

### The Good Results of Paul's Imprisonment

#### Philippians 1:12-18

Philippians 1:12-18: *"Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. 13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14 And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear. 15 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16 The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 18 But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice."*

#### Background Notes

In verse 13, Paul wrote that the whole palace guard - and everyone else (*"all the rest"*) had seen the evidence: *"my chains are in Christ."* The palace guard was a select group of imperial guards in Rome. They were not the Roman police, and they were not the normal Roman army. They were "special forces" - an elite group of about 9,000 guards.

Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter to the Philippians. He was not in a dungeon, but he was chained to a Roman guard at all times. These Roman guards who guarded Paul came from that select group of imperial guards. Periodically the guards would change, after a certain number of hours of guard duty.

So the apostle Paul would have met a number of guards – and more importantly, a number of these guards would have met Paul! How long do you think you could be chained to the apostle Paul before you heard the gospel? Not very long! Can you imagine these Roman guards coming back to the barracks after several hours of being chained to the apostle Paul, and sharing the things he had heard with his buddies?

This, then, was the way the whole palace guard - and everyone else in the official circles of Rome - heard why Paul was in prison. Paul had not done anything wrong. He was imprisoned because of his faith in Christ: *"...it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ"* (v13).

Undoubtedly some of those guards became Christians. In fact, the gospel rippled out beyond the ranks of the imperial guard and right into Caesar's household. Philippians 4:22: *"All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household."* Remember - Nero was the Roman emperor at this time. It's amazing how Paul's imprisonment worked out so that the gospel would ripple out in Rome, and folks were becoming believers!

One more background note: when I read verses 16-17, you may have noticed a reversed order in your translation of the Bible. That difference is because of manuscript variations. I was reading the New King James Version, and that translation follows what is known as a “Majority Text” – meaning the majority of the manuscripts.

Manuscripts were *handwritten* copies of Scripture – Scriptures that were copied by hand before the invention of the printing press. In verses 16-17, the order in which I read them is in line with the “Majority Text” – the *majority* of the manuscripts. “*The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel.*”

Some of the earlier or older manuscripts reverse the order of verses 16-17 compared to what I read. However – even though there’s a different order, *there is no difference in the content!*

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Adverse circumstances can advance God’s purposes.

From the human perspective, Paul had run into some very adverse circumstances. After all, he had a very successful ministry going before his arrest. Unbelievers were hearing the gospel, churches were being founded and built up - but then he was thrown into prison! His travels were cut off; his freedom to teach and preach was curtailed. Paul was chained at the wrist to a Roman guard, and the guard would never release that chain. He didn’t want to lose his prisoner, because it meant his neck!

These circumstances were not only adverse, they were very unpleasant. Think how unpleasant it would be to dress and undress while chained to a Roman guard. Think how unpleasant it would be to bathe and take care of personal needs while chained to a guard. Think of the gross talk and behavior of many of the guards. Why would God let this happen? The reason is that adverse and unpleasant circumstances can actually advance God’s purposes.

In this section, Paul shared two ways in which God’s purposes were being advanced - in spite of the adverse circumstances.

First - ***the gospel was making its way into the imperial ranks.*** Verses 12-13: “*But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ.*” If Paul hadn’t come to Rome as a prisoner, these lines of communication would have remained close, but the prison became a pulpit. The Roman chain became a line of communication into the imperial ranks of Rome. Adverse circumstances can advance God’s purposes.

Maybe you’re facing some adverse circumstances right now. Maybe you’re “chained” because of a sickness. Maybe you’re chained to an unpleasant job, or a boss that you don’t like. Maybe you’re chained to a neighborhood, even though

you'd like to move away. God can use all of these various "chains" as lines of communication. Adverse circumstances can advance God's purposes.

Second - ***Christians in Rome were becoming more courageous in sharing their faith.*** Verse 14: *"And most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear."* When the Christians in Rome saw Paul's brave testimony as a prisoner, they were encouraged to be bolder in their own testimony. When we hear of Christians who are undergoing very difficult circumstances because of their faith in Jesus, and they're still courageously hanging in there, we're encouraged to stand up more boldly, and to speak up more for the Lord.

Do you remember the Willis family that lost six children in a tragic car accident? Talk about adverse circumstances! Their steadfast testimony for Christ on national TV has encouraged literally thousands of Christians across this country to be more bold and steadfast in their witness for Christ. Adverse circumstances can advance God's purposes.

## **2. Bad motives cannot thwart God's purposes.**

Verse 15: *"Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill."* Some of the Christians in Rome were encouraged by Paul's testimony, and they were preaching the gospel for the right motives. Unfortunately, others were preaching the gospel from impure motives.

The believers who were preaching with the right motives were doing it out of love, knowing that Paul had been appointed by God Himself to defend the gospel. Those who were preaching the gospel from wrong motives were envious of Paul, and they were criticizing Paul. They were jealous and self-seeking. Their motive was to build up their own reputations in the Christian community.

But – in spite of the bad motives of the preachers, Paul **rejoiced** that Jesus Christ was being preached! Verse 18: *"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."* Paul knew that God could overrule even bad motives to accomplish His purposes.

I know a young man who has become a strong Christian, and is involved full-time in Christian camp ministry. When you hear the story of his conversion, you will have to agree that bad motives cannot thwart God's purposes!

A girl from the USA joined a missions team – apparently for the wrong reasons, or at least with mixed motives. She wanted to travel and see the world – certainly impure motives for a foreign missions commitment. Soon after they arrived, she left the missions team. Her motive? She wanted to do her own thing. She met a young guy in a pub - not the best of situations or motives - but of all things, she communicated the gospel to him - and he believed! He became a Christian!

He came back to the USA with her, and they were married – but after a short time she divorced him and went off with another man. (Talk about impure motives!) I don't know where she is now, but he is a solid Christian, and he's serving the Lord full-time!

You can be sure that the bad and impure motives involved in this case will be judged. But this true story is living proof that ***bad motives cannot thwart God's purposes.***

## Practical Application

### Let's develop a "big picture" mentality!

Why was Paul able to rejoice in the midst of adverse circumstances, and in spite of the bad motives of other believers? He didn't complain - he was able to ***rejoice!***

Paul could rejoice because he rose above the circumstances. He rose above the adverse circumstances of imprisonment, and he rose above the bad motives - because ***he had the "big picture."***

Paul knew that God was in control. He knew that God could turn tragedy into triumph. He believed what he had written to the Christians in Rome: "*we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose*" (Romans 8:28 NIV). Paul didn't say that everything that happens in our lives is good. No – events in our lives aren't always "good." But whether our circumstances are good or bad, God can work *everything* in our lives together for our eventual ***good.***

Paul knew that, from God's perspective, ***there are no accidents.*** Paul knew that God ***controls all circumstances.*** Paul knew that God is ***working out His purposes,*** in spite of adverse circumstances and bad motives.

Paul had God's perspective – he had the "big picture." Do we have the big picture? Can we rise above negative circumstances? Can we rise above tragedy? Can we rise above petty jealousies and rivalry, and people who criticize us behind our backs, and "sheep-stealing" - and whatever else is blinding us, and preventing us from seeing God's "big picture"?

Let's develop a "big picture" mentality!