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...to know the love of Christ
which passeth knowledge
that ye might be filled with
all the fulness of God Eph 3:19

“Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed (*homologeō*) a good profession (*homologia*) before many witnesses (*martus*). I give thee charge in the sight of God, Who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, Who before Pontius Pilate witnessed (*martureo*) a good confession (*homologia*); That thou keep *this* commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ:” (1Ti 6:12-14)

Paul, in his two letters to Timothy, strongly urged him to be faithful to that which he had been entrusted. They had come a long way together, and Paul was nearing the end of his ministry and life. He was concerned that the truth that was now being forsaken by many, would be left in good hands.

Paul admonished Timothy to **“Fight (*agonizomai*) the good fight (*agon*) of the faith”**. The Greek words for fight here are the words from which in English we derive, “to agonize” and “agony”. This word was used by the Greeks to express a conflict or a competition in a contest for a prize. It was a word associated with self-denial and much discipline. He knew that Timothy would be confronted with a sizable task to carry on this burden of truth and that his faith would be challenged.

The definite article is used here with the word “faith”, i.e. **“the faith”**. A study of the word faith (*pistis*) with the definite article in Paul’s last seven letters will help us better understand the

The Good Confession #1

meaning and seriousness of this urging by the Apostle Paul. (See introductory notes to the word *pistis* in the Englishman’s Greek Concordance and the following occurrences: Eph 2:8; 3:12,17; 4:13; 6:16; Php 1:1,25,27; 3:9 (twice); Col 1:23; 2:7,12; 1Ti 1:2,19; 3:9,13; 4:1,6; 5:8; 6:10,12,21; 2Ti 2:18; 3:8,10; 4:7; Tit 1:4,13; 2:2; 3:15.) It is used considerably more times in his letters to Timothy and Titus. We realize his concern when we read of those who **“concerning the faith have made shipwreck”** (1Ti 1:19), that **“some shall depart from the faith”** (1Ti 4:1), some **“had erred from the faith”** (1Ti 6:10, 21), and there were those who had overthrown **“the faith of some”** (2Ti 2:18). When Paul spoke of **“the faith”** in these letters, he spoke of Christ’s fulness and of the great secret concerning Christ as the head of the Church which is His body. This was the truth many had grasped and were now forsaking.

He further urges Timothy to **“lay hold on eternal life”**. Paul uses this phrase twice in this context, see 1Ti 6:19. The Greek word for “lay hold” means to seize by the hands, to overtake. Timothy already possessed eternal (age abiding) life. Paul exhorts him to embrace the possession that was already his. But eternal life in Paul’s last letters have a fuller meaning distinct from what John teaches in his Gospel. It has a fuller meaning than what Paul wrote about in his first seven letters. The hope of eternal life here is according to God’s promise before the ages. (Tit 1:2, 2Ti 1:1,9). Timothy had under-

stood the hope of eternal life that was promised according to the writings of the prophets. He was well aware of Paul’s letters and ministry during the Acts period which were **“according to the Scriptures”**. Now, theirs and the faith of many others were being tried concerning this **“hope of eternal life”** that had been hid in God and kept secret from the ages (Eph 3:9).

Furthermore, many were being put to death and the edict for their faithfulness was to be thrown to the lions. Many were returning to the truth they knew during Acts when there was much confusion about faith in Christ and the law. Much of the letter to the Galatians addresses this issue. Timothy and Titus both were now confronted with this subject and Paul speaks to this matter in 1Ti 1:6-10, Tit 1:10-16. Perhaps this accounts for the fact that at this time Nero showed partiality to the Jews. He was influenced by his second wife, Poppea who was a Jewish proselyte. (An example of this can be found in the writings of Josephus, *Antiq. xx, viii, 11.*) We see from Scripture that Paul’s primary enemies after his conversion were Jews. This continued unto the end of his life.

It is this **“good fight”** and this **“eternal life”** that Paul tells Timothy, **“...whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed (*homologeō*) a good profession (*homologia*) before many witnesses (*martus*).”** This was his calling, a “high calling”, a calling to heavenly places. Paul now reminds Timothy that he had professed a good

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The Hopes Of God's People # 13

PARADISE

“And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on Him, saying, 'If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us.' But the other answering rebuked him, saying, 'Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this Man hath done nothing amiss.' And he said unto Jesus, 'Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.' And Jesus said unto him, 'Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with Me in paradise.' ” (Luke 23:39-43)

Based on this Scripture from the King James's Version of the Bible, some men teach that (1) Paradise still existed at the time of Christ and exists yet today, (2) Paradise can be entered by believers immediately at death and, (3) Jesus and the malefactor went to Paradise on the very day that they died.

While men teach that Paradise is not future, but it existed in the time of Christ and exists yet today, Scripture reveals that Paradise was lost to man when Adam sinned. (Gen. 3:23,24) There is no record of its remaking in the ages, but we *do* read it will be restored in the future. (2Co12:2-4; Rev.21:1-4; 22:1-3)

While men teach that Christ went to Paradise that very day He died, Scripture tells us plainly that He was dead and in the grave three days and three nights. (Lk. 24:46; Mt. 12:40;)

And, though men teach that the malefactor did not really die and cease to be conscious, but that he went consciously to a place of pleasures, the Scriptures teach that death is a return to dust (Gen. 3:19); that there is no consciousness in the grave (Eccl. 9:10); that all believers sleep in the dust to awake at their resurrections. (1 Thes. 4:14; 1 Cor. 15:6,18)

What then are we to understand from Christ's words to the malefactor, **“Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with Me in paradise”**? How can we reconcile that statement with the weight of Scriptural evidence that believers do not go anywhere except to the grave at death and that they sleep there until their resurrections? We suggest that the seeming discrepancy may be

resolved if we examine Luke 23:43 more closely.

If we examine Luke 23:43 and the basis there for some doctrines of men, we find that these doctrines rest on a tiny punctuation mark in that verse. The placement of the comma *before* “To day”, as it is in the KJV, connects “To day” to the phrase that follows it. It reads then, **“To day shalt thou be with Me in paradise”**, which indicates that on the very day the words were spoken, the hearer would be in paradise with Christ.

If the comma had been placed *after* “To day”, then “To day” would be connected to the first of the sentence. It would become part of a Hebrew expression commonly used to emphasize a serious statement that followed. It would read, **“Verily I say unto thee to day, shalt thou be with Me in paradise.”**

Both “to day” and “this day” are used throughout Scripture in expressions to emphasize some solemn announcement. We find this the case 42 times in Deuteronomy where Israel was admonished about God's commands. In 4:26 we read, **“I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it”**. The translators realized that the message here was not that *this day* they would perish. They recognized the Hebrew expression for emphasis and therefore placed the comma after “*this day*”, emphasizing the horror of the pronouncement. Also, Deuteronomy 8:1 reads, **“All the commandments which I command thee this day, shall ye observe to do”**. Had the comma been placed before “this day”, as was done in Luke 23:43, the meaning of the sentence would be drastically changed. It would say that they were to observe and do the commandment “this day”, that is, on the day the words were spoken and not on any other days.

A closer examination of men's beliefs about Paradise reveals that they are based mainly on their understanding of Luke 23:43, with the punctuation of the KJV. However, since there were no punctuation marks in Scripture (the Greek New Testament) until about the 9th century after Christ, one can not trust

what punctuation implies. It is not a part of the original God-breathed Scriptures, but was added by the authority of humans whose understanding of Scripture was no doubt influenced by their particular beliefs.

One belief, that no doubt influenced the placement of punctuation, was the Greeks' doctrine that souls go either to a place of pleasures or to a place of torments immediately at death. This view was first adopted by the Pharisees in Christ's day, and later by Christian churches. It is still held today by most Christians and is based mainly on the verse in question.

If, in the sentence under consideration, the comma is placed *after* “To day”, then “To day” belongs to the first of the sentence and becomes part of a commonly used Hebrew expression. It reads, **“And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee today, shalt thou be with Me in paradise”**. Then by His use of the expression, “I say unto thee today,” Christ was stressing His sure promise to the malefactor. In addition then, there is no conflict with the weight of Scriptural evidence that Christ died and remained in the grave three days and nights. And also, there is not the false teaching that at death believers go to some place of pleasure or torment.

Today we use expressions for emphasis such as the one in Luke 23:43. We say, “I am telling you today!”... and we continue with some serious statement that is not confined to the time of “today.” Shall we not allow the Hebrews such use of language? Shall we not recognize figures of speech and expressions used in the Bible?

In conclusion, upon what shall we base our faith? How can we know what is true? Shall we trust in the traditions of men based on human punctuation, or shall we compare Scripture with Scripture and trust the accumulative evidence that we find? Some will say they can not “study” the Word of God to learn what is true, but if we read prayerfully and with an honest desire to know truth, the Holy Spirit will guide us into truth concerning Paradise and all things?

For a full explanation of Luke 23:43 and its grammatical structure, see the Companion Bible, Ap. 173

J. Heltzinger

The Lord Stood With Me

“At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me.” 2 Timothy 4:16-17

For the sake of the truth, which is the Mystery God revealed to him for the nations, the Apostle Paul endured loneliness, degradation, and physical pain. For a time some fellow ministers stood with Paul and the new message, but when persecution and loss came, they forsook the truth and went back to the congregations whose hope was Israel's; they turned back to the religion that was popular in that day. They turned back to meet with those who worshipped in fleshly ordinances, ordinances that God had declared obsolete. They “...loved this present world (age)” (2 Tim. 4:10). They forsook Paul and forsook the message God revealed to him.

Paul's life was not an easy one. He was tested and attacked to the very end, but his testimony was, “...**the Lord stood with me**”. Likewise, our lives will not be easy if we will remain faithful to the words of God revealed to us in Paul's prison epistles. We, who have heard and believed the secret revealed to Paul concerning the exaltation of Christ to the position of “Head” over all things everywhere, will be tested to see if we will hold to that truth. We may suffer loss of friends, family, positions, and opportunities to “serve” God in ways that are approved by men. We, who are counted complete, holy, and without blame before God because we are in Christ, will be tempted to compromise His finished work. We will be tempted to *add something* to the completeness Christ secured for us. We will be tempted to do some ritual or “work” and call it a witness of our faith.

Paul's prison epistles contain many warnings about attacks and temptation to succumb to earthly things, to yield to “soulish religion”, to forget we have

died with Christ and are not subject to worship in flesh. He wrote the Philippians, **“Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.”** (Php. 3:17-19) Paul was not merely warning about desires of the flesh such as food and sensual pleasures, but more importantly, he was warning of those who walk in the desires of their flesh in their worship of God. He was warning of those who walk worshipping according to their own reasoning and not according to the Word revealed to them. These, Paul declared were “enemies” of the cross of Christ.

Paul warned young Timothy, who would carry on the message after his death, about persecutions that would come for standing in the new truth. He said, **“...watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.”** (2 Tim. 4:5)

He warned the saints in the assemblies of Asia about temptations to follow men's traditions and to walk in the ordinances that gave the appearance of humility. He said, **“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.”** Beware of men's reasonings that are empty and are not Christ's words specifically to them. (Col. 2:8)

“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day... Which are a shadow of things to come, but the body (reality) is of Christ.” (Col. 2:16-17) Do not allow men to evaluate your position

on fleshly rituals and holy days, for those ordinances only pictured Christ and His work. He is the present reality and those ordinances are now obsolete.

“Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels...not holding the Head. (Christ)” (Col. 2:18-19) Today we may scoff at the idea that we might worship angels, but the word rendered “angels” here is the word also rendered “messengers” and can refer to any messenger, men or angels. If we follow the traditions of men instead of Christ, we may worship (honor) men, rather than Christ. We must be cautious about those who claim to be God's ministers, for some may be messengers of Satan, who himself is called, **“...an angel (messenger) of light”** (2 Cor. 11:14).

How can we avoid being beguiled of our reward or being made a spoil by the traditions of men? How can we walk safely and pleasing to God? It has been said, “The Bible is our guide, our chart, our compass for this life. Can we imagine a captain saying, ‘Well, I know there are reefs and shoals and rocks marked on the chart, but who worries about that?’” (C. H. Welch) The Bible, our chart, tells us there are spiritual enemies in our path who never give up trying to shipwreck our witness for Christ. They wish to spoil our testimony that He alone is our Captain, and our port and destination is to be with Him in heavenly places. We must be alert to the warnings specifically given to us on our chart, those in the prison epistles of Paul.

In this life, we may “go with the flow” of popular religion, but if we stand for the truth of the mystery, we can expect persecutions and loneliness. However, it is certain that at the end we will say as Paul did, **“...the Lord stood with me.”**

J. Heltzinger

The Good Confession ...cont'd

profession. He had declared openly in public his allegiance to this truth. To turn back now would be disastrous. It would “overthrow”, “make shipwreck” the faith of some and cause many to “err from the truth”.

Paul used terms that were related to the Greek games. Words that would remind Timothy of the dedication and faithfulness required to attain the prize in a race. Paul would later remind him of his own contest of endurance and how that it was the Lord who was faithful and delivered him (2Ti 3:10,11). And finally he would remind him that he himself had faithfully completed his race and that the faithful righteous judge would keep His word: “**I have fought (*agonizomai*) a good fight (*agon*), I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing.**” (2Ti 4:7,8). Paul assured Timothy that the

reward for faithfulness was to all that love His appearing.

Paul now reminds Timothy of the perfect example of a “**good confession**”. He could have mentioned several accounts of the Lord’s faithfulness while on earth. The temptations by Satan were good examples. Or the many times he was challenged by the scribes and leaders of Israel and how he confounded their reasoning by the use of the Scriptures. Instead, we read of the Lord’s good confession before Pontius Pilate at the end of his life. “**I give thee charge in the sight of God, Who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, Who before Pontius Pilate witnessed (*martureo*) a good confession (*homologia*); That thou keep *this* commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ:**” (1Ti 6:13,14). It is here that we see the summation of the Lord’s ministry and faithfulness on earth. We read of the precise detail he adhered to that was necessary to complete His

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course. Every Scripture that spoke of this moment and up until His last breath were fulfilled. His witness before Pontius Pilate was a remarkable accomplishment.

In the remaining articles we will consider His “**good confession**”. It is this good confession that we have for a witness and example for the truth with which we have been entrusted.

B. Bagby

Phoenix Spring Conference

The Annual Spring Bible Conference in Phoenix, AZ is scheduled for Apr 2-4, 2004, at the Glencroft Retirement Center, 8711 N 67th Ave., Glendale, AZ, Basement of Condos. Featured guest Speaker is Michael Mecikalski of Boscobel, Wisconsin. Additional information to follow in upcoming issues.

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