

THE FURTHERANCE OF THE GOSPEL

TEXT: PHIL. 1:12-30

Introduction:

1. As you study Chapter 1 of Paul's epistle to the Philippians, you will notice the emphasis on the Gospel (vss. 5, 7, 12, 17, 27).
2. It is amazing how many people are confused over the Gospel. Some churches teach a "social gospel." The Bible certainly does not teach this. Others promote a "healing gospel." This too is foreign to the Bible.
3. Lately we have heard many news reports telling us that Barack Obama's church teaches a so-called "black gospel." This too is unscriptural.
4. We do not need to be uncertain over this important Bible term. The apostle Paul has defined the Gospel for us (I Cor. 15:1-4).
5. The apostle Paul's great burden in life was the furtherance of the Gospel. And more than anything else, Paul's desire was to preach the Gospel in Rome.
6. In Acts 19:21, Paul said, "I must also see Rome." He did not want to go to sightseeing in Rome. He wanted to go there to preach and win souls.
7. In Romans 1:15, Paul wrote, "So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also."
8. In Romans 15:23, Paul told the Christians in Rome, had "a great desire" for "many years" to come to Rome to preach to them.
9. Rome was the greatest city in the world in Paul's day, the hub of the Roman Empire. Paul wanted to go there as a preacher, but instead he went there as a prisoner (read Acts 21-28 for details).
10. From a worldly point of view, Paul failed. But from God's point of view he was very successful. Paul knew that which happened unto him promoted "the furtherance of the Gospel" (1:12).
11. The word "furtherance" is a Greek military term referring to the army engineers who go before the troops to open the way into new territory.
12. Tonight, we will look at "the furtherance of the Gospel" (1:12), "the defense of the gospel" (1:17), and "the faith of the gospel" (1:27b).

I. THE FURTHERANCE OF THE GOSPEL (1:12)

1. Paul wanted his readers to know "that the things which happened unto" him (1:12), i.e. his trial and imprisonment, have resulted in the furtherance of the Gospel.
2. His enemies thought this would hinder the Gospel. Even some of his friends were afraid that his imprisonment would hinder the Gospel. But in fact, it resulted in "the furtherance of the Gospel."

3. This is another example of how man rules but God overrules. Truly “all things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom. 8:28).
4. Paul’s bonds (chains) were recognized in Caesar’s palace “and in all other places” (1:13) as being “in Christ” or “for Christ.” In other words, people realized that he was imprisoned for his faith in Jesus Christ, not for any criminal activity. This gave Paul an opportunity to witness to the Roman nobility, Roman soldiers, and other people he normally never would be able to talk to.
5. Another favorable outcome of Paul’s imprisonment was that “many of the brethren in the Lord” were encouraged and strengthened. They were “waxing confident” (1:14) by Paul’s bonds and were “much more bold to speak the word without fear.”
6. Oftentimes, persecution has the effect of transforming quiet and timid believers into bold and courageous preachers. Perhaps they were thinking: “Paul’s in prison. Someone needs to go out and take his place. I’ll go.”
7. Strange as it may seem, some preachers were preaching Christ out of “envy and strife” (1:15). Others had the right motives and were preaching Christ with “good will” (1:15), i.e., with an honest effort to help Paul and see souls saved.
8. The envious preachers were attempting to “add infliction” to Paul’s bonds (1:16). They were probably jealous of his success. As disturbing as this was, Paul had the right attitude. He rejoiced that nevertheless “Christ is preached” (1:18).
9. These opponents were probably those who mixed law and Gospel (cf. Phil. 3:1-9; Acts 15; Epistle to the Galatians).

II. THE DEFENSE OF THE GOSPEL (1:17).

1. There were some good brethren preaching Christ out of pure and sincere love for God, for Paul, and for the Gospel (1:17). They knew that Paul was “set” or determined “for the defense of the gospel” (1:17).
2. “Salvation” (1:19) in this context refers to Paul’s deliverance from prison. Christians were praying for his release and Paul was confident that God would answer their prayers and he would be released.
3. Consider the emphasis Paul puts on prayer – he sees prayer as powerful enough to thwart the purposes and power of the mighty Roman Empire (1:19). I am afraid we often underestimate what prayer can accomplish.
4. Prayer can literally move mountains. Our Lord said, “Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his

- heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them” (Mark 11:22-24).
5. On account of their prayers, and the supply of the Holy Spirit (1:19), Paul had an “earnest expectation” and hope that he would never be ashamed of his faith (1:20).
 6. Paul wanted to see Christ “magnified” (1:20), i.e., exalted and praised. Christ would be magnified by Paul’s life or by his death (1:20).
 7. Therefore, Paul was “in a strait betwixt two” (1:23). To him “to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (1:21). He wanted to continue preaching the Gospel but he knew that to die and be with Christ “is far better” (1:23b).
 8. Verse 21 has been called “Paul’s philosophy of life” (William MacDonald). Scofield calls it the key verse of the epistle.
 9. H.A. Ironside wrote: “The Christless business man, whose one aim and object is to obtain wealth, might well say, ‘For me to live is money.’ The careless seeker after the world’s pleasures, if he told the truth, would say, ‘For me to live is worldly pleasure.’ The carnal voluptuary given up to self-gratification, would say, ‘For me to live is self.’ The statesman, exulting in the plaudits of the people, and craving world-notoriety, might truthfully declare, ‘For me to live is fame and power.’ But Paul could say, and every Christian should be able to say, ‘For me to live is Christ.’”
 10. As wonderful as it would be for Paul to depart and be with the Lord, he knew God had more fruitful labor for him (1:22). Yet it was a difficult choice (1:22b).
 11. Paul preferred heaven but his friends preferred he “abide in the flesh” a while longer. This was “more needful” for them (1:24). Paul’s unselfishness was commendable. He does not think of his own comfort but only the furtherance of the gospel.
 12. Note that this passage proves conclusively that to be absent from the body means to be present with the Lord (cf. II Cor. 5:8). The doctrine of “soul sleep” is unscriptural. The body is said to be “sleeping” but never the soul.
 13. Paul had confidence that he would live longer and therefore continue to minister to the saints at Philippi (1:25). Later on, when it was time for him to leave this world, he knew it.
 14. “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness,

- which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (II Tim. 4:6-8).
15. Not only was Paul confident that God would deliver him from prison (1:19), and that he would live a while longer (1:24, 25), he was also confident that God would allow him to visit them in Philippi (1:26).
 16. Paul was not only concerned with “the furtherance of the Gospel” but also with the “furtherance and joy” of their faith (1:25).

III. THE FAITH OF THE GOSPEL

1. The “faith of the Gospel” (1:27) is the Christian faith. Jude calls it “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3).
2. Paul wanted them to make sure their “conversation” (conduct, behaviour) was “as it becometh the gospel of Christ,” i.e., worthy of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.
3. “You are writing a Gospel, a chapter each day,
By the deeds that you do, and the words that you say.
Men read what you write, whether faithful or true:
Say – what is the Gospel according to you?”
4. Paul made a plea for consistency, constancy, and unity (1:27). We must pull together – “striving together for the faith of the gospel” (1:20). Unfortunately, there was a division in this church (cf. 4:2).
5. Christians need not be “terrified” by our adversaries (1:28), i.e., by the enemies of the Gospel. Our Lord said: “I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18).
6. “Salvation” (1:28) in this context refers to spiritual salvation, i.e., the opposite of “perdition.” Boldness and bravery in the face of persecution has a twofold effect: first, it is “an evident token of perdition” to those who hate God. Secondly, it is a sign of salvation to those who love God (1:28).
7. Not only is it a privilege to live for Christ, it is also a privilege and blessing to suffer for Him (1:29).
8. Our Lord said in the Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matt. 5:10-12).
9. Paul said in II Timothy 3:12, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”

10. Paul rejoiced despite his sufferings and he told the Philippians to expect “the same conflict” (1:30).

CONCLUSION:

1. Paul was not afraid of death. He knew the verdict of his trial could result in the death sentence. Yet he considered that a victory.
2. Alfred, Lord Tennyson wrote this poem, called “Crossing the Bar”:

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark;

For tho’ from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar.”

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