



Defending and Confirming the Gospel

By

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The Apostle Paul spent many years in prisons across the Roman Empire for simply preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He wrote many of his best-known letters to churches and individuals from prisons. I can only imagine how difficult living in a Roman prison would be for Paul, but his commitment to Jesus Christ never wavered. He was honest with the Philippian Christians that his personal desire after almost 30 years of suffering for the Gospel was ‘to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.’ I can understand that as a human being. Suffering is not easy. However, Paul had something none of the rest of us have had. God had taken Paul to the ‘third heaven’ many years earlier and shown him amazing things that were and were to come (e.g. visions and revelations – 2 Corinthians 12). Paul knew things about God, His plans for the spread of the Gospel, and the end of the age that no one else knew at that time. Paul did reveal many things that God revealed to him during his ministry, but was not allowed to share some of what he saw. He said that he had been ‘caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.’ I think that event, plus the ever-present Spirit of God who inspired and led Paul during his ministry gave him the strength to suffer

through the many imprisonments, beatings, and other terrible things he faced (2 Corinthians 11).

One of the great lessons for me personally came from what Paul said next to the Philippians – ‘Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.’ Even though Paul knew that going on to Heaven to be with Jesus was ‘far better’ for him personally, he knew that ‘remaining in the flesh’ and continuing his ministry on earth was ‘more needful’ for the Christians in Philippi. Paul was eventually released from prison and continued to travel, preach the Gospel, and oversee the establishment and oversight of more churches. However, he was arrested again four or five years later, imprisoned in Rome, and killed (martyred) by the government. We learn more about what happened during those years between imprisonments from Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus.

That leads me to an interesting verse in Philippians 1:7 – ‘just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace.’

Paul spoke about his ‘chains’ (being in prison) and his ministry of the ‘defense and confirmation of the gospel.’ The Greek word Paul used for ‘defense’ was *apologia*. It is a noun that means ‘an answer for clearing one’s self, a reasoned defense, a vindication, evidence that is supplied to compel proof.’ The English word ‘apologist’ comes from the Greek *apologia*. The word is used eight times in the New Testament – six times by the Apostle Paul and twice by the Apostle Peter. A verb form of the word, *apologeomai*, was used eight times by the Apostle Paul and twice in the Gospel of Luke. It was well-known in the Greek and Roman world of the 1st century AD as a formal speech of defense or a ‘reasoned reply’ that a defendant would make to refute the accusations of someone in a legal or rhetorical setting. One of the best-known in that world was when Socrates defended himself

against charges of corrupting young people. You can read more about that in Plato's *The Apology*.

The word 'confirmation' comes from *bebaiósis* that means 'that which upholds, sustains, validates as guaranteed, to establish, confirm.' It's used only twice in the New Testament as a noun. Here in Philippians 1 and in Hebrews 6. The verb form, *bebaioó*, means 'to make firm, steadfast, reliable, guaranteed.' It's used once in the Gospel of Mark, twice in Hebrews, and five times by the Apostle Paul.

We should notice that Paul connected both words, 'defense' and 'confirmation' to 'the Gospel.' That was the apostle's primary concern. I believe it's important for Christians who actively share the Gospel with unbelievers to understand that they can both 'defend' and 'confirm' the Message of Christ's life, death and resurrection.

As Paul wrote in that context: ‘you all are partakers with me of grace.’ The Greek word *sugkoinónos* means ‘a co-participant, close companion, a joint-sharer.’ Paul knew the importance of ‘sharing’ the Gospel ministry with the people who had received the benefits of God’s grace. It is as we all appreciate God’s great ‘gift’ that we can respond to what how He will ask us to serve Him.

The Apostle Paul gave many years of his life to defending and confirming the Gospel and would eventually die for his commitment. If an apostle of Jesus Christ thought that highly of the ‘Gospel of Christ,’ so should we. That’s what Paul was telling the Philippians.

I’ll have more to share with you about why Paul emphasized that to the Philippian Christians in our next podcast.

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In Christ's Love and Grace,

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