

Paul's Letter to the Philippians - Part IV - The Christians Conflict in the Gospel of Jesus Christ

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It is a delight to stand in the pulpit this Lords Day and I am grateful to preach Gods word today. Today is Independence Day and that means most of us do not have to go to work tomorrow. With that said I am looking forward to sleeping in tomorrow and you may not mind if I preach a little longer than I might normally would - no amen's.

Text: Philippians 1:20-1:30 (notice the introduction in the bulletin)

No wonder Paul could write I am set for the defense of the Gospel, and that is our theme! **The Christians Conflict in the Gospel of Jesus Christ**

Let us pray:

From the time of Paul's conversion on the Damascus road until the day he was executed by the Roman government, and went home to receive his crown the Apostle Paul's life was marked by conflict. The Apostle was no stranger to warfare. It seems he never lived a day of his Christian life that was void of confrontation.

His journey was marked by struggle, battle, challenge, attacks, fighting, insurrections and yes many attacks from the adversary! He faced battles from without, and in Romans 7 we learn that he also faced severe battles from within. He was attacked verbally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Paul was misunderstood, mistreated, misrespected, misrepresented, and often mistaken. But Paul was not a miserable Christian. Paul learned in whatever state therewith to be content (Phil. 4:11), and beyond that Paul had the joy of the Lord (Philippians 2:2)! What a man of God Paul was!

On my trip home as I was leaving Pretoria South Africa and headed to Johannesburg International Airport, which is about a 50 mile journey, I was driven by a black man who had lived through the apartheid struggles in South Africa. During that entire 50 mile journey he kept saying, "It was tough". This was a sharp gentlemen and he drove me to the airport in a shiny black Mercedes Benz. Twice this man had narrowly escaped death. He shared with me that on one occasion he and his brother who were the same age, and they were not twins. Now there is a riddle for you to consider, how can you have a brother who is your same age and yet not be twins? I leave that for you to think about... He told me about an occasion when he and his brother were spotted being outside after 9:00pm, and blacks could not be on the streets after 9pm. The police saw them and chased them and as they were running they came to a fork in the road and he went one way and his brother went the other way...

Paul often mentions his struggles in his epistles. He writes in 2nd Corinthians 4:7-18 Paul writes:

7: But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

8: We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;

9: Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;

10: Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

11: For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

12: So then death worketh in us, but life in you.

13: We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak;

14: Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.

15: For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.

16: For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

17: For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;

18: While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Now we as believers are called to be soldiers in the Gospel of Jesus Christ! How are we holding up? How are we bearing up under the demands of the Gospel?

For several weeks now we have been studying the epistle to the Philippians. We have noted that Phil is one of four prison epistles written by the Apostle Paul. We have indicated that the background for this epistle is Acts 15 and 16. We have also mentioned that the epistle has several salient themes or reasons why Paul may have wrote this epistle:

1. Thank you letter. The church at Philippi had sent a gift to Paul and Paul was thankful.
2. Paul also used this occasion to encourage and to comfort this church. In spite of Paul's circumstances he was an encourager and they needed encouragement because they were going to undergo suffering.
3. Paul also wanted to let them know that he was sending Timothy and Epaphroditus.
4. Paul also had to deal with a situation in chapter 4 regarding two women who were disputing. All of this he wrote in a spirit of Joy!

By way of review: 1:15-18 Paul's passion-The proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ

People were preaching the gospel as a result of Paul's imprisonment. But those people fell into two different categories. The first group were sharing Christ with others out of good will and love. But the second group were doing it out of envy, strife, selfish ambition, and impure motives. These people were in it for what they could get: things like fame and notoriety, respect and honor, authority and control, money and favors. They envied Paul's popularity, the apostle's ministry. They wanted to prove that they were just as - or even more - effective a minister than he.

The amazing thing to me is that Paul rejoiced at both situations. Why? Because although he knew that God would judge their motives, he knew that the gospel was being proclaimed.

I know people that have been saved through the ministries of men that were later exposed to be false. But their impurity and insincerity did not invalidate the true message of the gospel. It did not negate the conversion that many people experienced when they heard of the grace of God and believed it for salvation. That's because the Gospel is message is power of salvation... God uses men, but the message is more powerful than the medium.

Hebr. 4:12 ...the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

The Word is alive, and when it is quoted, it accomplishes its work - to bring faith in heart to the hearer.

Rom. 10:17 So faith {comes} from hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

There are evangelists who are dead or in jail from sin, those who have walked away from the faith, but when they preached Christ, people believed. There is at least one Christian comedian who was exposed as a fraud, but I know several who were saved because he preached the gospel.

So Paul greatly rejoiced because Christ was proclaimed. People in the prison were being saved, and people in Philippi were being saved.

I have seen that ministry becoming contagious among the believers in this church as well. There has been such a neat work happening in so many people over the last year. Folks who were once shy and timid are stepping out and witnessing to their friends, their neighbors, their coworkers. Others are getting bold enough to invite unsaved people to church. And what is happening is that these people are getting saved. And that breeds the excitement to share with even more people. And just like what was happening in the early church,

Acts 2:47 ...the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

For this, Paul was rejoicing.

1:19-21 Paul's purpose: To Live Is Christ, To Die Is Gain

Many a message I share this little ditty: We have but one life and that shall soon...It is a poem that I think about more often than you can probably imagine, but why???

One life-priority-I do not care what you do in life, what plans, what motivates you have, or what demands are upon you. When you realize how fleeting life is it becomes the priority! Now, listen, this is very personal! One life, that's personal!

Soon passed- temporality of life. It's fleeting, it's a vapor, a blade of grass!

Shall last- Immortality. This is that which we can gain in life which is immortal! This is that which will never suffer the limitations of this earthly existence, and what is it-That which we do for Christ!

Paul knew that he was going to be delivered one way or another. Either he would be released from prison, or he would be put to death, thus releasing him also. But it was no big deal to him, because he had a healthy view of life and death. Death was no problem, he had already rubbed shoulders with death! He knew that Jesus Christ had already taken the sting out of death, and he knew that death was his entrance in to glory. In fact death was his preference, but the choice was not up to Paul. He was God's slave and he did not have any right to order His death. Jesus did, Jesus determined his death. Jesus was master of death, his and ours. For Jesus death was his servant! This is why Jesus could say Father into thy hands I commend my spirit. In other words it is now time for me to die. The consummation, the commendation and the compilation of the Saviors death (spoke of those points recently)! But not Paul, he was not God and he could not order his death!

Every day that he Paul lived, he would be consumed with Christ - living for God and learning more of Him, preaching the gospel and praying for others. And when death came, he would not be afraid, because he knew that death for the Christian is a promotion.

The Bible says,

1Cor. 15:54-55 But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written,

“DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. “O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?” O GRAVE WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY?

The worst thing in the world's eyes is to die. But for the Christian, it is the beginning of the adventure, the last stop of the train headed for eternal glory and communion with God. Are you on board? Are you on board this train with a final stop in Heaven? If not I beg you in Christ stead to get your ticket! Trust Jesus Christ as your personal Savior!

However, as Christians though we should not fear death, we should fear something: shame. Paul said, "I will not be put to shame in anything." John the apostle told us that those who do not abide in Christ will have cause for shame. He wrote,

1John 2:28 And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not and not be ashamed before Him at his coming (another translation says: not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.)

Here is one we are all familiar with: 2nd Timothy 2:15 Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

1:22-26 The believers challenging preference: Heaven Or Earth?

Thinking about Paul's situation, it is certainly understandable to see why he had the desire to die and be with Christ. He was in a filthy prison confined to a Roman soldier. There are times that we as Christians long for death, because we know that heaven will be so much better than this earth. But it's important not to lose perspective. We should not seek death. We should have Paul's attitude of living every day exalting Christ!

One of my greatest delights of the trip to Africa was flying in a helicopter. I have always wanted to fly in a helicopter and when we were approached with the opportunity I immediately wanted to go, and I thoroughly enjoyed the flight! It was amazing looking at sights from 600 feet and hearing the roar of the propeller and the engine. I liked it and wanted to go again.

On the other hand I did not like the 14 hour flight there or the 15 hour flight back nearly as much. It is quite a difference looking at the sights from several thousand feet in the air. In fact you do not notice sights. One looks out the windows and all you can see are clouds and they all look the same and sometimes you do not see anything. It is amazing at times it seems like the plane is not moving because everything looks the same. This must be what heaven is like: Heaven is like flying in a plane several thousand feet and because you are eternity there is nothing to mark any changes....

Even though Paul longed for heaven, he knew that his life on earth was necessary to other believers like the Philippians. It was necessary for **them** that **he** remain.

And so he was convinced that he would be released from prison and would have the opportunity to again minister to the Philippians personally. Paul lived for Christ, but Paul also lived for others and this was the source of his JOY! We see over and over in this epistle that JOY is Jesus first, others second, and you last! This was the order of Paul's life, this was his MOS, and this is how he lived!

1:27 Paul's privileged position: The Gospel of Jesus Christ

Whether Paul was released from prison or not, whether he was able to meet with the believers in Philippi again or not, what he really wanted to know was that they were living for the the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He wanted to get word that they were walking "in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ." What does that mean? He explains what it is: standing firm in one spirit and **striving** for the faith together with other Christians.

The Scriptures tell us to stand firm regarding several things: against man made religious systems and traditions (Gal 5:1), and for the traditions given to us by God (2Thes 2:15), for the faith (1Cor 16:13; 2Cor 1:24), against the schemes of the devil (Eph 6:11-14), and in the true grace of God (1Pet 5:12).

Paul tells the Philippians here to stand firm in one spirit. Whether we are talking about standing firm in grace and faith, or against religion and the devil, it is so much easier and more productive when we do it together with other Christians. We need to help one another, keep each other accountable, encourage one another. If we are

walking in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, we are standing firm together in one spirit, we are striving together with one mind.

1:28-30 The peculiar plight in living the Gospel of Jesus Christ

There is an aspect of living the Gospel that is peculiar. Peculiar because it requires some diligence, discipline, determination and some degree of defiance. In **Romans 1:16** Paul said I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ...

Paul was not ashamed! Paul would boldly preach Christ regardless of circumstances or repercussions. It is peculiar because sometimes in spite of all that we have in Christ we are ashamed.

We clam up

We shut up

We close up

And we shut down-and these may be the very times God is about to perform a miracle.

The Philippians did encounter opposition to their faith in Christ and their evangelism of the gospel. Even today in the United States, we see people lose their jobs because of the Gospel, suffer discriminated because of the Gospel, and become estranged in their families. But this should not alarm us - it is to be expected. John said,

1John 3:13 Do not marvel, brethren, if the world hates you.

Jesus had warned John and the other apostles of this very thing.

John 15:18-20 "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before {it hated} you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you..."

Suffering for the cause of Christ is a privilege. In Acts 5, the apostles were arrested by the officers in Jerusalem for preaching the gospel. After they were released, we read,

Acts 5:41 So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for {His} name.

I said at the outset that Paul was no stranger to conflict, he was no stranger to the battle field whatever the altercation consist of. He faced it head on and God saw him through, so at the end of his life when he patched up his wounds for the final time and put down his armor and he is about to go on to receive his medals, as a good soldier he could say: I have fought a good fight, I have kept the faith, I have finished the course, behold there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness! There is going to come a day when we will all faced the end of our battle, and may we have such a testimony!

We are leaning about evangelism in our life groups, and Paul is admonishing us to live the Gospel in spite of opposition and perils and trouble. May God help us to get past our silence and begin to preach the gospel. That we will no longer fear death, but live lives glorifying to God. That we will stand firm, united in one spirit. And that we will not be alarmed at our opponents, but rejoice that we have been considered worthy to suffer for Christ.

One final illustration and I am done:

Story told of a man who refused to take the Company Insurance. Word got around and finally the boss got wind of it said well I am going to straighten that out right this moment!