

**Good Results From Bad Circumstances**  
**Philippians 1:12-26**  
**Part 2**

We have begun our study in the book of Philippians. The theme of this book is joy. After the introduction to this epistle in **VV. 1-2**, Paul goes on to tell the Philippians in **VV. 3-8** that he constantly thanks God for them in light of their participation in the gospel from the first day they came to faith in Christ, to the time when he wrote this epistle. This joyous reality produces a great sense of confidence in Paul. He is fully convinced that they in fact are saved. He is fully convinced that they have a personal relationship with Jesus. But Paul did not take his present assurance for granted so he goes on to pray for the Philippians in **VV. 9-11**, **“that their love would abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment.”** He prayed this prayer in order that the Philippians would continue to be filled with the fruit of righteousness until the Day of Christ Jesus. He prayed this prayer in order that he would continue to be assured of the Philippians’ salvation. Beginning in **Phil. 1:12**, Paul transitions from his prayers on behalf of the Philippians to his own personal circumstances. More specifically, Paul wants the Philippians to know how his present circumstances have contributed to the advancement of the gospel. Let us read **V. 12**, **“Now I want you to know, brethren that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel.”** The importance that Paul places on the Philippian church knowing that his present difficult circumstances have been used to advance the gospel is illustrated by the fact that this section of Scripture extends all the way down to **V. 26**.

The biblical principle underlying Philippians 1:12-26 is that human circumstances lie in God’s hands and that God will use those circumstances to advance the gospel.

What was the first circumstance that the Lord used as a tool to advance the gospel? The first tool was Paul’s chains. Let us read **VV. 12-14**, **“Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, (13) so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, (14) and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.”** Paul may have been chained but the word of God was not. Paul may have been chained but Christ had become known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else. Hopefully each of us here this weekend who know the Lord and want to make Him known, will take encouragement from what Paul shares with us here in **Phil. 1:12-14**. We may be chained by various circumstances that are beyond our control, such as Paul was experiencing in his imprisonment, but the word of God is not chained and will continue to go forward.

Is what I have shared with you true? I believe that the answer to this question is, absolutely. And it remains true even if those who are sharing the gospel are personally messed up. Some people have the mistaken belief that if a person is sharing the truth of the gospel and is at the same time practicing sin, that the gospel which he has shared is somehow robbed of its power. This is not true. The gospel of Christ cannot be robbed of its power. Paul, in **Rom. 1:16**, tells us, **“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who**

**believes.”** It does not say “It is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes as long as it is shared by a Spirit filled believer.”

Practicing sin in our lives may cause us to stop sharing the gospel. Practicing sin in our lives may cause others not to want to hear the gospel. But if the gospel is shared and if the gospel is heard, the gospel is the power for salvation, even if the gospel has been shared by someone who is practicing sin. This is a truth we can rejoice in. This is a truth I can rejoice in.

The first time I heard the gospel was in a Baptist church in Compton, California. The first time I heard the gospel I responded. The person who shared with me, I later learned, left his wife for another woman. As a young believer the question went through my mind: Was he having an affair with this woman while he was sharing the gospel with me in this Baptist church? And if he was, did his sin in some way diminish the work of the gospel which he had shared with me? And the answer is, absolutely not. He may have been messed up, but the gospel that he preached was not and I was saved.

We will see the truthfulness of what I have just shared with you demonstrated in the passage we will be studying this weekend as we consider another circumstance in Paul’s life that the Lord used as a second tool to advance the gospel.

What is the second tool that God uses in this passage to advance the gospel? Let us read **Phil. 1:15-18**, “**Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; (16) knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; (17) the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. (18) What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice.**” The second tool that God uses in this passage to advance the gospel are Paul’s Christian opponents.

### PAUL’S CHRISTIAN OPPONENTS

We learned from **Phil. 1:12-15** that most of the church in Rome had been moved by Paul’s chains to preach the gospel of Christ fearlessly. It was not Paul’s imprisonment that made them bold to preach the gospel; it was Paul’s response to his imprisonment. If Paul, while in chains, showed defeat and discouragement and despair, the Roman Church would very likely have wilted. But when Paul manifests victory and triumph in the Lord over the circumstances, these timid brethren take the attitude that, though they may end up in prison, they will have the peace of God and the joy of God and the contentment of God and the presence of God. These brethren without doubt have been counting their own lives dear to themselves, not putting themselves at risk. But when Paul accepts his sufferings as he does, they no longer count their lives dear, but are willing to hazard them for the gospel’s sake. They know that if a prison cell were their destiny, they would find the Lord there, and they would find the Lord’s joy there, and the Lord’s peace there. But even though most of the church at Rome was personally challenged to trust in the Lord because of Paul’s imprisonment, trusting in the Lord was not their sole motivation for sharing. Another motivation for sharing were their feelings toward the apostle Paul.

Some Roman Christians who had been personally challenged by Paul's imprisonment had good feelings toward Paul and others had bad feelings toward Paul. And whether their feelings were good or bad toward Paul, both groups were being motivated to share the gospel of Christ because of those feelings (V. 15). This is clear from **Phil. 1:15**. Let us read this verse, "**Some** (of those who are sharing without fear), **to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also** (of those who are sharing without fear) **from good will.**" Both groups, because of Paul's chains, are preaching Christ fearlessly but from different motivations. Let us first look at the Roman Christians who were preaching Christ out of good feelings toward Paul.

We see them first alluded to at the end of **V. 15** where it says, "**but some also from good will.**" The word "good will" (EUDOKIA) literally means "to think well". The word refers to good motives and well wishes from which an action comes. But who was their "good will" directed toward as they were preaching? Certainly toward the Lord, but in the context of this passage it specifically relates to the apostle Paul. How do we know this? All we have to do is to consider the second reference to this group in **V. 16**. Let us read verses 15-16 together. "**Some to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; the latter do it out of love** (love for whom? Listen to the last phrase) **knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel.**" This latter group, the group that was preaching Christ out of good will, was doing so out of their love for Paul, knowing that he was appointed for the defense of the gospel. This group of believers knew that Paul was not in the place that he was and doing what he was doing by accident. They saw him as God's agent, faithfully dispensing his work and they loved him for it. And this love, not only for the Lord and the gospel, but also for the Apostle Paul, stirred them up to proclaim the gospel of Christ without fear. This group of Roman Christians were preaching Christ out of pure motives. Certainly, as the gospel went forth from such righteous Christians Paul would rejoice. We would rejoice. This is the way the gospel should be preached, but what should be and what actually happens may be two different things.

There was another group that Paul introduces to us at the beginning of **V. 15** who were preaching Christ out of impure motives. Let us read **V. 15**, "**some to be sure, (Some of those who are preaching Christ without fear) are preaching Christ even from envy and strife.**" This is in sharp contrast with those who were preaching Christ from good will and out of love.

What does the word "envy" mean? The word "envy" (PHTHONOS) is a feeling of displeasure produced by witnessing or hearing of the advantage or prosperity of another. Certainly I would think that all of us at some point in time have felt a feeling of displeasure when seeing or hearing of the advantage or prosperity of someone we personally know. Where does this feeling come from? Certainly it does not come from the Spirit. In **Gal. 5:21** it is listed among the fruit of the flesh in contrast with the fruit of the Spirit. If you are here this morning and you presently have this feeling toward another individual, you need to confess it and forsake it.

If we fail to do this, it will invariably lead to other things. Let us again look at **V. 15**, "**Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife.**" What is the second impure motive that Paul identifies? It is strife. The word "strife" (ERIS) is best understood as rivalry. We know that this has occurred when the person we are envious of rejoices, we become sad and then when the person we are envious of is sad, we rejoice. Why would we do this? Because they have

become our rival. We have entered into a conflict with them even though they may not have ever done anything to personally wrong us. Where does this come from? Certainly it does not come from the Spirit. In **Gal. 5:20** it is listed as a fruit of the flesh. If you are here this morning and you presently have this feeling of rivalry toward another individual, you need to confess it and forsake it.

But who did these individuals in V. 15 envy? Who was their rival? From **V. 17** we would have to conclude it was the Apostle Paul. In **V. 17** it says, **“The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment.”** Clearly from the context we would have to conclude that it is Paul that they were envious of and it is Paul who they considered their rival.

Paul’s opponents were envious of his authority. Paul’s opponents were envious of his position. Paul’s opponents were envious of his ministry. This led them to become Paul’s rivals. Yes, the chains of Paul were motivating most of the church to preach the gospel without fear but they were not all motivated to do this out of goodwill and love toward Paul. There were some who were motivated by envy and strife. In the case of these individuals, Paul’s imprisonment looked to them like a perfect opportunity to build a personal following at Paul’s expense and even to cause him distress.

The word “distress” (THLIBO) means to suffer affliction, to be troubled. It has reference to sufferings due to the pressure of circumstances or the antagonism of persons.

These Christian opponents of Paul, like the Corinthians, were truly messed up.

Did their failure diminish the power of the gospel? Did those who heard the gospel from them and who had responded to the gospel have to fear that their salvation was some how compromised by the messenger? And the answer is, absolutely not. A messenger of the gospel who is sinning does not diminish the power of the gospel to save.

How do we know this? Listen to the response of Paul to his opponent. Let us read **Phil. 1:18**, **“What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice.”** Does Paul believe that the power of the gospel to save is diminished by the presence of sinful motives? The answer is, absolutely not. Paul knew that even though his opponents were proclaiming the gospel in order to cause him distress, it did not diminish the power of the gospel to save. Because of this, anytime the true and only gospel is shared under any circumstances, we should be able to rejoice.

Let me ask you a question. Have there been Christians during the course of your life who had no feelings of good will toward you? Who actually might have delighted in your distress? I can honestly tell you that I have. But I also know that some of these individuals who have not been particularly happy with me and who have sinned against me have been used by God to advance His kingdom through their faithful proclamation of the gospel and in this I need to rejoice.

How can we do this? We can do this when we desire one thing more than anything else. What is

this thing? Let me share with you a story.

Twelve years ago we had a Japanese college student stay in our home. Her family was Buddhist by tradition but she had no personal religious faith. She became our Japanese daughter. Over these past twelve years she would periodically communicate with us. Several months ago she called and wanted me to perform a western wedding ceremony for her and her new husband. The planning and the carrying out of her wishes again gave us an opportunity to share the gospel with her one more time. I asked her how our discussion about the gospel made her feel and she said it made her feel bad because she wanted to respond to the gospel to please Lynn and I but she knew that she truly did not believe. And then she went on to explain how there is not one single Japanese Christian in her life using the Japanese language that might help her understand the things that we were explaining. I told her that we would pray that a Japanese Christian might come into her life. And she thanked us.

Hopefully she will write back to me one day and tell us that her prayers have been answered. That the gospel of Christ has been explained to her clearly and reasons for believing in Christ have been explained clearly and that she has placed her faith in Jesus. Let me ask you a question: If I were to receive a letter from her and she told me that a Japanese Christian had explained the way of Christ more fully to her and that she had received Christ, would I rejoice? Yes! Would I rejoice no matter what Japanese Christian might have shared with her? How can I do this? Because there is one concern that transcends all my other concerns. What is that concern? Her salvation.

We can rejoice when the true gospel is shared under any circumstance, by any individual, accompanied by any motivation, if our concern for the salvation of people transcends all other concerns. And if this is true then we will agree with Paul in Phil. 1:18.

God is going to use circumstances to advance His church. The first circumstance in Paul's life that God used to advance the gospel were his chains. The second circumstance in Paul's life that God used to advance the gospel were his Christian opponents.