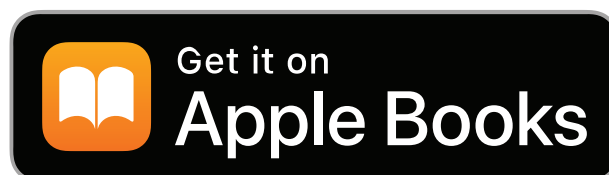
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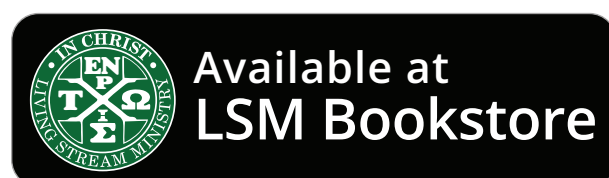
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