Text: Philippians 1:7
Title: "Lives that Defend and Confirm the Gospel"
Time: 10/27/2024
Place: NBBC

Introduction: Martin Luther, the great German Reformation leader, died of natural causes in 1546, but he did so in spite of the fact that he had been pronounced a heretic worthy of execution at the Diet of Worms twenty-five years earlier on May 25, 1521. Having rediscovered the great Bible doctrine of justification by faith alone through Christ alone, Luther came into conflict with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, which teaches that a man is saved by faith and the sacraments through the church.

Johann von Eck presided in behalf of the Roman Church at Luther's trial, and his case was simply to present Luther with a table filled with his works and a straightforward question, "Do you still believe what these works teach?" After being granted a day to ponder his answer, Luther gave his defense with his life on the line, "Unless I am convinced by proofs from Scripture or by plain and clear reasons and arguments, I can and will not retract, for it is neither safe nor wise to do anything against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen."

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther had posted his "Disputation of Martin Luther on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences," which came to be known as "The 95 Theses," on the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church. Indulgences were authorizations for sinful behavior that could be purchased prior to sinning so that the sinner would escape God's judgment. You could buy some for relatives in purgatory as well. They were created by Pope Leo X in order to finance the building of St. Peter's Church in Rome. Today, October 31st is remembered by Lutherans and other

Protestant denominations as "Reformation Day," and they designate October "Reformation Month."

The days of the Reformation have long passed, but the need to defend the faith as Luther did remains with us today. This is why we join hearts and hands with organizations like the American Council of Christian Churches. I was thankful for the opportunity to attend the Council's 85th annual convention last week. You may remember our hosting the Council's Spring Rally last April.

Like Luther, Paul was a great defender of the faith, but so were anonymous believers in the church of Philippi: "both in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, **ye are all** partakers of my grace." Every believer, not just the Pauls and Martin Luthers of church history, must do this work.

The word translated *defense* is *ἀπολογία*. I mention that because we get our English word *apologetics* from this Greek word. The great apostle and the faithful church member in Philippi were joined together in a work of apologetics. *To confirm* gospel ministry is *to strengthen* it. The title of the message this morning is "Lives that defend and confirm the gospel." We will see two things about lives that do so faithfully.

But first, we need to know what the gospel is. *Gospel* means *good news*, and the news of the gospel is good news (rather than bad or irrelevant news) because we sinners are lost and condemned before a holy and righteous God. We are in need of some good news because of our sin and guilt. Jesus Christ provided the good news for sinners by dying for our sins on the cross and rising again from the dead. Because He did that for us, it is now true that "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" from their sins and from this present evil age (Rom. 10:13, Gal. 1:4). Before anyone can live a life that defends and confirms the gospel for others,

that person must be saved by the gospel. Has the gospel saved you? If not, it can do so today if you believe its good news was for you. If it has, we are called to live lives that defend and confirm the gospel in two ways mentioned here.

I. Lives that defend the faith and confirm the gospel do not seek to be safe, let alone popular (v. 7; "in my bonds").

Illustration: During the first day of Luther's trial at the Diet of Worms, he was asked two questions. The first was, "Did you write these books?" His answer was "Yes." The second was, "Will you retract what you have written in them?" Luther's answer was, "I need time to reflect." The 21-year-old Charles V, before whom Luther stood, decided that Luther would have the night to decide and then would have to give an answer the next morning.

Luther did not sleep that night. He prayed through the night. He was wrestling in those hours with a decision between two choices: defend and confirm the gospel and suffer, or please man and be safe, perhaps even popular.

He prayed to the Lord in part: "I should desire to see my days flow on peaceful and happy. But the cause is Thine and it is a righteous and eternal cause. O Lord help me! Faithful and unchangeable God! In no man do I place my trust. It would be vain! All that is of man is uncertain; all that cometh of man fails. O God! My God, hearest Thou me not? My God, art Thou dead? No! Thou canst not die! Thou hidest thyself only! Thou has chosen me for this work. I know it well! Act, then, O God! Stand at my side, for the sake of thy well-beloved Jesus Christ, who is my defense, my shield, and my strong tower."

Application: There is a *both/and* phrase in verse 7. There are two things here that always have to go together: bonds and

faithfulness to gospel ministry. Defending and confirming the gospel causes persecution, not popularity.

We see this in the typical usage of the word Paul uses for *defense* in Phil. 1:7:

Luke 12:11-12, Jesus: "And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall *answer*, or what ye shall say: For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say."

Luke 21:12-19, Jesus: "But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake. And it shall turn to you for a testimony. Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall *answer*: For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist. And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. But there shall not an hair of your head perish. In your patience possess ye your souls." Notice that not even death can cause a hair on our head to perish. We need not popularity, for our protection is in the Lord's capable hands.

In Acts 24:10, Paul *answers* before Felix from his prison; in 26:1-2, Paul *answers* before King Agrippa, still in bonds. Lives that defend and confirm the gospel do not seek to be safe, much less popular. See 1 Pet. 3:13-18.

II. Lives that defend the faith and confirm the gospel share in God's grace (v. 7; "partakers of my grace").

Illustration: I remember sweet ACCC fellowship with Pastor Stephen Hamilton of the Lehigh Valley Free Presbyterian Church. The last message I heard Brother Stephen preach was titled, "True Protestant Living." Stephen is an Irish immigrant, and he told a story from the town where he grew up in Ireland of the salvation of a large and boisterous town drunk named Duncan. He was known as "Drunken Duncan." God saved him and changed his life. He remembered as a boy that Mr. Duncan would wear a tee shirt that said, "Under New Management." People listened to the gospel he preached as a result of that transforming new management.

Application: Paul refers to the new management that changed his life as God's mercy and grace (1 Tim. 1:12-17). It was this change in Paul's life, from blasphemer, injurious, and persecutor to Christ-like apostle, that made him a believable pattern for others to believe the gospel (v. 16). If Paul had gone back to his old way of life after professing Christ as Savior, that would have ruined his ability to defend and confirm the gospel to others.

Illustration: Luther experienced a great change when he was saved as well, very much like that of the Apostle Paul. Here is how he described what happened:

"Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, 'As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the Decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!' Thus I raged with a fierce

and troubled conscience. Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted. At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, 'In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live."'

"There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.' Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me."

Application: Have we been partakers of this grace? Have we been born again this way? Has the change of grace happened to us by faith in Christ? It had to the members of the Philippian Church. Look how Paul describes them in verses 5-6. He says two things about these church members, which caused him to conclude that they shared the same grace that he did.

1. Paul had seen their continuing fellowship in the gospel (v. 5). When a man is born again with new life in Christ, that change unites him with the body of Christ, other people who share that new life with him. That fellowship in the gospel is desirable to people who are truly saved by grace. It does not mean that we never have problems in our relationships (Euodias and Syntyche; 4:2), but it does mean that those problems are exceptions to the rule (see 4:1). The rule is that we are brothers and sisters, we love one another, we long for one another, we find joy in one another, and we serve one another for future reward.

These were not professing believers who forsook fellowship in the gospel. It is impossible to live a life that defends and confirms the gospel for the salvation of others unless we are willing to continue in the fellowship of the gospel, the mutual love and care in Christ of the local church assembly. Jesus taught us that it is by this love for one another that all men will know that we are His disciples (John 13:35).

2. Paul had seen the beginnings of the Lord's work in them (vv. 5b-6).

Illustration: Among the many commands I heard from my dad as boy growing up, the one I remember best because I heard it the most is "finish the job." Dad did not like to see weeds in the garden after I was done weeding the garden. He did not want the backyard grass by the sassafras trees to still need cutting when I was done mowing the lawn. He did not want to find a mess under my bed or in my closet after I was done cleaning my room. He would tell me over and over, "Kevin, finish the job."

Application: Jesus never has to be told that by His Father. He always finishes the job. If He has begun the good work of salvation in you and me, He will finish it. He was sent to earth to live a sinless life and to die for our sins, and as He suffered on the cross He could say, "It is finished!" Had He left that job unfinished, you and I would be burning in hell where we deserve to be this morning. That will not be our destiny, because Jesus finished the difficult job His Father gave Him. He could say, "It is finished."

Jesus' continuing work in your life and mine is that we might be like Him. Just like His cross work, He began this work, and He will finish it. If He really saved us, and we have stopped progressing, He will not let that state of affairs persist. Whom He loves He disciplines. Whom He justifies,

He sanctifies and glorifies. Whom He purchased with His own blood, He possesses for His own purposes. We can be confident of this very thing, if He began the work in us, He will finish it for the coming day. When we finally see Him, we shall be like Him (1 John 3:2).

Conclusion: Is your life a life that defends and confirms the gospel? Must you be safe, or even popular with this world, or are you willing to be persecuted to defend the gospel and strengthen gospel ministry? Has grace changed you so that you desire to continue in the fellowship of the gospel, gathering with your local church family and supporting it sacrificially? Is Jesus finishing what He began in you? Without His grace, we will never help anyone else with a defense and confirmation of the gospel.

In the 16th century, one man said, "Here I stand," and the world changed. Where do we stand? We live in a lost world that needs another reformation. The Lord asks us to serve that need by defending and confirming the gospel. We can be like the faithful church members of the Philippian church.

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,