

## Paul, A Prisoner Of Jesus Christ

*"For this cause, I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus in behalf of you Gentiles"* (Eph. 3:1). At least three times in this letter Paul refers to himself as a prisoner; here, where he calls himself a prisoner of Christ Jesus in behalf of the Gentiles; a second time in chapter four where he styles himself the prisoner in the Lord (vs. 1). The third appearance is in chapter six where he calls himself *"an ambassador in chains"* (Eph. 6:20).

As observed before, Ephesians is one of five "prison epistles." All these letters were written during Paul's incarceration in Rome, a length of time not certainly known, although it was at least two years for when Acts is concluded, Luke tell us Paul dwelt for two years in his own hired house, at which time the resolution of his fate was still uncertain (Acts 28:30). Paul willingly endured his imprisonment because he was not imprisoned because he was an evil doer or a meddler in other men's matters; he was imprisoned because he preached the gospel of Christ. Consider how Paul was the prisoner of Christ Jesus (2:1). The Lord had called Paul to be His apostle and it was in the realm of fulfilling His calling that he suffered the frequent imprisonments he did. True, Luke only records one prison confinement of Paul's life prior to the one recorded in Acts 21-28; but according to his second letter to Corinth, he had experienced *"abundant imprisonments"* (2 Cor. 11:23). His statement was not in conflict with Luke's accounts in Acts. Luke's account was not intended to be more than a smattering of incidents from the life of Paul. It was not intended to be a full disclosure of all things which had occurred to him. The Lord's calling of Paul placed him in "harm's way" and because Paul was faithful to his calling, he could properly speak of himself as *"the prisoner of the Lord Jesus Christ."*

Paul begged Ephesians to pray for him *"that utterance may be given unto me in opening my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains"* (Eph. 6:19f). Here Paul makes clear that it was the preaching the gospel which led to his imprisonment. There was something in the gospel which was galling and repugnant to some: so much so that they believed imprisonment was the proper punishment for his message. Nay, not imprisonment: to his accusers Paul deserved to die for the unacceptable message he proclaimed. Imprisonment, to them, was only a poor second option; only available because Roman authorities would not allow them to put him to death! And what was that message? Paul's words: *"For this cause, I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus in behalf of you Gentiles."* He was a prisoner on account of the Gentiles because the message Christ sent him to proclaim was *"... the mystery which had been hidden for ages but was now revealed ... that Gentiles were fellow-heirs*

(with the Jews); *fellow-members of the body* (with the Jews) *and fellow-partakers of the promises in Christ Jesus* (with the Jews)" (Eph. 3:6). This was the message which was reprehensible to Jews; totally unacceptable; a message, which when intimated by Paul in his defense on the castle steps in Jerusalem, provoked a Jewish mob to cry out: "*Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live*" (Acts 22:22). Paul faithfully preached God's message: there is no distinction, God is no respecter of persons. The door to grace is opened equally to all, Jew or Gentile. The preaching of this message led him to a Roman prison. Truly, he was a prisoner in behalf of we Gentiles. May Christ be exalted and may hearts render thanks to God that Paul faithfully preached God's declaration of grace to Gentiles, as well as to Jews! We have hope because of the bold preaching of Paul, our apostle.

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