

EPHESIANS: THE CHURCH FROM START TO FINISH
"Part IV: Savoring God's POWER Exerted For The Believer's Success"
(Ephesians 1:15-23)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Even as Christians, it's easy to become discouraged over the obstacles to "successful Christian living and service" we face today:

(1) At times the problem is conquering sin in **ourselves**. One of the men in the Saturday Men's Breakfast study has shared how a fellow believer has asked him **how** he might overcome his **own** drug or alcohol habit which he finds he's **powerless** to achieve!

(2) At other times, the hurdle is the darkness we face in the unsaved community. The June 1, 1998, Monday USA Today paper ran a political cartoon on its editorial page, posing this question: "What is legally easier to bring to school?" The answers were: "(A) [picture of the Holy Bible]" and "(B) [picture of a gun]"! Tragically, it's not easy to answer that question! The spiritual darkness that actually **forbids** the truth from being presented in public, especially to our **children**, is at times seemingly insurmountable!

(3) Sometimes the hurdle is in church groups. We received a form letter from Nadine's former Baptist college's 80-year-old president where he wrote: "I am writing to you about a very crucial matter . . . (In a) magazine, The Baptist . . . the statement is made that 'pants and shorts are allowed in the dorm' for the women students of (our) . . . Baptist College. This is absolutely false. No pants or shorts are to be worn by our young ladies . . . We will never give in to pressure from the Devil to water down our stand. We should expect to be attacked because of our standards and our firm stand on the King James Bible."

Sure, Deuteronomy 22:5 forbids women from wearing men's clothing, but **women's** pants and shorts have been around as proper **women's** attire for *decades*! Also, the King James Version, produced by England's *Episcopalian* King James VI was one reason the Congregationalist forefathers **left** Europe for the New World on the Mayflower! The King James Version is just *not* of Baptist authorship!

In reading the letter, I wondered if that segment in conservative Christian circles represented by this college president's viewpoint would **ever** be **able** to see **real** truth on these and many other similar issues!

How can we handle the DISCOURAGEMENT of facing a seemingly insurmountable uphill climb to make headway with sin or darkness in ourselves, in the world or even in fellow believers?!

(We turn to the sermon "Need" section . . .)

Need: "Attaining worthy objectives in life seems impossible in view of my own failings, the opposition I face in the world or even barriers in dealing with other believers! Is it worth trying so hard?!"

- I. Having declared the riches of God's glory and hope for the believer in Ephesians 1:3-14, Paul reported on his ongoing prayer that these Ephesians would comprehend these very truths, Eph. 1:15-18.
- II. **Additionally, Paul reported that he prayed God would cause these believers to perceive and EXPERIENCE His POWER for blessing:**
 - A. The Ephesian converts faced notable insecurities:
 1. Paul's ministry had so opposed idolatry that it imperiled Ephesus' economy, leading to an anti-Christian riot, Acts 19:1, 10, 23-29.
 2. Paul had left the believers to ease the persecution against them, and now wrote this letter from a stressful **prison** cell, Eph. 3:1.
 - B. Thus, Paul prayed that these believers would understand the greatness God's **power** exerted toward them for their **blessing**, Eph. 1:15-16.
 - C. In **particular**, he prayed they would **experience** this power three ways:
 1. Paul prayed that these believers would experience the resurrection power of Christ that reversed death for His **own** needs, Eph. 1:19f.
 - a. The power that raised Christ from death and set him at the Father's right hand is **NOW** exerted toward believers, 1:19-20.
 - b. To illustrate, Paul said that he often experienced **success** in the midst of life's humanly taxing reversals so that Christ's **death and resurrection** could be seen in his frail body, 2 Cor. 4:8-10!
 2. Paul prayed that these believers would experience the resurrection power of Christ over **ungodly dominions**, Eph. 1:19b-20a, 21-22a.
 - a. God's power that raised Christ from the dead placed Jesus in dominion over principalities and powers, the demonic realm, and over all human (including governmental) powers of all time, Ep. 1:19b-20a, 21-22a. This power is exerted for believers **NOW!**
 - b. To illustrate for **us**, we note the events of Paul's ministry in Acts 18 in connection with secular accounts: (a) Paul entered Corinth "shell-shocked" from repeatedly being chased out of towns, 1 Cor. 2:3; Acts 17:5-14; chs. 13-14. (b) God then gave Paul a vision to encourage him to **stay on** in Corinth, promising Paul would

not be harmed, Acts 18:9-10. (c) When the Judaizers **did riot** and bring Paul before Gallio, Paul did **not even** have to **speak** and Gallio set a precedent temporarily guarding Paul, Acts 18:11-18. (d) Via secular records, we see God was at work: Gallio was raised in A. D. 51 to Proconsul on the coattails of brother, Seneca who had been restored from exile by Claudius to tutor **young Nero!** Also, Claudius had exiled Jews from Rome in A. D. 49-50 for rioting against Christians, so **Gallio** mirrored the Emperor's **past** action, **refusing** to hear the case against Paul! **God used newly appointed Gallio, brother of an earlier exiled Seneca, and tutor to the future anti-Christian NERO to HELP PAUL when he was weak!** That is God's power toward believers over dominions! (Cam. Anc. Hist., v. X, p. 500; Ryrie S. Bib., KJV, fn., Acts 18:2; B.K.C., N.T., p. 407)

3. Paul prayed these believers would experience Christ's resurrection headship over all in the **Church** for His glory, Eph. 1:19b-20a, 22b.
 - a. Christ's resurrection placed Jesus in dominion over His **Church** to fill the need of every *believer* in every way, Ep. 1:19-20, 22b.
 - b. To illustrate, we note the events that led up to Paul's being **weak** at **Corinth**, and **WHY**: (a) The Corinthians were very worldly, B.K.C., N.T., p. 505. Thus, God had to get Paul to Corinth in a *weak* state so the **Corinthians** would not be swayed by Paul's **human** power, but by his **message**, and so **truly believe** to be **saved**, 1 Cor. 2:3-5. (b) To **do** so, God gave Paul the vision to leave Asia for **Thessalonica** in Acts 16:6-10 so he would be *persecuted* there, and believers there would **copy** the historical *precedent* of Cicero who fled into "out-of-the-way" Berea (ch. 17:10; G. C. Morgan, Acts, p. 399) and so send Paul down to Berea. (c) Discovering his *copy* of **precedent**, **Thessalonican Jews** pursued Paul to Berea, so believers there sent him *further south* to Athens, much to Paul's **concern** over what had become of **Thessalonica** believers, Acts 17:13-15; 1 Th. 3:1-2. (d) Paul sent Timothy and Silas off to Thessalonica for news and didn't meet them again until he had arrived in **Corinth**, 18:1, 5. **So, Christ used Cicero's flight 100 years before to get Paul into Corinth quite shell-shocked and alone from persecution, then protected him there in his weakness by Gallio's stand that was based on Seneca's return from exile to tutor Nero, all for the base Corinthians to be saved!** That's **power** over the **Church!**

Application: *To savor the power of God in our EXPERIENCE, (1) believe in Christ as SAVIOR from sin to become His child (Jn. 1:11-12). (2) Then, obey Scripture and see CHRIST move ALL mountains so that we can SUCCEED in doing His will for His glory (see Paul's testimony on this to the Corinthians in 2 Cor. 10:3-5)!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon lesson . . .)

initially very **discouraging** event that occurred in Quinche, Ecuador 14 weeks ago on March 2, 1998.

For preaching the gospel and building a new church there, the Berean missionaries and national pastor received threats from the area religious powers because they were allegedly standing opposed to the credibility of the local Quinche, Ecuador Virgin Mary statue. This statue allegedly sometimes cries and supposedly works miracles!

Since the Bereans' refused to stop their gospel teaching, a gathering of 1,000 townspeople, worked into a rage by loudspeakers promoting the priest's and nuns' fury, and led by the city police, headed up the road to the new church building site and burned it. Trina Mayfield, one of the witnessing missionaries, reports, "The nuns were seen tearing pages out of the Bible and throwing them into the fire (even the Catholic Bible we had)." Also, "the priest just stood watching everything, urging the people on." [Trina also reports that the national laws of Ecuador allow for freedom of religion!]

very discouraged. We could not believe that this really happened in the 20th century. To us, it was just like a Martin Luther or John Huss film. We had heard of persecution but had never experienced anything like it . . . "

However, out of the experience, the power of Christ over the Church there has become evident. Trina writes: "**Since** that time, we are **very encouraged**. The believers are **very united**; some have already become **stronger** in their faith. We are confident of God's control and know that 'all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.' We know that we are going to see fruit from this experience and that God has a specific purpose . . . We are looking forward to seeing what His purpose is!"

The power of Christ toward His people is being witnessed in the edification of this persecuted body in Ecuador! All we must do is what THEY are doing NOW -- trust in God's sovereignty!