

**Text:** Philippians 1:12-18

**Title:** The Advancement of the Gospel

**Truth:** The gospel of Christ spreads despite persecution and obstacles.

**Date/Location:** Sunday December 5, 2021 at FBC

## Introduction

**NKJV Philippians 1:12-18** <sup>12</sup> But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, <sup>13</sup> so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; <sup>14</sup> and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

<sup>15</sup> Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will: <sup>16</sup> The **former** preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; <sup>17</sup> but the **latter** out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. <sup>18</sup> 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.

There is an interesting thing about the preservation of the Biblical text. In the New King James Version, verses 16 and 17 are swapped as compared to the NIV. There is no difference in meaning, so do not allow this to bother you.

**NIV Philippians 1:16-17** <sup>16</sup> The **latter** do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. <sup>17</sup> The **former** preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains.

### I. The Gospel Has Advanced, verses 12-14

A. On the surface, the circumstances seem very unfavorable to the progress of Christian ministry because Paul was, at the time of writing, in a Roman prison awaiting trial for a ridiculously trumped-up series of charges that he was creating chaos in the temple by illegally bringing a Gentile in there. To learn more about this, we

should read Acts 21:26-28:31. In it, Paul was mobbed, almost beaten to death, “rescued” by Roman guards, nearly beaten by those guards, held in confinement in Jerusalem, then Caesarea, then on a ship to Rome which nearly sank, and on to Rome. Along the way he suffered the indignity of a number of unjust courtroom trials. Now he was awaiting the final adjudication of his case by the Caesar.

B. Despite this situation, as Paul waited his trials, he was mostly free to minister to many people coming into his place of house-arrest (Acts 28:17-31). Later, he was perhaps in a more primitive confinement area. A man named Onesimus was one of the fruits of that prison ministry (Philemon verse 10, 13). Thus, the gospel advanced despite its primary Gentile advocate being in prison.

C. The Gospel started out under duress in Philippi. The church there began with Paul and Silas being beaten and thrown into jail. But the jail experience led to the salvation of a corrections officer and his family. It led to the humiliation of the authorities as they had to release Paul and Silas. So, the believers to whom Paul was writing knew about very difficult problems attending the work of God.

He had certainly informed them of what is recorded in Acts 14 with the beatings and opposition. He would go on to face problems after starting the church in Philippi in Thessalonica and Athens and elsewhere. We can see that the gospel often progresses and even flourishes under pressure.

D. The apostle cites two ways that the gospel has advanced of late:

1. Inside: The whole palace guard knows that Paul is not a criminal and that in fact He is there merely for his profession of and preaching of Christ. They could see right through the envious Jews who started Paul’s troubles with false charges, and the feckless Roman leaders who did nothing to release Paul although he was innocent. Some of them must have shaken their heads in wonder at why the system did this to a man. Many probably did not believe the gospel, but they had enough brains to see that Paul’s case was not worth taking up time and space in their judicial system. He was a decent man. He was suffering for doing right, not doing evil (1 Peter 3:17).

The whole situation led to people within the household of the Caesar to become believers (Phil. 4:22). They were undoubtedly especially appreciative of the financial care that the Philippians sent to the apostle Paul to help him.

2. Outside: Many Christians were emboldened by Paul's imprisonment and began to speak God's word without fear.
- E. Today it is the same. When there is pressure from the unbelieving world, the gospel still advances. And how does it move? By divine providence, indeed, but by that same providence as it moves people to preach boldly. Well-motivated people—I hope we are such people—find a new focus to preach the gospel to the people who are lost and dying and maybe dying sooner because of the difficult times. When there is no pressure and times are good, Christians become spiritually out of shape. More difficult times do require us to focus on issues of daily sustenance, but they should also sharpen our focus on what is truly important.
- F. Christians are not a danger to anyone. All we do is preach a message of salvation that you are free to receive or reject. Of course, we are quite insistent and demanding, in a way, but in the end, you must choose, and you must freely do so without any pressure other than the certainty of coming divine judgment.
- G. I wonder if you can think about how we can be tools in God's hands to continue to advance the gospel in our culture. I have puzzled over this, from basic Bible illiteracy to the clamor for social justice to the isolating effects and fear-mongering of COVID to the reduction of door-to-door ministry to the hardness of family members to the inoculating effects of evolution and science and education and atheism to the faith. But these things cannot stop the gospel of Jesus Christ, because nothing can. Like the king of the beasts, the Word of God is not chained (2 Timothy 2:9).

## **II. Good and Ill Motivations for Preaching Christ, verses 15-18**

- A. Some of those emboldened ministers were preaching out of envy and strife, and others out of good will.
- B. The envy and strife crowd are motivated by jealousy and rivalry. I presume that they want to be prominent like the apostle Paul.

Furthermore, verse 16 (or 17 if are not reading NKJV) goes on to explain that these ones are moved by selfish ambition. They are not sincere in preaching Christ, which means that they do not have holy or pure motivations. They have some prideful desire. They want to preach for money or fame or influence, not for the love of Christ and love of the lost. They were preaching true doctrine, but had a heavy dose of malice toward Paul at the same time.

At the same time, they hoped to “add affliction to my chains.” Somehow they figure that what they are doing will cause the apostle Paul further trouble or distress in his chains.

The bad preachers’ exact motives are a bit murky and we should be careful not to speculate too much. If you do not think about evil plotting very much, it seems hard to figure out what they want to accomplish. That distress they hope to inflict on Paul could be that they wanted to be more famous and have a larger following. The fact that Paul was set aside was an “opportunity” for them to enlarge *their* ministry, instead of focusing on the ministry of Christ *per se*. The distress to Paul would be that he is losing supporters or political clout and so he would resent them. And, since he was in prison, he would champ at the bit even more to get out. It would be frustrating that he could not get out.

But that is not at all how Paul looked at things, so none of this bothered him. He knew that God was at work in his imprisonment, and if it was good enough for God, it was good enough for Paul.

- C. The good will crowd (verse 17, or 16) loved the apostle Paul. They believed in his message, and in him personally. They did not think he got himself into prison because he was a dummy. Perhaps the others thought, “He should have been more prudent. Then he would not have been caught up in this mess.”

These good people recognize that God is working through the situation. They know that Paul’s role is critical because he is set for the defense of the gospel. This does not mean simply that he is defending the gospel as an apologist to skeptics. Rather, the entire gospel project, so to speak, and its legality in the Roman system of government, rides on Paul’s shoulders. He is taking the gospel to the supreme court, and what they decide will determine what

these other preachers will have going forward—either freedom or persecution. He represents all preachers and all Christians before Rome. This case was a big deal.

D. The bad teachers thus could not ruffle Paul’s feathers. “What does it matter?” Paul asks in verse 18. He recognizes a bigger thing is being accomplished, and in that he is happy. He knew that there are ministers with bad motives. But if they were preaching the true gospel, then it was OK in some sense. Whether people preached Christ for real, or just outwardly as a pretense for accomplishing something else, God also uses *that*. In other words, not even false motivations in gospel preachers can stop the advance of the gospel! Since Paul saw things that way, he did not take personally what they were doing to him. It didn’t “trigger” him because his trigger was in an entirely different realm. He got very upset if the doctrine was wrong.

At the same time, he did not approve of the poor inner desires of these preachers, which did leak out into the public.

E. Paul is also not commending teachers who promoted false doctrine. So, for example, he was not showing favor to Judaizers or the circumcision. They were not preaching the right gospel (Gal. 1:6-9, Phil. 3:2). He would not show favor today to those who preach salvation by works (basically all the cults). They are not “preaching Christ.” Therefore, he would not rejoice over their work.

## Conclusion

Paul is assuring his dear friends that although he is in prison, the mission of the gospel is moving ahead anyway. In fact, the gospel is moving ahead not just *despite* his imprisonment, but *because* of it! God’s wisdom in using such situations to advance His work is amazing.

COVID cannot stop the progress of the gospel, even if churches must close temporarily. Government regulations did not stop the church from worshipping last year, and they are not stopping us from worshipping this year. Interestingly, the modern-day attacks on the church can in fact be an occasion for us to become bolder and step

out in faith. We know what we have is precious and true. It is the only way a person can be eternally saved and secure. What do we have to be shy about?

In our land, the modern version of opposition is little stuff. In other parts of the world, the harshest of persecution cannot eliminate the Christian faith. It *can* do real damage and deserves blame for many souls being lost because they do not hear the gospel, but if God wants the gospel anywhere, it will get there. Whether it is by a person, or by means of the computer, or radio, or print Bibles, the gospel will move.

Pray that the Word will run to its destination (2 Thess. 3:1). Take serious stock of how *you* can be a conduit for the gospel. Don't leave it to your pastor or hired-gun missionaries. You are a minister too (see Eph. 4:12, "work of ministry")—even in hard times.

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