

Philippians—The Joyful Letter

Part 2

“Paul’s Purpose”

Last time we closed talking about the need for love combined with knowledge and discernment. Discernment is necessary for us to “approve the things that are excellent,”—the things that are of God.

Now starting in vs.11, Paul gives the results of walking in love and discernment:

1:11 “being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Now, “righteousness” refers to doing what is right. While the culture we live in might ask if something is expedient, or popular, or if it will make them feel good, the Christian must ask, ‘Is it right?’ Is it the right thing to do in the eyes of God? Could Jesus amen it?

Then in verse 12, Paul talks about how God has made even his suffering work out to the spreading of the gospel of Jesus Christ:

1:12 "But I want you to know, brethren, that the things *which happened* to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel,"

While he's primarily referring here to his current imprisonment, the various tribulations he'd experienced were many. And he contends that no matter what, the gospel still went forth. He provides a blow by blow list of these sufferings in 2 Corinthians:

2 Cor. 11:23-27 "I have worked harder, been put in jail more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again and again. 24 Five different times the Jews gave me their terrible thirty-nine lashes. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I was in the open sea all night and the whole next day. 26 I have traveled many weary miles and have been often in great danger from flooded rivers and from robbers and from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the hands of the Gentiles. I have faced grave dangers from mobs in the cities and from death in the deserts and in the stormy seas and from men who claim to be brothers in Christ but are not. 27 I have lived with weariness and pain and sleepless nights. Often I have been hungry and thirsty and have gone without food; often I have shivered with cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm."

Paul's victorious report is: "These things have resulted in the furtherance of the gospel!" How so? In the next two verses he tells us how. First, we're told that *his chains were uniquely productive*:

1:13 "so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ;"

When Paul arrived in Rome as a prisoner, he was turned over to the custody of the commander of an elite Roman guard. He was daily chained to them. In close quarters like this, Paul made the best of it by making friends with them, and winning many of them to Jesus.

A lesser man would have questioned God's ways, fretted over his enforced imprisonment, and maybe even become embittered. Not Paul. He redeemed the time and made the most of his circumstances.

The Bible says that a wide circle of people in Rome, including members of Caesar's household, (Phil 4:22) were won to Christ!

A second way God used Paul's imprisonment was in *the number of Christians emboldened to witness*:

1:14 "And most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear."

Zeal begets zeal. Bold people embolden others. Fire spreads fire. The Roman Christians looked at the great Apostle and were inspired by his sincerity, tireless efforts, and infectious enthusiasm, even while chained. It moved them to say, "If Paul can keep his joy and keep right on witnessing even while in prison, so can we boldly witness for Christ!"

Then Paul shoots straight with them about the motives of some of the people in ministry in his circle:

1:15 "Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill:"

Some are preaching for the right motives—*from goodwill*. *Goodwill* is from the same Greek word used in heralding the Savior's birth: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14).

It means this first group were preaching the gospel out of a sincere desire for the well-being of others.

But not all preachers are motivated by such desires. Some were preaching out of *envy*. They were jealous of Paul—envious of his success and resentful of his influence.

And some were preaching out of *strife*. This word means “factious rivalry.” In other words, fleshly competition. Preachers full of this spirit cannot rejoice in the success of another.

James wrote, “For where envy and selfish ambition exist, confusion and every evil thing are there” (3:16).

Paul goes on to say that these wrong-headed preachers were attempting to add to his pain:

1:16 “The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains;”

They wanted to irritate Paul. They hoped that thoughts of his imprisonment compared to their freedom would gall him.

Comparatively, there were the others:

1:17 “but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel.”

It hasn't changed today. People preach out of a variety of motives—some for money, fame, or both. Still others preach out of the motive to win people to Christ and truly bless God's people.

Next, we see that his rivals had no idea who they were dealing with. Paul's spiritual depth and Christ-likeness was beyond them. He responded to them with the victorious viewpoint I have used in my own life:

1:18 "What then? Only *that* in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice."

He couldn't amen their motives, but he could rejoice that the gospel was going forth, no matter who through!

This is powerful! Paul simply chose to overlook the mean spirit of jealous men and rejoiced that the gospel was being preached.

This is why I affectionately call Paul "the attitude king." No one could get him down. He was irrepressible, unstoppable, and unflappable. It was the gospel that mattered most to him, so he focused on the preaching, not the preachers.

His boundless optimism continues in the next verse:

1:19 "For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,"

The apostle was relying on the supply of the Spirit of God through the prayers of God's people. The Holy Spirit would see him through. He knew it!

He continues:

1:20 "according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death."

Not only does he fully expect the Spirit's help, but also that no matter what his circumstances brought him, Christ would be magnified in his life.

Paul's lifelong attitude was, "Ready for either." If they kill me, I'll just go to Jesus. If they let me live, I'll keep on preaching. I'm ready for either!

Then he spills the secret to his inner victory:

1:20 "For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain."

Everybody lives for something or someone. If people were honest, some would say "For me to live is pleasure." Or, "For me to live is wealth." Or, "For me to live is prestige and power." But for Paul, to live was Jesus!

As I've often said, life is like someone giving you a dollar. You can go and spend it any way you want, but you can only spend it once. Paul had wisely decided to spend his entire life on serving Jesus!

To live for anything other than Christ is to reach the end with regrets. The famous English poet Lord Byron wrote at the ripe age of 30, "I have squandered my whole summer while 'twas May...I have spent my life, both interest and principle."

In other words, I've lived hard and fast for the pleasures of this world, throwing caution to the wind so that the summertime of my life was consumed early, in the month of May before summer even began.

When he was 36 he wrote again,

**My days are in the yellow leaf;
The flowers and fruits of love are gone;
The worm, the canker, and the grief**

Are mine alone.

But the Christian that serves Christ his whole life long will NEVER reach the end like this! Paul says, If I live, I live serving Jesus. If I die, I go to Jesus, which is gain!

We recall that Paul had one day seen heaven when the Spirit transported him there. In 2 Cor. 12:1-5 he describes hearing "unspeakable words" that he was never allowed to repeat on earth. He called the place he went to "Paradise." No wonder he longed to return!

He next describes a conflict:

1:22-24 "But if *I* live on in the flesh, this *will mean* fruit from *my* labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, *which is* far better."

Paul is torn. If I stick around, I will have more fruit from my ministry. But oh, to go be with Jesus is so much better! In the end, Paul chose love:

1:24-26 "Nevertheless to remain in the flesh *is* more needful for you. 25 And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of

faith, 26 that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.”

Paul had concluded—You need me more than I want to go to heaven. And since I walk in love and not selfishness, I will remain. Commentator John Phillips writes, “Paul reluctantly turned his thoughts from the land of harps and halos to a world of grime and guilt.”

Paul, ever concerned about the well-being of others, dispenses advice:

1:27 “Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel,”

The word “conduct” is from a Greek word meaning “citizenship” or “manner of life.” In this verse it can mean “citizen-life.” Every Christian is a citizen of two worlds—the nation you live in, and of heaven. Paul says, “Let your lifestyle reflect your heavenly citizenship.”

And, says Paul, be courageous and unafraid of your enemies:

1:28 "and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God."

He's saying that their calm collective courage in the face of danger and persecution is a sure token to their enemies of the perdition that awaits them.

I've read many times of when saints were being burned at the stake how they would sing, or give praise to God, and their lack of fear in the face of death brought bystanders under conviction.

Paul reminds them of the certainty of suffering for Christ:

1:29 "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,"

Paul assured Timothy of the same thing, "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted," (2 Tim. 3:12)

If you truly stand for Christ in this present godless culture of ours, you will suffer the sting of criticism, ostracism, or persecution....and in other parts of the world, physical violence and even martyrdom.

I have never suffered physical violence for my faith, but I have suffered mockery, ostracism, and criticism. It's ok. Peter wrote, "If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you." (1 Pet. 4:14)

Finally, Paul points to his own suffering as an example:

1:30 "having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear *is* in me."

On one level or another, you may be called on to suffer as I have, says Paul.

Next time: How to be Like Jesus

