

Lesson 4
Paul's Imprisonment Furthers the Gospel
Philippians 1:12-18

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Every child of God has asked himself, "Why do I have to suffer? since I am an object of God's grace and have found the forgiveness of sins in Christ, why can't I be exempt from trying circumstances? No Christian has a completely logical answer to this question, but the Christian by faith rests the things he does not understand into the hands of God. The Christian does have the confidence that nothing has come into his life except God has directly or indirectly permitted it, for all things are under the sovereign control of God, and somehow, He will work the crisis for good. (**Rom. 8:28: *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.***).
- B. Surely the Apostle Paul asked himself the same question as he found himself under house arrest and a prisoner of the state of Rome. Humanly speaking, things had not worked out as Paul had planned them. He wanted to be out preaching the gospel as far away as Spain but instead he found himself a prisoner for two years in Rome, being on trial for his life. In Jerusalem a few years before the writing of this letter, Paul was falsely accused of bringing a Gentile into the Temple. As a result, he was dragged into the street and nearly lynched by a religious mob. He was then put in prison and narrowly escaped a flogging by pleading Roman citizenship. His case was a mockery of justice! Forty Jews even took a vow they would not eat until Paul was dead. Eventually he was taken to Caesarea where he spent two years waiting in prison. Because of his appeal to Caesar, he was put on a ship and sent to Rome. On that journey, he was shipwrecked, bitten by a snake and forced to spend the winter on the island of Malta. He finally arrived in Rome condemned, bound by chains and waiting the uncertain decision of a half-crazy earthly king. Surely Paul must have thought to himself, "Why must I suffer as an innocent person? Why has God placed me in this extenuating circumstance?" Yet, Paul knew something about the plans and purposes of a sovereign God and was confident that God had a definite reason for this testing. He had the assurance that God works everything for good and he became an optimist in the midst of negative circumstances. The Apostle not only saw the bad but the good in every situation in life, and he learned to use what seemed to be bad situations and turn them for good in the cause of Christ.

II. PAUL WAS IN A ROMAN JAIL AS A PRISONER OF CHRIST (12)

- A. ***Now I want you to know, brothers,*** -- The Philippian Church loved Paul and they wrote a letter, wanting to know how Paul fared in Rome. Was he alive? Was he in jail? What was his future? What would happen to the gospel cause if Paul is executed? Would Paul hold up or fold up as he faced the highest court in the Roman world? All these questions and more were racing through the minds of the Philippians. NOTE: While the Philippians were concerned for Paul, Paul was more concerned for the Philippians that they would understand the sovereign workings of God in his life. He wanted them to learn the spiritual lessons from his example of facing adverse circumstances.

- B. ***That what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel*** -- Apparently some of the Philippians had become rather negative and pessimistic about Paul's imprisonment. They had their eyes on the circumstances rather than the Lord. Paul, the optimist, does not even talk about himself or his negative circumstances, but he assures them that his imprisonment has actually furthered the cause of Christ. When Paul went to Rome as a prisoner, it was in reality the gospel that went to Rome. Notice again how Paul does not tell these Philippians all about his personal problems but tells them how God is at work in his life and how God is bringing good out of bad. Paul was not frustrated, depressed or sure God had put him on the shelf. While Paul was bound in chains, the gospel was not bound, and he was using this prison experience for the furtherance of the gospel (***2 Tim. 2:9: This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained.***). Paul was consciously aware that all men had to hear about the forgiveness of sin, deliverance from judgment and eternal life, which can only be found through the person of Jesus Christ. NOTE: Here is a principle of God's government in this world – that the things which are happening to us as Christians are designed by God to further His cause of the gospel in this world. Everything God allows to touch us is working to conform us to the image of Christ, making us Christ-like so we can be more effective in this world for the advancement of the gospel. NOTE: Perhaps your plans for your life have been shattered by negative circumstances. Maybe you now know tears rather than laughter. Possibly you are experiencing misunderstanding when there was once affirmation. Perhaps you are feeling insecurity when there was once vigorous confidence. Do you have the faith to believe this is happening for the advancement of the gospel through your life? Somehow animosities, pain, lies, injustices, mental turmoil the threat of death and suppression of truth can be used by God for the advancement of the gospel.

III. PAUL'S IMPRISONMENT WAS CAUSING ROME TO FACE THE ISSUE OF CHRIST (v. 13):

- A. ***As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard, and to everyone else, that I am in chains for Christ.*** -- Paul's imprisonment was advancing the gospel because many in Rome were coming to know Christ as personal Savior and Lord through his ministry. They were coming to know Christ through the Palace (Praetorian) Guard. The Praetorian Guard consisted of 9000 of the finest, seasoned soldiers in the Roman Army. They were highly trained, "crack" troops who were paid double because their assignment was to protect the Emperor and be security guards for all those prisoners who were appealing to Rome of whom Paul was one. These soldiers were the future "movers and shakers" of the Roman Empire. The Apostle Paul was guarded 24 hours a day by one of these Praetorian Guard. Paul was actually chained to a guard and every four hours the guard changed, so that over a period of two years, Paul had an opportunity to share the gospel with 4,220 men of the Praetorian Guard. These guards would have to listen to Paul debate with unbelieving Jews, or reason with unsaved Gentiles, or teach Christians. They saw Paul write and dictate letters, (Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, Philemon) and they observed him reading the Old Testament scriptures and praying. These soldiers became a captive audience. These hardened, rude, rough and tough legionaries, who humanly would be the very last people to become Christians, were deeply moved by what they saw and heard and felt in the presence of Paul. They became convinced that Paul was not in jail for political or civil breaking of the law but because of his religious convictions. He was in jail because he believed in a resurrected Christ and proclaimed Him faithfully to all men. Some of the Praetorian Guard actually became Christians and many of them probably begged for guard duty with Paul. NOTE: Notice the words "and

to everyone else.” The teachings of Paul about Christ became the talk of the town. The news of Christ spread from guard to guard, to the families of the guards, and to all the families of Rome. The message of Christ even went to Caesar’s household (**Phil. 4:22: *All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar’s household.***). The same Praetorian Guard would also stand watch over Caesar’s household. All this meant progress for the gospel. Rome was being faced with the issue of Christ. NOTE: by Paul being in prison, the gospel got into Roman circles that would have ordinarily been closed to Christians. God works in mysterious ways. We learn that circumstances are not a barrier to the gospel. The gospel actually grows better in the soil of adversity. Augustine said, “The blood of martyrs is the seed of the church.” The more men try to stamp out the gospel, the more it grows. The more Christians are persecuted, the more the gospel is preached.

Dr. Kim, who is a leader with Campus Crusade for Christ in Korea, had his family killed by the Communists and he himself had been left for dead after being beaten and shot. When he became conscious, he gave himself wholly to Christ to be used to spread His Word. The first thing Dr. Kim did was forgive his enemies. He forgave his supposed friends who turned him over to the Communists, and he forgave the man who killed his family. He knocked on the door of the man who shot him and the man thought he was seeing a ghost. Dr. Kim went in, told the man that he forgave him and that Jesus wanted to forgive him too. This man accepted Christ and the Gospel began to spread in an amazing way as God began to use Dr. Kim. The South Korean Army came to him and said, “We are so impressed with the discipline of the Christians and the commitment of the Christians in your organization (40,000 hard core trained Christians) that we want you to train our army. Teach them discipline. Teach them this kind of commitment.” Dr. Kim was given authority to start with the officers, and put them, in effect, in a Lay Institute of Evangelism. The officers, in turn, trained the men in the Korean Army. The Korean Army was actually evangelizing Korea.

IV. PAUL’S IMPRISONMENT WAS CHALLENGING CHRISTIANS TO WITNESS (v 14): ***Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the Word of God more courageously and fearlessly.*** -- Paul’s circumstances had caused most (not all) to begin witnessing for Christ. The implication here is that many of the Christians in Rome had been silent about the gospel because of persecution. They had shown very little courage for Christ. These Roman Christians had rationalized that it was all right to be a “silent witness” but not a verbal one, which plays right into the devil’s hand. Yet, when they saw Paul being so confident, so assured, so bold under such adverse circumstances, they were willing to suffer themselves for the cause of the gospel. They saw Paul “under fire” and were challenged by his example. The saints at Rome began to “gossip the gospel” and God was at work saving people. Paul’s example was infectious and the Christians at Rome moved out for Christ. Paul, through the saints at Rome, was multiplying his ministry. This proves that the power of an example is worth a thousand sermons. NOTE: Notice it was not the preachers, or the evangelists, or the bishops who began to witness but “the brothers in the Lord.” This was a lay movement. Every Christian began to share the good news of Christ with their friends, neighbors, business associates, classmates or whoever. This is New Testament Christianity. Someone has said, “The world has yet to see what God can do with a church wholly mobilized for Him.” NOTE: Do you view your present negative, restricted circumstances as an opportunity to advance the gospel and encourage others? Your prison may be a boring job or an illness that limits you. Perhaps you feel trapped being the mother of small children. You may be chained to a group of obnoxious business associates. Your

chains may be you are out of work. These are not circumstances which cannot provide an opportunity for the spread of the gospel. Our seemingly insignificant negative circumstances are part of God's master plan to reach the world for Christ.

V. PAUL'S MINISTRY IS CAUSING POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE REACTIONS FROM CHRISTIANS (vs. 15-17)

- A. ***It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry,*** -- Now Paul tells us about the most bitter pill to swallow. He speaks of his persecution from fellow-Christians. It is one thing to go out into the world and be ridiculed and scoffed at by unbelievers – we expect that. But it is quite another story when we are attacked by brothers and sisters in Christ. The deepest wound of all is when one Christian stabs another Christian in the back. This is the most painful wound of all, and this is the kind of wound Paul describes in verses 15-17. NOTE: Paul points out that some in Rome were preaching Christ out of “envy” and “rivalry.” They were preaching the gospel with wrong and impure motives. These were true believers who were attacking Paul. Paul approved of their message. He would not approve an untrue gospel. They were not unbelievers, or false teachers, or apostates but genuine Christian preachers who disliked Paul. They were men who were “preaching Christ” but had mixed or impure motives. They preached the true gospel but their hearts were wrong. Envy motivated some because they were jealous of the Apostle Paul and his success in the gospel, even while in prison. With the arrival of Paul in Rome, some of the “big name” preachers in the city were losing some of their prestige and were jealous of Paul. Others preached out of rivalry for they wanted to show themselves better than Paul. They used their pulpits as a launching pad against Paul. They wanted to put themselves up and Paul down. NOTE: what envy and jealousy there is between pastors and congregations today. If a church in the city begins to be blessed by God and grows numerically, pastors and congregations of other churches begin to snip and criticize. There is too much professional jealousy among Christians and pastors.

In our generation, we see this jealousy and envy among preachers in the critical attitude of many towards Billy Graham. Mr. Graham is preaching the gospel with great success and has become a target for all kinds of criticism. Some of the criticism is over method, and Mr. Graham does some things I probably would not do, but he is preaching the gospel with no compromise. However, much of the criticism of Billy Graham is because pastors and evangelists are just plain jealous of Mr. Graham's success.

- B. ***But others out of goodwill.*** -- This group had pure motives and loved Paul and the gospel and were challenged by the life of Paul to preach courageously. They saw Paul as appointed by God for the defense of the gospel and humbly submitted themselves to Paul.

I remember the story of this preacher who was very jealous of Charles Spurgeon. Each Sunday this pastor would watch people walk by his church and some leave his church to go to Spurgeon's Tabernacle to hear the Prince of Preachers, who was mightily blessed of God. This preacher became critical and even spoke out against Mr. Spurgeon in his pulpit. Finally one day the Spirit convicted this preacher's heart that he was jealous of Mr. Spurgeon. From that time on, the preacher began to pray diligently for the ministry of Spurgeon in private and public, for the important thing was that the gospel was being preached. It wasn't too long before God began to fill up the pews in this preacher's church, for God blesses a heart filled with love for those preaching the gospel.

- C. ***The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.*** -- The preachers with pure motives were motivated by love for Paul to preach the true gospel. They just wanted to see the gospel proclaimed, and, if Paul was God's instrument that was fine with them.

Billy Graham came under such terrible attack from one minister that it really began to eat away on Mr. Graham's heart, until finally there sprang up the seeds of hatred for the minister in Graham's heart. Billy Graham went into his room, got down on his knees, and told God that he was going to stay on his knees until God put love in his heart for this critical minister. After many hours, the love did come, and Mr. Graham began to love this minister not for the things he had done and said but because this minister was proclaiming the gospel.

- D. ***The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, supposing they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains.*** -- While these preachers were not anti-Christ, they were anti-Paul. They disliked Paul, trying at every turn to stir up trouble for him. They felt Paul was not in jail to defend the gospel but that he had sinned somehow and deserved what he got. These carnal preachers were pushed by selfish motives and a partisan spirit. They craved honor and prestige and would have "cut the throat" of Paul to get it. NOTE: There are pastor's in the Lord's work today who will go to any lengths in order to push themselves to the top. They think nothing of crushing other Christians to gain their selfish ends. How sad it is that there are quite a few of these types of men in evangelical circles today. We call them "Protestant Popes." NOTE: Often preachers preach with bad motives. Some men preach for the praise of men. Others preach for the power and control they can have over men. Others preach for money. Yes, some preachers go about the country, charging exorbitant fees. If they don't get the fee, they don't speak. It is possible to preach the right message with the wrong motives.

VI. PAUL REJOICED THAT CHRIST IS BEING PREACHED (v. 18)

- A. ***But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached.*** -- Paul's attitude gives us insight as to what our attitude should be towards those Christians who attack us or towards those Christian groups with which we disagree. Paul did not respond by a vicious attack on these brethren, sending a scathing, red-hot letter to every local church, naming by name each preacher in Rome who took issue with him. These were brethren, not unbelievers; they were saved, not lost. They were true Christians and he deals with them in love. Paul dealt with the unbelieving, false teachers in Galatia in a harsh way, and said of them, "Let them be accursed!" Yet, Paul does not correct or take on these carnal preachers in Rome. Instead, he rejoices that Christ is being preached and people are being saved.

NOTE: So often preachers and Christians begin to look at other Christians and preachers and begin to wonder whether their motives or methods are right, so they start preaching against this movement and that movement, this Christian and that Christian. They spend all their time attacking other saints. This causes disunity in the body of Christ; it gives the world ammunition to criticize Christians and it uses up good energy which should be used to preach the gospel. We are told in Jude 3 to contend for the Faith but not to contend with the faithful. God is the judge of motives and not men.

NOTE: Could Paul have said, "I thank God Christ is being preached" if one of the preachers was John Wesley, an Arminian, or Pat Robertson, a charismatic? Paul surely

would not have agreed with all they taught, but he would have been thankful for the truth they did have about Christ and salvation. NOTE: There will always be other Christians, other denominations and para-church organizations who will not dot their “I’s” and cross their “T’s” just like we Reformed people do. Yet, we can get excited that they are preaching Christ.

Frank Barker, pastor of Briarwood Presbyterian Church, tells a story on himself how he was all concerned about a semi-liberal who was seeing people saved in his church in spite of the preaching, through home Bible studies. He did not agree with the theology, the method or the material. Then Frank says he said to himself, “Finally, I began to realize that God is far more concerned about people being saved than He is about doing it my way or with a particular approach I use. God doesn’t mind some error being mixed in with the truth nearly as much as I do! God is concerned that we have a humble approach. I always thought God would work in an amazing way in a church where everything was done according to strict orthodoxy. I was in just such a church one summer and it was dead...dead orthodoxy. I am now of the opinion that alive heresy is preferable to dead orthodoxy! We can become proud of our orthodoxy and that is one thing God is not going to use! So, we can rejoice as Christ is being preached even though there is various error mixed in.

- B. ***And because of this I rejoice.*** -- Paul was determined not to be pessimistic or critical but to rejoice in the fact that Christ was being preached no matter what the poor motives, questionable methods and even shaky message of his enemies might be. Paul was an optimist and believed God was sovereignly in control of the preaching of the gospel.

NOTE: Paul was not indifferent to the errors of the carnal preachers but he was more concerned that the gospel was preached. Paul was too busy positively preaching Christ to get into negative debates and disputes with other Christian ministers.

NOTE: God is very concerned about our attitude. If others do not use the same methods we do or strictly adhere to our system of doctrine, we should not get all bent out of shape. We can rejoice that Christ is being preached. We don’t have to accept their system of theology but we can rejoice that Christ is being proclaimed. NOTE: The real question is are we proclaiming Christ to men? Do we have some method of making Christ known to others? Quite often we Reformed people look upon ourselves as the doctrinal conscience of the universal church and we are quite critical of other’s doctrine and method, especially in the area of evangelism. Yet, many Reformed people are not evangelizing, and the freewill camp puts us to shame when it comes to zeal for reaching the lost.

I am reminded of a statement made by D. L. Moody. Someone told him they did not like his method of sharing the Gospel and he asked what method they used. They admitted to not having one. Moody then said, “Well, now, I like the one I use better than the one you don’t use.”

VII. CONCLUSION

- A. Saved. What can we learn from this passage of scripture as Christians? First, negative circumstances are allowed by God to make us cling to Christ, honing off the rough edges to make us more Christ-like. Second, adverse circumstances are somehow designed so that we can further the gospel of Christ. Third, how we respond to negative circumstances impresses the unsaved world, for if they see a positive response, they will

conclude that our Christ is real. Fourth, how we react to difficult situations has an impact upon other Christians, for they become encouraged and stand for Christ when we are positive. Fifth, God wants us Christians to be rejoicing people in all circumstances, and to have positive attitudes in regard to the preaching of the gospel.

B. Unsaved

1. For you without Christ as your Savior and Lord, would you like to have an optimistic viewpoint about life like the Apostle Paul? Would you like to have the inner confidence that when external circumstances look impossible, all things will work together for good? Would you like to have a consciousness of God's working in your life?

2. Only Jesus Christ can bring you into contact with the Heavenly Father. Christ alone can bring you into fellowship with the Creator of heaven and earth. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6).