

The Word Is Not Bound

"Wherein I suffer hardship under bonds, as a malefactor, but the word of God is not bound. Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sake that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Tim. 2:9f).

"Wherein I suffer hardship under bonds ..." Just before these words Timothy had been urged to remember Christ, the seed of David, *"according to my gospel"*. Let none suppose Paul claimed to be the originator of the gospel -- it had been preached long before he embraced it -- proclaimed while he resisted and persecuted it; originating with Jesus, Himself. It was the gospel Paul preached, hazarding his life to see that it spread every place. He lived and breathed and exulted in the gospel: Christ risen from the dead!

Because he preached the gospel he suffered hardship under bonds. He had earlier in the text admonished Timothy to *"suffer hardship"* with him. Timothy had not yet come to the juncture in his life as Paul. He had, without doubt, suffered hardship; both from his own preaching and because of his association with Paul; but those hardships had not reached the severity that his life was near its end, as Paul's. True, he had likely been imprisoned before this time. The Hebrew letter states that our brother Timothy has been *"set at liberty"* (Heb. 13:23) and this is a likely reference to the one Paul addresses here. But, at the time of this letter he was not in bonds. Paul suffered as a malefactor: an evil doer. How strange that his message of hope in Christ Jesus, with its constant appeal to love, holiness and lawfulness, should be construed by Roman authorities as *"evil"*; a crime so severe against the state that he should be executed for it! But, such was the mind set of the Imperial Caesar in this 7th decade of the first century.

"But the word of God is not bound." Rome could imprison, bind the great apostle, but it could not bind the message he taught! Worldly leaders of both Jews and Romans thought they could stamp out the accursed doctrine of Jesus, but to the government's ultimate chagrin, the more they persecuted the religion of Jesus, the more it spread. Jewish authorities scattered early Christians away from Jerusalem but soon gospel fires were burning in nearly all Judaeian, Samaritan, and Galilean towns! Roman persecutions did not staunch the abandonment of pagan deities as their worshippers came to bow before King Jesus and pledge allegiance to him. By the fourth century the religion of Jesus held sway in the world as Constantine, the Roman Caesar, reportedly said, "Thou has conquered." The body can be chained, but the word cannot be bound. How many revolutions against oppressive governments have succeeded; spurred on by the words of one imprisoned

because of his opposition to that government! God's word cannot be bound by its enemies, but we who are professed believers of it can. We can bind the word by failing to speak it. We can bind the word by our senseless and endless quarrelings and divisiveness over inconsequential things. Jesus warned, "*A house divided against itself cannot stand*" (Mk. 3:25). We can bind the word by saying one thing and practicing another. But let God's people stand united; truly transformed in personal life; let them cry from the streets to the rooftops the glorious gospel, and there is no power that can fetter the word. And let it be free and fall into the hearts of sincere and hungry men and growth will follow which will mimic the gospel's spread in the first century. Let us not bind the word!

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