

Philippians 1 • When Only the Gospel Matters

Introduction

Paul's circumstances were anything but joyful. He'd been false accused, arrested and persecuted, taken to Rome, and was now awaiting trial. Even there in Rome the problems were compounded by division among its Christians in general and more specifically by leaders trying to make trouble for him. How was he able to achieve joy in the midst of such uncomfortable circumstances? Paul was what we would call "single minded". His concern was not for himself, but for Christ and the Gospel. Paul looked upon these circumstances as sent by God for the purpose of exalting Christ. If Paul had been "double-minded", he would have complained because life was so unfair; the "single mind", however, has as its focus a life devoted exclusively to Christ and the Gospel.

¹Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons:

²Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, ⁵in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. ⁷For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. ⁸For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; ¹¹having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

[Read v.1-11]

Point #1: The Fellowship of the Gospel

Q: What is Paul's present situation? How does it appear to contrast with the feelings he is expressing?

A: Paul is currently a prisoner in Rome. His present situation, which we would usually associate with the worst of circumstances, is contrasted by his personal joy in the fellowship of the Gospel.

Application: *What is the priority of the Gospel in your own life? Do you even think about it that often? To what degree are you burdened for others through it even more than for your own self?*

Observation: *Paul provides three expressions of his joyful attitude because of the Gospel.*

Q: What is the first attitude expressed in v.3-6?

A: "...always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all..." Paul was not thinking about himself; they were always forefront in his mind.

Q: What is the main focal point of his prayer?

A: "...that He who began a good work in you will perfect it..." Paul desired to see the Gospel grow to full maturity in them, to accomplish the full purposes of God.

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:1-2

Q: What is Paul's second attitude expressed in v.7-8?

A: "...I have you in my heart..."

Q: Why might Paul, in his present circumstances of imprisonment in Rome, feel so close to the Philippians?

A: We read in Acts 16 Paul's ministry to Philippi and how he not only ministered there but had been imprisoned as well. He knew that this church recognized what God could do with such circumstances, making the most of what seems like the worst to bring about the best.

Q: What is Paul's final attitude expressed in v.9-11?

A: He has them in his prayers.

Q: What are the things for which Paul prayed? Was it for their personal comfort? Or their physical needs?

A: He prays "that your love may abound still more", which is the fulfillment of the whole Law that we should love one another. He prays for their spiritual needs.

Q: But how does Paul specifically desire this love to come about?

A: "...in real knowledge and all discernment..." (v.9) In other words, it's supposed to be biblical love as defined by biblical truth.

Q; How will true, biblical love become visibly evident? What is the proof that biblical love has been achieved?

1. "...approve the things that are excellent..." – To place a higher priority on spiritual things than worldly matters.
2. "...sincere and blameless..." To live sin-free so as to avoid hypocrisy in the pursuit of personal faithfulness.
3. "...filled with the fruit of righteousness..." – Doing deeds which testify to everyone around us of a heart and behavior molded by Christ.

Application: Paul had them on his mind, his heart, and his soul (or prayers). Our dedication to the Gospel is actually a reflection of our dedication to Christ Himself. How well does your own heart, mind, and soul reflect your love of others and concern for their being shaped by the Gospel? It's a mirror of our own condition of the same.

¹²Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, ¹³so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, ¹⁴and 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. ¹⁵Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; ¹⁶the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; ¹⁷the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. ¹⁸What 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, ¹⁹for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, ²⁰according 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,

[Read v.12-26]

Point #2: The Furtherance of the Gospel

Q: What is Paul referring to as "my circumstances"?

A: There's many chapters in Acts devoted to explaining in detail what he has so humbly summarized here, including being falsely accused, the plot to kill him, the shipwreck on the way to Rome, his miraculous recovery from being bitten by a deadly snake, and so on up to and including imprisonment in Rome.

Q: Why do you suppose Paul doesn't go into very much detail about these things here? What might it reveal about the character of Paul?

A: Paul is more concerned with the Gospel than with himself.

Q: What are some examples in v.12-21 of how Paul put Christ first?

1. Paul did not see himself as man's prisoner, but "for the cause of Christ". (v.13)
2. Paul saw his situation as an opportunity to witness for the Gospel to "the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else". (v.13-14)
3. Paul's response to his enemies' selfish-preaching was "So what?" (v.15-18)
4. Paul's response to friends' concern and prayers for him was "Good! This will exalt Christ!" (v.19-20)
5. Faced with the possibility of death, Paul responded that Christ would be magnified whether by Paul's life or death. (v.21)

Point: Paul, knowing that God was always in control of every circumstance regardless of how it appeared from a human point of view, knew that no matter

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

²⁷Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; ²⁸in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. ²⁹For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, ³⁰experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.

where he was or what confronted him, he was always in an opportune place to share and grow the Gospel.

Q: What are some examples in v.22-26 of how Paul put others second?

A: Paul’s “heaven on earth”, so to speak, was helping others mature in the Gospel. Although he longed to be with Christ, he earnestly yearned to remain and help believers grow in Christ.

Q: So if Paul put Christ first and others second, what does this imply that he put last?

A: Himself.

Point: Paul did not consider his body his own, his future was not his own, nor even that his reputation was his own. Joy for the Gospel under all conditions was realistically possible because it was more important for Christ to be glorified than himself.

Application: How well do you recognize that misery and failure often comes from putting ourselves first? What is the honest evaluation of your own priorities when it comes to Christ, others, and self? How well does this reflect your commitment to the Gospel?

[Read v.27-30]

Point #3: The Faith of the Gospel

Q: What are the stages Christians go through to become mature and ready for spiritual conflict?

1. They become sons or daughters in the family. (The **fellowship** of the Gospel.)
2. They become servants. (The **furtherance** of the Gospel.)
3. They become soldiers. (The **faith** of the Gospel.)

Q: Paul doesn’t use the term “soldier” in these final verses, but what are some of the terms he does use which might paint this kind of picture?

1. “standing firm” (v.27)
2. “striving together for the faith of the gospel” (v.27)
3. “in no way alarmed by your opponents” (v.28)
4. “a sign of destruction for them” (v.28)
5. “to suffer for His sake” (v.29)
6. “experiencing the same conflict you saw in me” (v.30)

Q: What is Paul’s assurance expressed in v.27?

A: That we are not standing alone. People committed to the Gospel become strengthened to the point of “standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith”.

Q: What is Paul’s assurance expressed in v.28?

A: That we’re on the winning side. The unity and faith of Believers is a clear sign to the enemy that they are going to lose and to God’s people that they’re going to overcome and win.

Q: What is Paul’s assurance expressed in v.29-30?

A: That it is a privilege to suffer for Christ. Later in this letter, Paul will further elaborate that another gift of suffering for Christ’s sake is fellowship with Him.

*that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;
Philippians 3:10*

Q: But, according to v.27, what is the greater principle which should govern our behavior in all these things?

A: "...conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ..."
Even in the midst of battle we're required to behave like Christians.

Application: *Do you ever think you're excused from being a proper Christian example because of the intensity of the battle? How well do you recognize that a soldier of Christ is first a family member to the church and a servant to others?*

Overall Application

In the midst of trouble, Paul exuded a quiet confidence.

- *He was confident the Philippians would continue in their Christian walk. (v.6)*
- *He was rejoicing that his own trials were giving other believers new confidence. (v.14)*
- *He was confident that he would come through these trials and be restored to his friends again. (v.25)*

This is the blessing of the single mind, that joyful confidence in God which knows He is in control of all circumstances so that the priority in every situation is always the Gospel.