

The Book of Philippians

Notes: Doug Hamilton

The Progress of the Gospel (Philippians 1:12-26)

Philippians 2:12-14 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.

- Naturally there is a subtle military theme in the Letter to the Philippians, for it is a military colony for retired Roman military soldiers. This fact it was first brought to light in his "defense and confirmation of the gospel" statement in 1:7. Here Paul used a common ancient military phrase "*Now I want you to know*", (Γινώσκειν δὲ ὑμᾶς βούλομαι). When Roman soldiers were separated from their families by many miles during a time of deployment, little accurate news would arrive back on the home front. Erroneous rumors of their death from battles or illness would trickle back to family members and cause great distress. Once the soldier would learn their family was making a fervent inquiry of such, they would immediately write back to reassure that they were okay. The phrase "Now I want you to know" was a particular comforting phrase to address such a situation. Take for example the following:
 - "Theonas, for example, wrote to his mother from his military camp to let her know that he was not seriously ill, as she had mistakenly heard, but was doing well. After the standard greetings, he says, "I want you to know that the reason I have not sent you a letter for such a long time is because I am in camp and not on account of illness; so do not worry yourself about me." Arnold, C. E. (2002). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary Volume 3: Romans to Philemon*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Paul believed in the Progress of the Gospel.

- We will often be pointing out some the many military words and phrases strategically used by Paul throughout the letter. He was simply speaking their language to communicate the great message of the gospel.
 - Paul uses a rare word for "progress" (*prokope*) in verse 12 and also in 1:25. Once again, this is a military word. The word "*specialy used for the progress of an army or an expedition...which means to cut down in advance. It is the verb which is used for cutting away the trees and the undergrowth, and removing the barriers which would hinder the progress of an army.*" Barclay, W. (2003). *The Letters to Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* (3rd ed. fully rev. and updated). The New Daily Study Bible. Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press
- Paul spent his entire Christian life, removing obstacles to the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - If you put him around sick people, then he started a hospital ministry.

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- If you put him around poor people, then he started a sharing ministry.
- If you put him around dying people, then he started a healing ministry.
- If you put him around ignorant people, then he started an educational ministry.

There were two primary obstacles that Paul had to remove which were hindering the gospel.

1) Prison

The Apostle Paul once stated during the last imprisonment of his life in *2 Timothy 2:8-9 Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel, ⁹ for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned.* Even though he was in prison, the gospel of Christ would not be hindered.

- He often shared in his writings referencing his imprisonments. He mentioned this event multiple times in his letter to the Philippians (1:7, 13 and 14).
 - We learned of this imprisonment at the hands of the Romans in Acts 28:17.
 - He told the Colossians to remember his chains (Colossians 4:3, 4:18).
 - He called himself a "*prisoner of Jesus Christ*" in Philemon and Ephesians 3:1.
 - In Acts 28:20 it says that he was "*bound with this chain*", giving us insight to his house arrest in Rome while awaiting an appearance before Caesar.
 - In Ephesians 6:20 he referred to himself as an "*ambassador in chains*", revealing some insight to his condition of house arrest.
 - *Chains* is the word *halusis*, which was a handcuff like device with a short chain between the wrist shackles. One shackle would be chained to the prisoner and the other to a guard, making escape impossible. Even though Paul was in his own quarters, he would have always had a guard right next to him.
 - There were four types of imprisonments during this time period:
 - Released to the custody of another.
 - Unchained in a cell.
 - Chained in a cell.
 - Chained to a guard.
- It was to this last custody that Paul was held, but not just any type of guard that he was chained to, but the Praetorian Guard.
 - They were the elite 12,000 hand selected soldiers to watch over the affairs of Caesar and usually were the ones that determined who became Emperor. They had true power.

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- When Emperor Caligula went crazy, they had him assassinated and replaced with Claudius lest the Roman Senate take over and run the Empire.
- As JFB states, "*the barrack of the Praetorian guards attached to the palace of Nero, on the Palatine hill at Rome*" for these were of Caesar's household (4:22). The soldiers chained to Paul were the best of the best of the best and everyone in the Empire knew it.
- The mere fact that Paul would mention them in detail to the Philippians would have been equivalent to our mentioning of the Navy Seals to a modern day soldier.
- There would have been one Praetorian guard chained to Paul at all times, probably rotating a new one every few hours. As encouraged as the Philippians would have experienced at the mentioning, it would also be depressing to be wearing one on your wrist at all times. In spite of this something incredible happens, for his cause in Christ have "*become well-known through the whole Praetorian Guard*".
- It is important to understand that the guards were there for his every move. There was a guard chained to Paul's wrist...
 - when he made his meals, went on a bathroom break and when he slept.
 - when he prayed to God and sang hymns of joy.
 - when he studied the scriptures and wrote letters.
 - when visitors came over to interact and worship with Paul.
- It was in spending time with Paul throughout these two years under house arrest that would have opened the eyes of the Praetorians. Exposure to each guard of the spirituality of Paul, his miracles, his knowledge of Christ and love for his fellow man began to influence them.
 - Perhaps each guard working a shift and heading back to the barracks, the word of Christ found a home in the hearts of some of the soldiers.
 - Perhaps some of the soldiers came home and told their families and they converted.
 - Perhaps they told their friends from the other segments of the Imperial staff about this apostle named Paul and his awesome message of salvation through Jesus Christ and responded to the offer.
 - Is it unreasonable to understand that *the whole Praetorian and everyone else* in the palace area were now aware of Paul and his gospel.
 - It seems to make more sense of verse 4:22 in closing the letter when Paul said "*All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.*"
- The mere thought to a church in a military colony hearing that even the Praetorian Guard were talking about the gospel was an incredible confidence booster.

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2) Politics

Philippians 1:15-17 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.

- Paul wrote in *2 Timothy 1:8* "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God..." He said this because there were a few Christians who were ashamed of the fact their beloved leader was shamed in such a way. In that culture one of the most shameful things was to be thrown into prison.
- *As a result they were preaching Christ out of selfish ambition.* The word he uses for ambition is *eritheia* (ἐριθεία) and meant to *canvass for office* (Barclay). We have a word for this today called *politics*. Interestingly the only other prior use of this word in ancient scripture was in Aristotle's writing named *Politics*.
 - They were preaching Christ to position themselves to be a leader in evangelism. This was a shameful thing to take their shame in Paul and politic with it. There were probably promoting the politically-correct gospel of watered down Jesus.
 - Others were not ashamed of Paul and continued preaching the gospel out of love. They were doing what was expected by carrying out the gospel mission.
- It would have been easy for Paul to bad mouth the shameful brothers for their behavior, but he did not do this.

Philippians 1:18-20 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, ¹⁹ for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, ²⁰ according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

- The Greek philosopher Epicurus taught centuries before that when the time get tough to think on the more pleasant moments from before. In his final illness, in terrible pain, he encouraged his followers about all the wonderful discussions from the classroom which they shared. Later in Philippians Paul will tell the Philippians to turn from the worries of the world to virtues like "*whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy*" (4:4-8). He is using the same technique here, for he will keep a POSITIVE ATTITUDE.
- The positive side to this situation is that whether Christ is preached out of politics or passion, CHRIST IS PREACHED! This is what nurtured Paul in his position and this he REJOICED! The fact that he restated it lends to

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- the seriousness of the joy. He was not going to let it bring him down, but to lift him up!
- Though Paul does not say that he is quoting another verse from the OT, verses 19-20 are nearly a verbatim quote of Job 13:16 from the Greek version. In that passage Job was being accused by his three friends of bringing all his affliction upon himself. Job's response to them was basically, "Let God cross examine me and then I will be delivered." In the same way that Job knew he would be delivered from his trial, Paul knows where he stands with God.
 - He transfers this positive attitude of the politics to his possibility of being released from prison. He is confident that this will happen for two reasons.
 - A. Prayer of the Philippians: He believed in the power of the prayers of the church. He constantly asked for these prayers because he knew God answers prayers.
 - 'Beloved,' he writes to the Thessalonians, 'pray for us.' 'Finally, brothers and sisters,' he writes, 'pray for us, so that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified everywhere' (1 Thessalonians 5:25; 2 Thessalonians 3:1). He says to the Corinthians: 'You must help us by prayer' (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:11). He writes that he is sure that through Philemon's prayers he will be given back to his friends (Philemon 22). Before he sets out on his perilous journey to Jerusalem, he writes to the church at Rome asking for their prayers (Romans 15:30-2). (Barclay)
 - B. Provision of the Spirit: As sure as the Holy Spirit dwells in him as Jesus promised, he will not be abandoned now. He was never left alone to fend for himself.

Philippians 1:21-26 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. ²³ But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; ²⁴ yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.

- Paul could live or die, and there would be benefits either way. If he lives, then he will work again with the Philippians. If he dies, then he will go on to be with Christ. Both are good and put Paul in a "*hard-pressed*" decision.
 - That word comes from a person traveling through a narrow ravine. They can neither go right or left, but forward. He will go forward in Christ (3:13) and in the end the decision will be revealed. Either way it will turn out just fine.
- Paul used the word *progress* again in verse 25. The ancients referred to this rhetoric device as an *inclusio*. When read publically it would have

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allowed the listeners know it was the end of a major division of the text. In other words, Paul discussed his PROGRESS in the gospel was carried out for their PROGRESS and JOY in the faith.

What do we apply from here?

God expects us to progress in our faith. We are to remove as many obstacles which stand in the way of a great relationship with Him. It might not necessarily be prison or politics, but it could be a thousand other things.

- If our career is standing in the way of our family from being faithful in Christ, consider changing some things.
- If our hobbies stand in the way of being faithful in God, then change it.
- If our habits are conflicting with Christ, eliminate it.
- If we lack time for prayer for God in our day, then remove some items out of the schedule.
- If our friends are pulling us further from Christ and they want nothing to do with Him at all, then make new friends.

Take the time to progress your relationship with God by removing the obstacles out of the way. If we do, our joy and faith will progress to others and their joy will be full.