

Good Results From Bad Circumstances
Philippians 1:12-26
Part 3

We have begun to examine Phil. 1:12-26 which briefly outlines for us various circumstances in Paul's life. The underlying principle of this section of Scripture is that human circumstances lie in God's hands and that God will use those circumstances to advance the gospel. Hallelujah! How do we see this demonstrated in Paul's life?

The first circumstance in Paul's life that God used to advance the gospel were his chains. We saw this in **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.**" God used Paul's circumstances to make the name of Christ known through the whole praetorian guard and everyone else. This is a wonderful testimony to the power of God to use circumstances to accomplish His purposes. Hopefully this will be personally comforting to us as we suffer under circumstances that might appear to us to limit our ability to proclaim Christ. Hopefully, we will understand that though we may feel chained, the word of God is not chained.

But this is not the only circumstance in Paul's life that God used as a tool to advance the gospel. He also used Paul's adversaries. Let us read **VV. 15-17**, "**Some to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will. (16) The latter do it out of love, 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.**" Yes, Paul's chains had stirred up the church of Rome to preach Christ fearlessly. But some of those who were preaching Christ fearlessly were preaching Christ out of envy and strife. They were jealous of Paul's influence on the church and they wanted to inflict pain on him. This is another terrible circumstance in Paul's life, but Paul was able to see that God could even use this circumstance to advance the gospel. How do we know that Paul was able to see this?

Let us read **V. 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.**" Paul could have become discouraged by his mistreatment, especially because it was not coming to him just at the hands of the world but also at the hands of some in the church. But he didn't. "Why?" Because he saw that God was using his adversaries, whoever those adversaries might be, to advance the gospel of Christ.

Some people may find Paul's perspective very foreign to them. When they feel chained by circumstances, the only thought that may cross their mind is how those chains have robbed them of the opportunity to secure what they want or desire. When they feel under attack, the only thought that may cross their mind is how painful those attacks may be on them. If this describes you, then may I suggest that you begin to meditate on what is really important? And you might

say, “And what is that?” Let us read **Phil. 1:18** once again, **“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 proclamation of Christ, the proclamation of the gospel of Christ needs to be more important to us than our personal comforts or people’s responses to us. Can you say amen? May God give us the grace to respond in this way to whatever circumstances come into our lives knowing that God controls those circumstances and that He will use those circumstances to advance His gospel.

There is another circumstance in Paul’s life in addition to Paul’s chains, in addition to Paul’s Christian opponents, that we find in **VV. 19-26**. But we are not going to consider that particular circumstance this week. Rather I would like to go back to this last circumstance in **VV. 15-18** and examine several very important questions Paul has shared with us. What is the first important question that we need to address?

DO MOTIVES MATTER WHEN THE TRUE GOSPEL IS PROCLAIMED?

How would you answer this question? Hopefully you would answer, yes! Motives matter. Just because Paul encourages us to rejoice when the true gospel is proclaimed, whether in pretense or in truth, he is not encouraging us to be indifferent toward improper motivations in regard to ourselves or others. Why is this? This morning I will give you two different reasons. First of all, we need to consider our motives if we hope to be commended as a faithful steward of Christ’s gospel (1 Thess. 2:1-4.) If there is any doubt concerning this, let us consider **1 Thess. 2:1-4**. In this section of Scripture Paul is presenting himself as a faithful minister of the gospel. Let us read, and as we read let us ask ourselves the question, “how did Paul demonstrate himself to be faithful?” **“For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain, (2) but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition. (3) For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit, (4) but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men but God, who examines our hearts.”** Let us go back to the original question, “How did Paul prove himself a faithful steward of Christ’s gospel in **1 Thess. 2:1-4?**”

HE PROVED HIMSELF FAITHFUL IN RESPECT TO HIS MANNER OF MINISTRY (VV. 1,2).

What was Paul’s manner of ministry? He was persevering. We saw this in **VV. 1-2**. **“For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain** (or in other words empty of purpose), **(2) but after we had already suffered** (been beaten) **and been mistreated** (or in other words ridiculed) **in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you** (at Thessalonica) **the gospel of God amid much opposition”** (We were still, even after all that we experienced at Philippi, to engage the enemies of the gospel in an intense contest or struggle).

Paul and his companions were clearly persevering. When less faithful stewards may have quit, Paul continued on. Perseverance is at the heart of faithfulness. How else did Paul prove himself

faithful?

HE PROVED HIMSELF FAITHFUL IN RESPECT TO THE MESSAGE OF HIS MINISTRY (V.3).

Let us read **V. 3, “For our exhortation does not come from error.”** What specifically was this exhortation? When Paul speaks of **“our exhortation”** he is specifically referring to the gospel. We see this in **V. 2** where he identifies the “exhortation” as the “gospel.”

And what does he say about this **“exhortation?”** He said that this **“exhortation does not come from error.”** Or in other words, he believed that the gospel that he was preaching was true! He was convinced that the gospel that he was preaching was true! God had entrusted to him the gospel and he had not in any way corrupted it. The gospel he was proclaiming was true.

How did Paul prove himself faithful? He proved himself faithful in respect to his manner of ministry. He proved himself faithful in respect to the message. And lastly he proved himself faithful in respect to the motive of his ministry.

HE PROVED HIMSELF FAITHFUL IN RESPECT TO THE MOTIVES OF HIS MINISTRY (V. 3).

We must understand that even though we may be persevering in sharing the true gospel, we must also share that true gospel with pure motives if we are going to be considered a faithful steward.

Look at **V. 3, “For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity.”** Or in other words, preaching the right message with the wrong motives. What are some examples of wrong motives that we might be able to point to?

The lust of their flesh (2 Tim. 3:1-6). Could this even be possible? Let us read **2 Tim. 3:1-6, “But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. (2) For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, (3) unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, (4) treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; (5) holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; avoid such men as these. (6) For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses.”** Can this actually happen? The answer is yes. There have been many men associated with the ministry of the gospel who have played with the affections of women in the guise of being servants of Christ. Why have they done this? They have done this in order to satisfy the lust of their flesh. Yes, they may have a form of godliness but they have denied its power and have proclaimed the gospel for the wrong reasons. But this is not the only impure motive.

The lust of the eyes is another (1 Thess. 2:5). Let us read **1 Thess. 2:5, “For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed - God is witness.”** There are many so-called Christians today who see Christ as a means to an end rather than as the end.

They look upon him as the means to get whatever their eyes might desire. What is so disturbing about this is, rather than being ashamed of themselves, they actually preach this gospel of greed and lust to others. If you removed from these individuals the hope of earthly riches as the product of their gospel proclamation it is very doubtful whether or not they would preach the gospel at all. But this is not all.

The pride of life is still yet another (Phil. 1:15-18). And to what passage of Scripture might we go to illustrate this particular problem? There is no better place to go to illustrate this problem than the passage that we have been studying over the past several weeks, **Phil. 1:15-18**. Why were these individuals preaching the gospel? They were preaching Christ from envy and strife. They were jealous of the Apostle Paul and were seeking to bring him distress in his imprisonment. Can this actually happen in our lives and the answer is, “Of course!”

Paul in **V. 3** is sharing with the Thessalonians that his preaching did not come from “**impurity.**” He in essence was telling them that he was not being motivated by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life. He was telling them that his motives were pure and this was important to him because he wanted to live a life pleasing to the Lord. He wanted to be a faithful steward. Are motives important? Yes! If we desire to live a life pleasing to the Lord, we cannot be indifferent to our motives for doing what we do and certainly this is true when it comes to the proclamation of the gospel. But this is not the only reason why we cannot be indifferent in respect to motives. Not only will an indifference to motives lead to problems in being able to please the Lord, an indifference to our motives can also lead to hindering the ability of people to hear and respond to the gospel.

We need to consider our motives if we do not want to be a hindrance to the gospel (1 Cor. 9:11-12). Again we turn to the life of the Apostle Paul to illustrate this point. We know that in Thessalonica, Corinth, and probably Ephesus, Paul worked with his hands to supply for his needs. Why? Let me read for you **1 Cor. 9:11-12**, “**If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you? (12) If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things, that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ.**” Why did Paul choose not to ask for money from these various churches? He was fearful that this action would be interpreted by those in the church wrongly. He was fearful that some might interpret that action to mean that he cared about their money more than he cared about them. If they interpreted his actions in that way, it would become more and more difficult to minister the word of God in their lives effectively.

Jim, several weeks ago, shared with you that we are being watched. And as we are being watched, there will be times when people will speculate about our motives. Hopefully, we will commit ourselves as the disciples of Christ to remove, as best as we can, anything that would cause people to conclude that our ministry is being performed out of impure motives, lest we might cause by our actions a hindrance to the gospel of Christ.

CONCLUSION

Just because Paul encourages us to rejoice when the true gospel is proclaimed, whether in pretense or in truth, he is not encouraging us to be indifferent toward improper motivations in regard to ourselves or others. Clearly we see from other Scriptures written by Paul that our motivations our important.

We need to consider our motives if we hope to be commended as a faithful steward of Christ's gospel (1 Thess. 2:1-4).

We need to consider our motives if we do not want to be a hindrance to the gospel (1 Cor. 9:11-12)

Can God continue to work as His true gospel is proclaimed even if our motivations our impure? And the answer is "Of course he can!" This is why Paul was able to say in **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."** Paul would not be able to say this apart from God being able to work around whatever circumstances might present themselves as the true gospel is proclaimed. But hopefully we don't want God to have to work around our lives; we want God to be able to work through our lives. Therefore let us look at our lives and let the Spirit of God search us so that any impure motives for ministry on any level might be revealed to us so that we might be able to confess and forsake them.