

From Every Generation

2 Corinthians 1:1-6; 2 Timothy 2:7-13

Sunday, November 15, 2020 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

❖ Introduction

Some people would prefer to face trouble now if it meant that they next generation would enjoy peace. Others are just the opposite. Hezekiah, a righteous king in the Bible (2 Kings 21:19), was content to know of trouble for his descendants as long as it was after his lifetime. Contrast this with the stories I've heard over the years of Jewish leaders facing concentration camps on the eve of World War 2 planning for the education of future children. The second attitude is the Biblical one. It has been said that our obedience to Christ, as well as our disobedience, affects other people. The Scriptures indicate that there is also an influence on future generations of Christians, and concern for them should influence our decisions in the here and now.

❖ set the stage

The Apostle Paul, knowing that he is near the end of his life, wrote a second letter to his protégé, Timothy, emphasizing the most important points of advice and bidding farewell. In it he mentions that he is imprisoned, charged as a criminal for his efforts to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Even though he is in chains, the Gospel is not, and he declares that his suffering for the benefit of fellow Christians, including Christians of future generations, is worth it all. He finds his life spent for the elect of God to be a life well lived.

❖ the elect-people of every generation who obtain the salvation in Christ

The Bible speaks of an elect, people chosen from every generation to be saved by the Gospel. How they are chosen is a matter of debate and we don't have time for that here, but there is an elect. There is a chosen people. I once had the rare privilege to have supper with a gentleman and we discussed what it mean to be chosen people. I mentioned that I

believed that the Jewish people were chosen people in that they had a special place in the plan of God. They mattered, and so did Israel. I believe, however, that the elect ultimately are marked by a devotion to Jesus. But I took care to explain what I mean by "chosen". We are not chosen in the sense that God chose people out of the broader population of the earth with an eye toward rejecting those not chosen, but chosen for a purpose. Scriptures tell us that Christians are among the chosen people as well, and likewise, they are chosen for a purpose. Often that purpose is fulfilled in our efforts to help other people. The applications are numerous.

❖ application: endure

The Christian in this passage is compared to a soldier, farmer and athlete. The soldier limits his outside activity in order to focus on his duties to his commanding officer. The farmer works hard and is patient as he awaits the harvest. The athlete disciplines himself in order to be prepared when the race begins. The Christian requires the same focus, hard work, patience and discipline in order to be useful to Christ, and for the elect. Whatever we endure successfully now prepares us to set an example and to help people in the future. The first few verses of 2 Corinthians, written after years of ministry, say as much. Make the most of your challenges today, in order to set the example and be ready to help another person facing the same challenges in the future.

❖ Conclusion

People can endure current troubles with a vision of benefits to come. Knowing that your perseverance to Christ through difficulties influences people now and in the future can be a great comfort for the discouraged Christian. The Apostle Paul faced false accusations and imprisonment knowing that his message, and his example, helped those who knew him and also those yet to come. I think that is true for Christians today, whose lives are an encouragement to those around them and to generations of Christians yet to come.