

Last week, we were talking about the temptation to be ashamed of Jesus – to distance ourselves from Him and His teachings and to hide our allegiance to Him... When the world is vocally and overwhelmingly opposed to God and His word, sometimes it's easier to say nothing, than to give our testimony and to let it be known that our Lord is our everything...

And today we're going to continue on with this same thought of "suffering for the Gospel". As we said last week, "**not** suffering for the Gospel", is an anomaly – it's not normal. Throughout the ages, it has been normal for Christians to suffer for their faith. And things seem to be returning to normality once again (in our culture). As our nation is becoming increasingly godless, and as the population is becoming more and more anti-Jesus and anti-God's word, Disciples of Jesus will suffer for the Gospel.

And so today comes a word on "enduring faithfulness"... And the way Paul teaches us about this, is in short, sharp life-lessons, that explain and drive-home the points that we need to know, to help us to embody "enduring faithfulness"...

So, because as Disciples of Jesus, it is normal to suffer for the Gospel:

1. One.

Be strengthened by **grace** that is **in** Christ Jesus.

You know, when we're looking for strength, often we're looking for "power" – we're looking for an ability to overthrow our oppressors. But that's not the way for disciples of Jesus. Our **Lord** will overthrow our enemy when He returns on the Day of The Lord,, but until then, we are overcomers, by holding on to the faith...

We are strengthened, by the grace that we've received, and we are strengthened by the grace that we continue to have, in Christ Jesus... Grace, is the unmerited favour of God. This is what strengthens us. I didn't deserve it; You didn't deserve it. None of us earned it... We have been saved in Christ Jesus – this is the grace of God. And we will be **preserved** in Christ Jesus – this also is the grace of God.

Even if we suffer/die for our faith in Jesus, when He returns in all of His glory, He won't be ashamed of us. We will be there with him, sharing in His glory. And so, we are strengthened by this grace.

What a wonderful encouragement..

2. Two

Entrust the Gospel (the Gospel that Paul publicly taught {in many places}) – entrust this gospel to others, so they **also** can teach.

I was filling out some insurance paperwork the other day, and they wanted to know if I back up my computer and store that information 'off-site' at least weekly... The reason is, if a catastrophe happens:

- *if malware locks a person out of their system; or*

- *if there's a fire and everything's destroyed; or*
- *if a thief breaks in and steals all of one's computer equipment*

will all of that person's documents and family photos and records – will they all be lost? or is there another up-to-date copy, so you can just pick up and carry on after the catastrophe...

It's called "redundancy"... If one component fails, there is another component that can carry on.

Military jet-fighters, have multiple redundancies in every system. So, if one wire is severed by a bullet, there's another 2 or 3 wires, that can all do the same job...

And Paul is telling Timothy here, "Don't be the only the only person who knows the Gospel." School up other faithful men, who are able to teach...

My aim as a teacher and pastor of a church, is to make myself redundant... If I die tomorrow, there needs to be another faithful man of God, who's trained-up and ready to step-up and teach God's word... And BTW, you don't even have to wait until I cark-it...

And as persecutions increase, this is going to become more and more important... As the leaders in the church – as the preachers and teachers are persecuted and imprisoned, there needs to be others, who know God's word, ready to continue on proclaiming this message of grace we've been entrusted.

3.

Next, he gives an example of the faithful endurance of a Soldier.

The soldiers Paul would've been familiar with, were the Roman Legionaries.

80 Legionaries formed a unit called a "Century", over which a "Centurion" commanded.

And what made the Roman military such a formidable opponent, was:

- *their training;*
- *their defences;*
- *their discipline; and*
- *their overall method.*

And Legionaries would do it tough.

At times, the Century of 80 men would march hard, deep into enemy territory, carrying all their gear with them as they went (rain /snow). And as the sun went down, they'd pull up and make their camp, but even though they were exhausted from their hard day's march, lugging all their gear, before they could even eat their dinner at night, they would have to construct their camp fortifications.

They would dig deep trenches as fortifications around their camp. And the regulation trench that they would have to dig:

- *2m wide;*
- *1m deep;*

- *And the dirt they dug out would be heaped up on the camp side of the ditch.*

(sometimes bashing their way through frozen ground if it was in the middle of winter).

And they'd do this, knowing that at daybreak they'd be on the move again, and they'd have to dig those same fortifications all over again, the next night.

There was a fair bit of hardship involved in being a legionary...

And Paul says, ³ Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

In what way, are we to serve as soldiers of Christ? We share in suffering. And:

⁴ No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.

A soldier's full duty, is to serve his country. If anything else gets in the way of that, he's failed in his duty.

As Christians, our allegiance is to our Lord, and our full duty is to serve Him. He has suffered; we will suffer too. And if anything in life hinders our **true** purpose of following Jesus, those things have gotta go.

4.

Fourthly, he gives us the example of an athlete... An athlete does not win a prize if he breaks the rules. ... *In recent years,*

there's been some prominent world champions, who have been stripped of their prizes, because it was found that they were drug cheats...

And as Christians, we will not win the prize unless we stick to the rules too: Keep the faith – keep following Jesus, and walk in the faith. We were saved from sin, not to go on sinning, but to become holy and Christ-like by the Holy Spirit.

5. Five:

The example of the farmer: The one who works hard, shares in the crops. And as disciples of Jesus, when we stand firm in the faith (even through persecutions) and when we continue to share the testimony of Jesus Christ, we will share in His glory.

Now, as reformed evangelical Christians, some might want to guard so hard against “salvation by works” (that we earn our own salvation), that they then spend a lot of time explaining Biblical passages like this one away... I'm not going to do that, because this was written for a reason – it was written to challenge us. We know that we've been saved by grace – he's already talked about grace (our first point – strengthened by grace)...

But those who are saved by grace, serve, and work hard for the Gospel.

I've noticed, that when it comes to farming (and lets think of farming families), sometimes the heir (son or daughter of the farmer) – works harder than any of the employees... But some others, view themselves as “the privileged”, and sit back and

often they'll head off on extended weekend jaunts – they don't work hard...

Which one is the true son?

- *The one who diligently carries on his father's business?*
Or
- *the freeloader who lives for his own pleasure?*

And as co-heirs of Christ, do we work hard and carry on the Father's business of seeking and saving the lost? Or are we freeloaders who live for our own pleasure?

6. Six

Paul says: ⁷ Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

In order to stand firm in the faith, we need to know what **the** faith is. Do you regularly read your Bible? And do you think about what God is teaching us?

Some of us might just read a little bit of the Bible and go "Oh, this is too hard – I just don't understand it." And they give up... But if you desire to understand God's word, you can, because the **Lord** gives understanding.

To read the Bible, this is the process that I use. We have to empty ourselves of our own thoughts and our own fleshly desires, and we read it and think on it, and think on it some more, and as we continue to think on what we've read, The Lord will give understanding.

7. Seven

Keep the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ at the centre.

V⁸ Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel

Jesus is the Christ – He’s the chosen one of God – the anointed – of a royal line – he was the offspring of King David... .. But He was crucified...

To be chosen by God doesn’t mean that we won’t suffer, but it means we are blessed in sharing in the resurrected life of Jesus Christ... If Christ suffered, we will suffer too. If Christ was raised, those who are His will be raised too.

8. Eight.

Even if the preacher is bound, the Word of God is **not** bound.

Often, where the church is growing the fastest, is in nations where Christians are persecuted the most...

Paul says, he preaches the resurrection of Jesus Christ – that’s his Gospel. ⁹ for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound!

9. Nine

Bear suffering, for the sake of the elect who have not yet heard...

In His grace/mercy, God has chosen to save. Now, some folk get themselves all befuddled on this, and their theology takes them to a place that Scripture does not... They come to the conclusion that, “OK, if God is going to save whom He chooses, then we don’t have to do anything about it.”

What an absolute nonsense...

Because the Word of God is not bound, ¹⁰ **Therefore** (he says) **I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.**

Because God chooses to save, we endure suffering, for the sake of those who are yet to hear. That’s why Paul’s in prison – because he couldn’t stay silent...

It’s not those who are scared into silence who will help those who are not yet saved – it’s those who endure. For the sake of Christ, and for the sake of those who have not yet heard, we keep on testifying for Jesus.

10. Ten

Death in Christ = Life in Christ.

Paul says: “Here’s a trustworthy saying”: **If we have died with him, we will also live with him.**

What does that mean? Some commentators think it’s talking about martyrdom. If we are killed because of our faith in Jesus, that’s ok, because we’ll be raised to eternal life with Him.

Other commentators think about the theology of baptism. In Baptism, the old man is killed; dead; buried, and we become alive in Christ...

Which is it? Is he talking about martyrdom? Or is he talking about Baptism?

I reckon it’s both...

I have already died. I have already laid my life down. How can I take it back up again?

And so, when we suffer for the Gospel, this isn’t a new thing – it’s not a new decision... It’s a continuation of the path that we began, when we were baptised into the death of Jesus.

So, **If we have died with him, we will also live with him.**

We’ve already died in baptism, and we’ve already come alive in Christ. And yes, the world kill the body, but we still live with Him.

11. Eleven

If we endure with Christ = we will reign with Christ.

The non-offensive; non-costing prosperity gospel that is so appealing to the selfish human nature, might talk a lot about reigning and not much about enduring...

It's all about:

- blessings now;
- having good times now;
- promotion now;
- success now;
- we are kings – we reign now....

But God's word tells us that if we **endure** now; if we have **hardships** now; when He returns as king, **then** we'll reign with him...

12. Twelve:

The flip-side of this is denial = denial...

Last week we looked at what Jesus had to say about this: ^{Luke}
^{9:26} **For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.**

Now, some people's theology force them to try and explain this away. There is a belief that's known as "Once-Saved-Always-Saved", that says that "*no matter what, once you've been saved, you can never turn your back on Jesus and lose your salvation*"... And if you believe in OSAS you're going to have a lot of trouble with what this is saying here:

if we deny him, he also will deny us;

That's pretty clear, and the only way to make it say anything else, is to twist it, which we will not do.

13.

And of these 3 statements, the faithfulness of God means this is sure.

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

¹² if we endure, we will also reign with him;

if we deny him, he also will deny us;

¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful—

for he cannot deny himself.

God remains faithful. That means He is true to His word.

If we have died with him, we **will** also live with him;

¹² **if** we endure, we **will** also reign with him;

But,,, He is also faithful to His word when he says **if** we deny him, he also **will** deny us;

If I was to accept the teaching of men that once someone's been saved, they can never be unsaved, that would be to fall into a self-confidence trap, just like Israel did. When God said to Israel, "Turn from worshipping idols and start living justly, for if you don't, I will bring upon you all of the curses that I promised I would." But essentially Israel said "Nah. We're the chosen people of God. We have a covenant with God. He'll never do that." But you know what – That was part of the covenant.

"If you remain faithful, and if you live justly, you will be blessed. But if you don't then you will be cursed."

And when Jesus spoke to the Pharisees, they too were very confident in their position as children of Abraham. But Jesus said to them "Your father is the Devil – the father of Lies". They were confident in the covenant. But they had broken the covenant.

And biblically, it is clear (crystal clear), that the New Covenant in Jesus Christ works in a similar way. We are saved by the blood of Jesus – it's not by our own doing. But we have a role to play – to believe in Jesus Christ. And to believe in Jesus isn't a once only thing, where I can believe in Him today and trust in Jesus today and follow Him today, and then to turn my back on Him tomorrow. To believe in Jesus, means we have to keep on believing.

e.g. that most often quoted Bible verse
John 3:16 (ESV)

16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

And in the Greek, "believes" is a Verb; Present; Active. A better translation would be to say "that whoever **is believing** in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

Jesus said, "If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, I will be ashamed of them."

He cannot deny Himself. He cannot go back on that and say "I didn't really mean it..."

But I want you to also hear this: even **if we are faithless, he remains faithful**

When someone mucks-you-about, how many chances are you willing to give them??? 3 strikes and you're out? The Disciples thought "maybe 7 would be generous". Or maybe just one: You let me down and I'll take my business elsewhere...

Well, Peter denied Jesus. 3 times he denied Him. But even though Peter was faithless, Jesus remained faithful, which meant the faith of Peter could be restored... And it was.

When Peter saw Jesus on the beach, he jumped into the sea and swam back to Jesus... "Do you love me Peter?" "Yes I do." "Feed my sheep"... And then He said, "Follow Me".

And here's good news. Sometimes we've been "faithless". Sometimes I've been faithless. I've let Jesus down... But it is only the end, if we let it be the end.

God is looking for faithful endurance. And if that doesn't describe my walk with Jesus up until now, well things can change. Faithful endurance can begin today, because He remains faithful.

14.

And finally, No.14: Departure from this and into arguing over words, ruins the hearers of the Gospel.

V¹⁴ Remind them of these things [the blessing of faithful endurance], and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers.

Whenever a person's theology (what they believe about God) forces them to shape the Scriptures to fit the mould of their theology, that's a disaster. It's literally a catastrophe. The Greek word there for "ruin" is καταστροφῆ (katastrophē) (total ruin – total upending).

It's pretty much the same word that describes how Jesus overturned the tables of the money-changers in the temple.

And to quarrel about words (as opposed to accepting what the Word of God says), totally upsets the apple-cart.

So, let's never argue about words, to try and shape the Scriptures to fit what I believe about God. It's supposed to be the other way around. The Scriptures, are to shape what we believe about God.

And in this case, the Scriptures have taught us **how** to live in a world where Christians are persecuted. With enduring faithfulness.

Let's pray:

Lord, we want to thank You,
that even when we have been faithless,
You remain faithful.

It's rather confronting,
that You are true to your word,
That if we deny You, You will deny us.
But it's also a great comfort
that You are true to Your Word:
"What when we endure, we shall reign;
That if we die with You, we will live...

But Lord we know,
that there are times when we have not endured;
and we have not been faithful.

Forgive us Lord.

And by Your Holy Spirit,
And in Your Grace,
Strengthen us.
Strengthen our faith.
Strengthen our love;
and our hope.

As we pledge to follow You,
Prepare us for enduring Faithfulness.

From now on.

To Your Glory,
Amen.