

## CHAINS (2Tim 2:8-15)

St. Paul talks about being in chains for the gospel of Jesus Christ which he is preaching. In my mind's eye I picture someone sitting in prison with heavy iron clasps around their wrists and their ankles, so tight that they bite into the skin on his arms in order that they don't slip off. And every time that he moves I can hear the clinking of the links on the chains as they hit against one another, a constant reminder that he is not free --- at least not physically free to go where he wants or do what he chooses. But Paul does not let the physical chains silence him or keep him from spreading the word of God.

Many of us from time to time get bound up, chained to our thoughts or circumstances of life. We think that our situation is helpless or hopeless and we wallow in our despair, feeling sorry for ourselves as we wrap ourselves in our own chains. And if we listen closely, we will hear the clinking of the links on the chains just as clearly as if they were made of iron. Maybe we have become so accustomed to our chains that we cannot even hear the sound they make when we try to move. Maybe we are in a financial bind and we think that the only way out is to have more money. We limit God's ability to love us when we can see only one way out. My brother, who lives in Louisiana, has been out of work for over 8 months. He is an oil field worker and about my age, so companies are reluctant to hire him possibly because of his age, even though they would deny that there is any age discrimination going on. But he trusts totally that God is taking care of him. He has a house that is paid for and food in his freezer. Whenever a bill comes in that he doesn't know how he is going to pay for it, money appears from the most unlikely of sources. He, in the meantime, goes about the business of spreading peace and good will and the love of God amongst the recovering alcoholic community. If the roles were reversed and I were in his situation, I would be going nuts worrying about where my next meal would come from. I would be chained even more tightly than Paul was. My brother recognizes that the word of God sets us free from those things which chain us up and limit God's ability to show His love for us.

Different things chain us up in our prisons --- it may be our minds which limit being able to see other possibilities; it may be our hearts that remain hard to the needs of others which, if they were softened, would let love in; it may be our "seeming" physical limitation that keeps us from accomplishing what God is calling us to do. Whatever chains us up can be set free by the word of God, the gospel of Jesus Christ. St. Paul gives us hope when he says, "If we have died with him we shall also **live** with him; if we persevere we shall also reign with him." Today let us see if we can cast off just **one** of those chains which limit our ability to spread God's love.

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