

Ephesians 3:1, 13

0203

Paul understands that all of life is a spiritual battlefield. And the battlefield includes the battle over good things that happen and evil things that happen, who's going to use them? Is God going to use them for good? Or is the enemy going to use them for evil?

And for this, what I want to do is I want to connect together, verse one, down to verse 13. Okay, so you remember from last time, we looked at verse one, and we made note of the fact that what Paul does is he breaks his train of thought, he begins here in verse one to say, "For this reason, I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus," and then he sort of breaks off his thought.

And the subject there is I, Paul, remember how he talked about the verb that goes with that subject doesn't come all the way until verse 14, and verse 14, he comes back once again with the same "for this reason," And then comes the verb, I bow my knee, right? So the verb is I, Paul, and (I'm sorry), the subject is I, Paul, and the verb is bow my knee. So Paul saying, I pray, and here's what I pray. But then he breaks his thought, for these 13 verses of parenthetical explanation.

And we mentioned that last week, and we said that what Paul wants to do, before he prays, he wants to make sure that we've understood what he said.

Let's return to that now. And let's flesh that out just a little bit more. And I want us all to see specifically what and why Paul wants us to see before he prays, or specifically what he wants the Ephesians to see before he prays. So here's what he says, once again, "For this reason, I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of the Gentiles," and there is the dash.

That's where Paul says, women, let me let me say these other things first. Okay. So what did Paul say right there that caused him to want to sort of break his thought off for a while? I think that what Paul said right there that caused him to say, wait a minute, before I go any further, let me just explain some things. I think what he just said, was "a prisoner on your behalf." And I think he just said, Wait a minute. I don't want them to be discouraged by this.

Because Paul is a prisoner. And he is a prisoner on their behalf. Paul is in prison, specifically, because he's teaching of the full inclusion of the Gentiles in the kingdom of God. Paul is not in prison because he's preaching Jesus Christ as the Messiah. He's in prison, specifically, because the Jews don't like his teaching about the full inclusion of the Gentiles in the kingdom. So he's right to say, "I'm in prison for you. I'm in prison, because I have taught this message of your inclusion."

And so I think that what the reason Paul really wants to stop and re explain this, is he doesn't want discouragement to come over them. So now let's take a look down all the way down to verse 13, at where he's going to pick back up right before he picks back up, verse 13. "So I asked you not to lose heart." The word that's translated 'lose heart' literally means be discouraged. I don't want you to be discouraged over what I'm suffering, and once again for you, which is your glory.

In other words, Paul is concerned that they would lose heart or become discouraged because Paul is suffering specifically suffering on their behalf. Or you might even say in their place, and he doesn't want his suffering to discourage them. Now, I think that there is a valuable lesson in that for us that we should guard our hearts against becoming discouraged when we see the suffering of loved ones.

Isn't that an easy thing to get discouraged over? I mean, our own suffering can be hard enough. Isn't there's a certain sense in which the suffering of a loved one is even harder, to not become discouraged over? And I think Paul immediately recognizes that they could hear this, they could read that, and they can really become downhearted and discouraged because—here I am. Paul has been in prison now for five years. They can really become discouraged about this, not to mention the fact that it's on their behalf. So wait a minute, let me explain some things, first, let me make sure that you are not being led into discouragement over my suffering for you.

Because when we become discouraged over the suffering of a loved one who is in Christ, we are displaying a weak faith. Let me say that again. When we allow discouragement to come into our heart, due to the suffering of a loved one who is in Christ, we are showing a weak faith.

Is God sovereign or not? Is God good, or not? Does God not tell us that if we are in Christ, he brings good out of every evil? So either he does or he doesn't. And that, that doesn't apply only to our suffering, but to our loved ones who are also in Christ.

So either God means what He says, When he says he brings good out of suffering for his children—either we believe that or we don't. Either we believe that “this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,” either we believe that or we don't.

That can be harder to trust in and that can be harder to believe when it's the suffering of loved ones. Nevertheless, it's still the same faith.

You know, we know that this is true, don't we that God uses evil for good purposes. We know that's true, because Romans 8:28 tells us that Genesis 50, verse 20, tells us the same thing. Joseph says to his brothers, you know, you meant this for evil, but God meant this for good. So we know that God is a God who uses evil for good purposes. But do you also know that the reverse can also be true? That Satan can use good for evil purposes? Do you know that he can do that? And do you know that that's what he seeks to do? And that's what exactly Paul does not want the enemy to do. He does not want the enemy to take this grace that the God is pouring out to Paul and use it against the Ephesians to weaken their faith or drag them down, or cause them to be disheartened.

Because Paul understands that all of life is a spiritual battlefield. Every moment of your life is a spiritual battlefield. This is a battlefield right now. And the battlefield includes, among other things, the battle over good things that happen and evil things that happen, who's going to use them? Is God going to use them for good? Or is the enemy going to use them for evil? And Paul understands that. And Paul says, Listen, yes, this This is no fun being in prison. This this is this is indeed suffering. And I am, yes, I am suffering on your behalf. But don't be downhearted about that. Don't be discouraged, because our God is the God who allows no bad thing to touch us. Who absolutely brings good out of everything that

he allows to touch us, His loving hands have not allowed anything to come into Paul's life that God didn't want there, that God has not promised to use that for Paul's ultimate good, which is why he says this is for your glory.

And so that's the final takeaway in this section here is to ask God to strengthen the faith in your heart that when others who are close to you are undergoing trials and suffering. If they are in Christ, then that is not cause for discouragement on your part.

I think right now of, for example, Leah Fleming, a sister in Christ who now stage four breast cancer, okay. And we see the updates and everything. Isn't that cause that the enemy could take that and discourage us? Not if we know what Paul's saying to us. Not if we know that our God promises good out of every evil and not just for us, but for all who are His children.