

Philippians VII – “Gospel Freedom by Roman Chains” (Phil 1:12-18)

Introduction – The Philippians have a great “*fellowship in the gospel*” with Paul (v5). Now, Paul answers their concern for his physical well being by telling them of the “*furtherance of the gospel*” (v12). Paul’s personal life is so centered around his calling as a bondservant that reflecting on any of his circumstances is to reflect on the work of the gospel. And while he is in prison, he is certainly not languishing there.

Unexpected Advance From Prison (vv12-14) – There must have been some smiles from at least one family in the Philippian congregation when this part of the letter was read. God does some very unexpected things when Paul is in prison (Acts 16:22-34).

The Irony of Afflictions (v12) – Joseph, Israel, Job, Jehoshaphat, Jeremiah, Jesus, Peter, John, even the church in general (Acts 8:1-4), over and over again afflictions upon God’s people have only turned out to be God’s appointed plan to spread His gospel all over the world, reveal His true character, and make holy a people for Himself.

The Praetorium Guard (v13) – Paul’s desire had been to go to Rome (Rom 1:13), and the Lord had provided. Not only that, but Paul was granted the opportunity through the means of his imprisonment to witness to the entire palace guard, probably those who personally served Caesar and his palace operations (some of whom may even have retired in Philippi – 4:22). Paul, with his own private bodyguards, is able to freely meet with Jews and Gentiles alike in Rome (Acts 28:17-31), so that “*all the rest*” have heard of Christ.

His Chains In Christ – Paul’s chains are not ‘because of Christ’ but ‘in Christ’, saying more about his discipleship in Christ and not his circumstances (3:10).

The Church Emboldened (v14) – The other result of Paul’s chains was an increased boldness throughout the church to speak the word without fear (2 Tim 8-9). Their confidence was in the Lord, not in Paul who was imprisoned.

Mixed Motives (vv15-18) – It seems that this loyal church may have heard that there were those in Rome hoping to add to Paul’s affliction. Paul responds that this in fact is only another cause to rejoice. Affliction without and afflictions within – in either case, Paul sees Christ being preached and in this he rejoices.

Who Were They? (vv15-16) – We do not know exactly who these preachers from envy were or what the circumstances were. We do know that they were not preachers of a false gospel, because then, Paul would not rejoice. He would damn them (Gal 1:8). They are not the ‘dogs’ he warns against in 3:2. Paul is not concerned about himself in any degree compared to his concern for the gospel.

The Partnership of Love (v17) – If this is in contrast to those who preach out of envy towards Paul, then the object of ‘love’ here is upon Paul himself. They know that He has given himself for the defense of the gospel and they join in this ‘*fellowship*’ with him. Afflictions and persecutions upon Christians are often used by God to motivate others to serve Christ in the same cause.

What Then? (v18) – “*Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice,*”. When a church starts to get her hands around the sovereign goodness of God as Paul proclaimed and lived (and wrote about to the Romans, chapter 8:31-39), they become very dangerous to the world. Once we are no longer afraid of what will happen to us, prisons and afflictions cannot stop the spread of God’s Word. But the point is not to be inspired by Paul and run off to imitate him. The point is to see through Paul to the One with whom Paul is consumed. Paul is not thinking about Paul and telling us to think about him. Paul’s epistles and life point us to Christ and to our calling in Christ.

The Dominion of Divine Perspective – This is the mindset of the bondservant of Christ Jesus. We have been chained by love. We have been imprisoned in grace. We are given a vision that causes us to see everything in light of the bigger picture. Jesus Christ is bringing His gospel to the nations and nothing will stop Him (Psalm 2), and He is using His bondservants to do so. Yet He has also promised persecutions for us (John 15:18-20). The only way to reconcile these two things is to see that our shared sufferings in Christ are means by which God stimulates believers to greater holiness and opens eyes to message of the gospel.

Single-Minded Passion – In prison or out, attacked from within or from without, in plenty or in want, Christ is sufficient. He grants eyes of faith to see beyond our circumstances (Heb 11:1-2, 13-15) to the promises God has made. He will bring salvation to the world and He will bring His people to Himself finally in heaven (Phil 1:6). Paul’s passion is not only for these events, but for Christ Himself (3:10f).

Glorious Optimism – This is not a personality trait of Paul’s. This is the fruit of abounding in the love of Christ more and more in knowledge and all discernment. We too are Christ’s bondservants and saints. We too have been called to pick up our crosses and follow Christ each day. We too have been called to participate in the sufferings of Christ. What matters is not what happens ‘to me’, but how everything is affecting the gospel. But this is not ultimate self-denial for the one who is ‘in Christ’. It is ultimate joy.