

“Your Response to Adversity Reveals Your Priorities” Philippians 1:12-18, Sermon Notes
Pastor Eric Borgstrom
Saving Grace Bible Church
October 29th, 2017
Morning Worship Service

I want to begin our time together this morning by talking about the purpose of the church. Why is the church here?

Another way to ask the question: What should be the *priority* of the church, and by extension, the priority for all believers?

As you can imagine, there are a lot of different ways that question might be answered today. One common way might be to say that the church is here to “walk as Jesus walked. The church is here to love people how Jesus loved people, to follow in the steps of Christ.”

And to be sure, that can be an accurate statement depending on what someone means when they say that, but oftentimes today that language is used to imply something like this:

Because Jesus fed the poor, one of the main priorities of the church is to feed the poor

Because Jesus healed the sick, one of the main priorities of the church is to provide medical treatment and healthcare for those who are sick

Because Jesus cared for the outcasts and the oppressed in society, therefore the church should prioritize providing care for those who are experiencing a difficult lot in life

This movement today is what is commonly called the “social gospel.” That’s just a term that is used to say that the church exists to help alleviate the social ills in society in the name of Jesus

Things like racism, poverty, homelessness, human-trafficking, disease, addiction, disaster relief, really anything that exists in the world as a result of the curse of sin

This, we’re told, is to be the *priority* for the church. We are to exist to make the world a better place to live. And by the way, if the world will warm up to Jesus as a result of your compassion, well, that’s even better. That’s a bonus

Now, on the one hand, before we’re quick to dismiss this view we can recognize there certainly could be a worthy motive within the social gospel movement that is appropriate

After all, it is not evil or sinful to want to alleviate human suffering in the world

Christians are those who should pity those who are suffering, and pity victims of crimes, and have a compassionate attitude toward the homeless and the afflicted

But at the same time, we have to ask the question: Is this the mission, the purpose, the priority of the church as we see it in the New Testament?

I've always liked the way John Piper has illustrated this: Paraphrasing his thoughts: Any acts of social mercy by Christians, like feeding the poor, providing clothing and shelter for the homeless, any of these acts of compassion *minus the proclamation of the gospel message* is actually not loving, it's not compassionate, *it's cruel*

And you say how? How can it be cruel for Christians to meet real needs in the lives of those who are afflicted?

Because, Piper continues, "It's like standing beside a man on death row, about to be executed for his crimes, and although we hold the key to his release, we hold the key to his freedom in our hands, we close our hands and instead just comb his hair as he sits in the electric chair, making sure he is as comfortable as possible as he awaits his execution."

That's what happens when the church's priorities are misguided. When we think that our priority is to make sure people have better circumstances, to make sure people are more comfortable on their way to eternal destruction, we no longer have a distinct message, we are no longer offering people *anything different than the world itself can offer people*

Have you ever noticed that the world, the pagan world that hates God, does a much better job of doing the "social gospel" than the church? The world has much more resources, has much more ability to help alleviate human suffering than the church does

So that can't be the main thing the church is to be about because if it is *there would be no need for the church*. If the world can do it, or even do it better, that can't be the purpose of the church

So, at this point you might be thinking, "ok, we get it, so if the church isn't here to primarily be about those things, then what is the priority of the church? Why do we exist? What is supposed to be the heartbeat, the priority of every true believer?"

Well, the purpose of the church, the priority of the church is, very simply, to fulfill the great commission

Matthew 28:18-20, "And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.'"

So in the great commission we see first of all that the church exists to glorify God through evangelism. Making disciples, gospel ministry

And secondly, the church exists to glorify God through edification. The building up and encouragement of the church. This is in verse 20, "teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." There's edification, or the building up of the body of Christ

That's the mission of the church. Evangelizing the lost, and edifying the body of Christ

And as you read the New Testament, especially Paul's ministry, it's clear that the great commission is what Paul was about

Paul's priorities were in the right place. Paul was about giving sinners something that didn't merely put superficial bandaids on their felt needs, but rather was about a message of salvation that addressed their greatest need: How to be reconciled with a God who was angry with them on account of their sin

Paul's priority was the gospel. The good news that God saves sinners through the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ

And in our text this morning, as we listen to the Apostle Paul describe the circumstances surrounding his imprisonment, we're going to see how adversity reveals our priorities

Notice Philippians 1:12-18, "Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and 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. Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice."

Paul's priority is clear. The advancement of the gospel. In fact, the word "gospel" is a heavy theme here in chapter 1

Just to illustrate how central that word is in chapter 1 notice the following verses:

Verse 5, "your participation in the gospel."

Verse 7, "both in my imprisonment and the defense and confirmation of the gospel."

Verse 12, "the greater progress of the gospel."

Verse 16, "knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel."

Verse 27, "let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel."

Paul wanted the church in Philippi to have biblical priorities. He wanted the church to be focused on its *unique purpose*

And as Paul talks about his imprisonment and how he is processing his imprisonment, he gives us *two responses to adversity which prove you have gospel priorities*

The first response to adversity that proves you have gospel priorities is you *recognize adversity advances the gospel*, this will be in verses 12-14

Notice verse 12 again, "Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel..."

What has happened to Paul? What are his circumstances? Well, Philippians is what we consider a prison epistle because it is abundantly clear that Paul is writing from some sort of prison context

And while Paul doesn't get specific and say exactly what it was about his imprisonment that he is focusing on, nevertheless we know that it has something to do with his gospel witness while he was in prison

Because he tells us in verse 13, "so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known..." and then he lists several ways the gospel has advanced based on this

So we know he has something about his imprisonment in mind and we know that whatever has happened to him would tempt the church in Philippi to think that gospel ministry would now be hindered or even completely put to an end

This certainly is understandable from the Philippian's viewpoint. From their point of view, Paul's locked up in prison for a few years, now he has appealed to Caesar, not only is his ministry obviously coming to an end but also our partnership with him is over as well, and he's probably going to be martyred. We're not going to see him again

So Paul, aware of the temptation this church would be facing, models for them an appropriate and gospel-centered response to his adversity

Verse 12, "what's happened to me, my circumstances are irrelevant, what's important is that what has happened to me has caused the gospel to grow."

In fact, there's a little word here in verse 12 that is rendered a little differently in several English versions

Verse 12 reads like this: my circumstances, what has happened, has *instead or rather or actually* turned out for the *greater progress* of the gospel

In other words, this is not hindering or putting an end to gospel ministry, as you might be tempted to believe, it's *actually* doing the opposite, it's causing it to grow

When Paul faced adversity, his priority and focus was on what God was doing to cause the gospel to grow

Now, maybe you are thinking, "Oh I know the book of Acts, I know what happened to Paul, Paul was going around and preaching, he kept upsetting people and was discovered by the authorities, he was put in prison for a few years as he kept making appeals over and over..."

"This definitely wasn't part of God's *original plan*, plan A, but because God is so wise and so powerful he can now use this setback in Paul's life to advance the gospel."

Perhaps your view of God's sovereignty is like that? He's just really, really good at coming up with contingencies when His original plan doesn't work out. He's really skilled at working around the sinful actions of others or even our own foolish choices and *that's* why we can have confidence the gospel will go forth in our adversity

Well, if that's your view of God's sovereignty then you do not believe in God's sovereignty. Because that view portrays God as nothing more than just a really wise and powerful man

After all, man has no control over the future, but he can be really skilled at *responding* to events and making lemonade when life hands him lemons

But that's not at all how the Scriptures portray God's sovereignty. Especially when it comes to gospel ministry. In fact, take a look at Matthew 10:16-18

Here Jesus is sending out His disciples on a little mission trip, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. But beware of men, for they will hand you over to *the* courts and scourge you in their synagogues; and you will even be brought before governors and kings *for My sake, as a testimony to them* and to the Gentiles."

According to Jesus, you get arrested and brought before the officials of the land, you end up in prison, you can't travel around and do gospel ministry freely, it's not an accident. It's not plan B

You get sick or go through some very challenging circumstance that seemingly limits your ability to follow Christ and proclaim Christ, it didn't take God by surprise, He isn't *responding* to it as if he didn't know it was going to happen

God's foreknowledge in Scripture is not a result of Him looking into His crystal ball to see what the future holds, but rather His foreknowledge is a result of God's foreordination

In other words, God knows the future because *He has planned* the future and He has planned the future for His glory and the redemptive good of His people

Notice that language there again in Matthew 10:18, Christ says "you will be brought before them *for my sake, as a testimony to them.*"

The officials aren't arresting you for that reason, they mean evil. They are trying to get you to be quiet and stop preaching Christ. They aren't bringing you before them so you can give them the gospel

So they mean evil, but God means those very same actions for good, in the language of Genesis 50:20

No Christian is persecuted and in jail by accident. No Christian experiences plan B from God. All difficulties are plan A

Back to Philippians 1:12, Paul is helping the Philippian church grow in their theology of God's sovereignty

Paul is communicating to this church what the priority should be: What has happened to me has *rather, rather* than destroying or hindering gospel ministry, this has advanced it, it has caused it to grow

Adversity reveals our life focus, our life priority. How we respond in difficult circumstances reveal what we are living for

Now, I don't know about you but my typical response, my natural response when I am placed in situations and circumstances that I would never choose for myself, well, it's not always consistent with what I see Paul doing here

And that's probably true for most of us here this morning. When under adversity, the natural response is complaining, a lack of gratitude, lack of joy, bitterness toward God or others, lack of zeal or passion to serve and obey God

But these types of responses are merely proving that we have elevated something in our life above the gospel. There's something more dear to us, something we love more, than making Christ known

Now, back to the context here, what did Paul mean that his circumstances had turned out for the greater progress of the gospel?

Well, he gets specific in verse 13, notice, "so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else."

Just look at the influence Paul had while he was in prison. It's interesting, the full praetorian guard, at full strength, numbered around 9,000 to 10,000 soldiers

Now, it is technically possible that Paul could be referring to that full amount, or he could be referring to a localized expression of that praetorian guard around Caesar's headquarters there in Rome, but in either case, a very large number of the praetorian guard would have been aware of Paul and aware of his cause, the gospel

And you say how so? How did his imprisonment get so much attention that it was well known throughout the entire praetorian guard?

Well, first of all Paul would have proven to be an extraordinary prisoner

Not only would he have been speaking a clear and compelling message of salvation to these soldiers but he was probably one of the only prisoners in there who wasn't focused on *why he shouldn't be there*

For instance, most inmates, at least early on in their term, spend all of their time and conversation pleading their innocence. And it turns into a self-pity party for anyone who will listen. "They got the wrong guy, the real villain is still out there."

So Paul would be the odd man out when it comes to this. He's in there saying, "They got the right guy, I'm guilty of what they say. I'm guilty of preaching Christ and defending the gospel. That's why I'm here. What they say about me is true."

So it became known that the only crime Paul had committed was being associated with Christ and preaching for Christ

Another way Paul's imprisonment and his gospel cause would have become well known is because we know from Acts 28:23 that Paul had a lot of visitors during this imprisonment, and they would come to hear him speak about Christ

And a lot of visitors in a prison context meant more soldiers would have to be present to control the crowd and make sure no suspicious activity was going on

So these soldiers would have been forced to eavesdrop on Paul's ministry and his preaching to the large number of visitors he had

There's also at least one other reason why Paul and his message was so influential among the Praetorian Guard

In other passages (Acts 28:20, Eph. 6:20) where he speaks of this very imprisonment we see him use a word for "chains" (halusis) that refers specifically to a certain kind of chain

This was a short chain, similar to the design of handcuffs today. A little bit longer than handcuffs, and probably a little more heavy duty than handcuffs, but a similar design

And one end was placed over the wrist of a prisoner and the other end was placed on the wrist of the prison guard. And this was for 24 hours a day, making privacy and escape impossible

So, Paul couldn't get away from them, *but they couldn't get away from Paul* either

These soldiers would cycle through their shifts, chained to Paul 24 hours a day for 6 hours at a time. Every 6 hours a different soldier would come on shift. This would have gone on for the 2-3 years he was in this particular imprisonment

So it's not hard to imagine why Paul and his cause became so well known among these soldiers

By the way, we must marvel at the wisdom of God in placing Paul with this kind of access to these soldiers and the inevitable influence he would have

Praetorian Guard, these were the top of the line soldiers in Roman Empire

These were specialized, handpicked, strong, sophisticated, brilliant young men. They would sign up for 12 years of service which would then put them in a position to have very influential careers after that

In other words, if the praetorian guard was on your resume, not much else mattered. You were going to be influential and successful

These men would become commanding generals of large forces, senators, ambassadors, various public offices, influential businessmen. Really any notable and successful positions in society

Here's where we marvel at the wisdom of God: If you wanted to influence the Roman Empire this would be the most important group to influence

And the Lord decides that through this hard circumstance in Paul's life, the entire praetorian guard would be confronted with the gospel

Notice the end of verse 13 as we see that Paul's influence wasn't just to the guards, "and to everyone else." Not only soldiers, but the servants of Caesar's household, the great numbers of Jews who visited him in his imprisonment to hear him preach, (Acts 28:23), the church there in Rome

Ironically, Paul's gospel became more known as a *result of being in prison*, not *despite of being in prison*. The original design of arresting Paul in order to shut him up, was having the reverse effect. The Word of God was going forth and growing

Paul proved he had gospel priorities as he recognized that his adversity came from the merciful hand of God and was only furthering the cause of the gospel

Yes, God's Apostle was bound, but God's Word cannot be bound

In a future and final imprisonment of Paul, he wrote these words to Timothy, 2 Timothy 2:8, "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel, ⁹for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; *but the word of God is not imprisoned.*"

Now, there's another way this adversity caused the gospel to grow. We see this in verse 14, notice, "and that most of the brothers, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear..."

So Paul recognized that the effect of his adversity was having a ripple effect. Evangelism - I'm able to proclaim Christ to everyone in my sphere of influence

And edification - by my example I'm encouraging and emboldening the Christians in Rome to preach the gospel with all the more clarity and faithfulness

Literally verse 14 says, "to a much greater degree they are daring to speak the Word without fear."

The language there suggests that it wasn't that these brothers weren't preaching Christ at all before this. It rather implies that perhaps they were witnessing timidly, hesitantly, perhaps just when it was comfortable or easy

But now, Paul says in verse 14, they have all the more courage to speak the Word *without fear*

It is common for the Scriptures to portray fear as the great enemy of gospel proclamation. We read it earlier in Matthew 10:26-33. Fear of man keeps us from faithfully proclaiming the gospel as we ought

You don't need to turn there but let me review verses 32-33 again, "Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven."

Now, we can deny Christ directly, like Peter, in a moment of weakness we cower in fear and say "I'm not a Christian, I don't know the man, I don't believe."

But because most of us here in America are not under the threat of bodily harm on account of our association with Christ, our denials might show up in more *indirect* forms

In other words, we may never say the words, "I don't know Christ," but at the same time we never *speak up* and proclaim Christ to others because we love our comfort, we don't want to sacrifice our time and energy and reputation for Christ

We've got Thanksgiving approaching soon. Holiday get togethers often provide unique opportunities to get together with people who might not know Christ. Unbelieving friends or family.

You're at Thanksgiving dinner and your extended family are all unbelievers, and they're all talking about how great it is to be pro-choice on the abortion issue, or how great it is that we are evolving as a human race and how we're starting to accept all forms of human sexuality, and on and on

And there you are, the lone man out, sitting in your chair, your conscience is burning because you know you should speak up and defend the truth but you don't want to be disliked. You don't want to be criticized, you don't want to ruin Thanksgiving dinner so you keep quiet and you miss the opportunity God provided for you

That can be a way of denying Christ without even saying a word

In that same context in Matthew 10, I'll also reiterate verses 37-39, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it."

He's not saying that every time you have a chance to speak the truth you hit a home run and you *never* strike out or cower in fear. He's saying that being a Christian is going to cost you things you hold dear

It's going to cost you relationships, it's going to cost you your comfort, you're going to have to lose and give up things that you currently love

That's why this passage in Matthew 10 causes us to ask some important questions about ourselves: What has it cost you to be a Christian? What relationship, what friend or acquaintance mocks you because of your association with Christ, what family member has told you to chill out and stop living so radically for Christ?

Where are the things in your life that you want to do but you refuse to do based on the conviction you have in the Word of God?

Well, this is one of the many gifts of adversity in our lives. Why? Because true conviction, true beliefs are exposed when pressure comes in your life. Your priorities in life quickly become revealed the harder life gets

With Paul, are you able and willing to recognize that God has designed your adversity not only to make you more like Christ, but also to cause the gospel to grow?

What a helpful principle to keep in mind the next time we are uncomfortable in life and think that we have been backed into a corner, my life serves no purpose, I'm good for nothing. I can't be faithful to Christ in this circumstance

Might we recognize that the Lord not only doesn't need smooth and comfortable circumstances to cause the gospel to advance, He actually uses the opposite of those things to cause the gospel to grow

Paul recognized that his imprisonment was plan A for God's glory, his good, and the advancement of the gospel

This is the first response to adversity which proves you have gospel priorities, you recognize adversity advances the gospel

The second response to adversity, which proves you have gospel priorities, is that you rejoice when adversity advances the gospel. This will be in verses 15-18.

And you'll notice that the text takes an interesting turn here: Notice verse 15, "Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment."

Paul sort of makes a parenthetical statement here, a qualifying statement about these brothers who now have much more courage to speak

And this is kind of confusing at least at first glance. Because we see that within the group Paul refers to in verse 14, "most of the brothers," there are two *subgroups* within that larger group

And basically, what Paul says is that some of these brothers are preaching the gospel with pure motives, they are true partners with Paul in gospel ministry, while others are preaching the gospel with impure motives

Those with pure motives are represented at the end of verse 15, "they preach from good will" and verse 16, "they preach out of love knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel."

So the first group of brothers, they have good will toward me, Paul says, they love me, they sacrifice for me and for the sake of the gospel, and they recognize that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel

They understand Paul is an apostle, he is God's spokesperson, therefore they are convinced what happens to Paul is not Plan B. It's not an accident. God ordained it for the defense and confirmation of the gospel

And this is exactly what we would expect the text to say - Most of the brothers were emboldened to speak the word without fear, and they are preaching the gospel with pure motives, out of love, recognizing that I'm an apostle and I'm in these circumstances for the defense of the gospel

But then he talks about another group of brothers and the emphasis in verses 15-17 is really on this other group of brothers and that's where it gets a little confusing as we hear Paul describe their ministry

First of all, it's important to note that according to Paul they are *brothers*. That means at the very least, he considers them as part of the Christian community there in Rome

Secondly, it's very important to note that their *motivation* not their *message* is the issue here. How do we know that?

Well, let's put our interpretive caps on (they should already be on, but let's make sure they are on here) for a moment and follow this train of thought:

Notice the end of verse 14 again, "they have far more courage to speak the Word without fear."

15, "some (in this group) are preaching Christ even from envy or strife, but some (are preaching Christ – is the idea) from good will."

16, "the latter do it (preach Christ) out of love..."

17, "the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition."

So it's clear that the preaching and proclamation *itself* is the same from verse 14 on. In other words, this subgroup of brothers are not heretics. There's no indication that they are preaching a false gospel or another Jesus

And there's also no indication that their method was wrong either. In other words, they weren't abandoning gospel preaching and instead putting on dramas because the culture in Rome was more visual and they thought they could reach more people that way

No, there's no indication that their message (the gospel) or their method (preaching) was off

And this is consistent with what we see Paul say in other letters when someone is tampering with the message or the method

For instance, when the method of preaching is abandoned, when man starts to think he can package the truth in a more appealing way, Paul says the gospel itself loses its power, its emptied of its power

Where do we see this? Listen to 1 Corinthians 2:2-5, "And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, *so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.*"

Paul says, if I start to get clever in ministry, and I start to get innovative and come up with new ways to package the truth, I risk losing the power of the gospel. Why? Because I won't know if people believed because of my ingenuity, or the truth itself

So that's how Paul talks about the method of preaching and proclaiming Christ. And he's not concerned about that here in Philippians. These brothers, as far as we know, were proclaiming Christ and Him crucified

When the *message* itself or the content is at stake, Paul is equally concerned. For instance, listen to Galatians 1:6-9, "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is *really* not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ."

Notice, the emphasis here in the Galatians passage is on the message, the content. And now notice the much stronger language he uses: "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!"

So, when a false gospel or false Christ is being proclaimed, Paul speaks in language of warning and condemnation

Furthermore, take a look at Philippians 3:2, "Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; for we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh"

Again, a warning, strong language to beware of those who are preaching a different message

But there is no strong language like that in our passage in Philippians 1, no warning about the *content* of the message or that their *method* was off

Which then begs the question: Why would these brothers do this? Nothing wrong with their gospel, nothing wrong with their method of proclaiming the gospel, so what were they doing?

I think we get evidence about what these brothers were doing in light of what the text *does and doesn't* say about them

Notice first in verse 15 that they are preaching Christ from "envy and strife." This is terminology that has to do with relationships, specifically their relationship with Paul as will be made clear in verse 17

"envy" there is a strong word and is basically synonymous with jealousy. And you say what were they jealous of?

The text doesn't say: Maybe Paul's giftedness. Maybe that he was so well loved and respected in the Christian community. And then he came to their town and all of the focus shifted off of them and onto him and then they went to prison to hear him speak, this man who had such a remarkable reputation and they were less than impressed

"I'm a better preacher than he is." And they became resentful toward him based on how much everyone else liked him. Maybe he represented a position and a status that they desperately wanted

Whatever it was the text doesn't specifically say, but they had a problem not with the gospel, but with Paul

Further insight into their motives we can see by contrasting the first group with this group. For instance, the first group, preaching with pure motives, understands that Paul has been appointed for the defense of the gospel

Notice verse 16, "the latter do it out of love knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel."

But notice verse 17, the other group of brothers don't recognize Paul's imprisonment is part of God's plan to advance the gospel, they rather are "thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment."

In other words, perhaps these brothers view what has happened to Paul in a completely different way than Paul did

Maybe they understood verse 12 this way: What has happened to Paul, what Paul *recklessly* got himself into in getting arrested and bound in chains, has not served to advance the gospel

Paul is minimizing the gospel's influence by willingly giving himself up and continually putting himself in positions of attention so that now he is bound, he's in prison, and can't really do anything for the gospel. He can't visit the churches, he can't go out and evangelize. And now he's caused the world of Christianity to be one big joke

So they could easily conclude that Paul has done damage to the Christian cause by getting himself arrested. "Look where Paul's wisdom got him, here's the great apostle that is supposed to be our leader and forerunner in gospel ministry, and he's sitting there 24 hours a day chained to a Roman guard. That's not exactly going into all the world and preaching the gospel. He's probably going to rot in prison the rest of his life or be executed."

Or maybe they were resentful toward him from another angle entirely: "Look at that compromiser Paul. If he was really faithful he would have been martyred already. He's just being too friendly with the Romans and compromising his message so he doesn't get killed."

Whatever the specific resentment was, notice verse 17, their ministry came from "selfish ambition, not from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress or affliction in my imprisonment."

There's the heart motive. Not the glory of God and the advancement of the gospel, no, these brothers sought to gain something for themselves in their ministry, and harm Paul at the same time

That's really what that word "selfish ambition" means. It was used of a person who wanted to magnify himself, to promote himself. And it became common to use it to refer to people like politicians who run for an office and are trying to get elected

We just came off an election year for the presidency and the campaigns of the nominees can be summed up in one phrase: total self-promotion while stepping on whoever and whatever in the process

That's what our modern-day politicians do. Their message is, "I'm right and everybody else is wrong, and by the way, look at how bad everyone else's character is." That's the word Paul uses here in verse 17

These brothers were after recognition, credit, respect, whatever heart idolatry they were longing after

So, like a politician, they were in it to promote themselves and discredit Paul at the same time

In verse 17, that word for distress or affliction could be external affliction for Paul in prison. In this sense, their actions were meant to make his life in prison more difficult somehow

Maybe angering the officials, or perhaps causing such an uproar that fellow Christians could no longer visit Paul

This distress or affliction could also refer to an internal affliction Paul would experience in his spirit. He would be grieved, tempted to discouragement on account of their actions

Now, before Paul brings up *why* he is even referring to these brothers, let's just pause and consider selfish ambition in the midst of biblical ministry

The reason I think it's helpful to consider this is because sometimes we can pat ourselves on the back just because we know we have good theology and we know we faithfully proclaim the biblical gospel

But at the same time, do we ever consider what our motives are for studying theology and preaching the gospel?

It's clear from this text that one can be studying the Scriptures, teaching, serving, attending church, preaching, evangelizing, doing all sorts of Christian activities, with the motive of selfish ambition

So what might be some evidences of selfish ambition in our lives? There could obviously be many evidences so we'll just highlight a few of them

First of all, when it comes to sharing the gospel, do I always find a way to make sure other Christians know when I evangelized? Do I seem to always find a way to insert my evangelistic efforts into conversations I have with other Christians?

Now, I'm obviously not saying there aren't times when it is appropriate to talk about our evangelistic endeavors, but perhaps this will be a good test the next time you do get a gospel opportunity with someone:

See how bad your heart wants to bring it up to other people in the church: That could be a sign that your motive to evangelize was really just self-recognition, which is selfish ambition

Another sign of selfish ambition in ministry is if I get angry or envious or jealous of other people when they get to serve in areas I want to serve in, but I'm prevented from serving in that area for whatever reason

Or when I do serve in a particular area but someone else gets the credit and recognition for it, and that deeply bothers me

Why is that a sign of selfish ambition? Because what godly motive would you have for wanting to be recognized? If the need got met, that's all that should matter

Another way I can tell if I have selfish ambition is if I'm intimidated by more gifted people and I can't recognize and compliment their gifts. This is most likely another thing that was going on with these brothers in verse 17 as they thought about Paul

A resentment had developed within them, perhaps never even meeting him face to face, just their *perception* of him and how other people talked so highly of him, exposed that they wanted that same type of praise

If we're selfishly ambitious, people who we perceive are more gifted than us are a threat. So selfishly ambitious people will be uncomfortable around gifted peers, they will maybe cut them out of their life, will slander them or find some way to discredit them

Another way selfish ambition might show up is an over-inflated view of one's own giftedness and importance. Unwilling to accept help, unwilling to receive criticism, unwilling to have other people do the job because they perceive they are the only ones who can do it well

So you can see that it is entirely possible to do ministry activity in a biblical way with *unbiblical motives*

What *should* characterize us, what is the opposite of selfish ambition? Glance over at 2:3-4, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, (ok, Paul what's the opposite of these things?)

"... but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."

Selfish ambition, "I exist for my own glory and praise, other people exist to help me accomplish that goal."

While humility says, "I exist for the glory of God and the advancement of the gospel, other people exist for me to serve and accomplish those goals."

These brothers in verse 17 viewed Paul as a threat, he stood in the way of their heart idolatry

Now, being the good expository listeners you are, you might be saying, "what does this have to do with our second point?" Rejoice when adversity advances the gospel

Well, to merely focus on these two groups of brothers, specifically this group who was preaching with impure motives, would miss the entire point of these verses

In other words, why is Paul even highlighting this, why is he even bringing up the fact that some of them preach with pure motives and others preach with impure motives?

I don't know about you but I would be tempted to think something like this about these brothers with impure motives:

"Are you guys serious? I'm in here suffering for the gospel, chained for 24 hours a day to a Roman guard, never having any privacy, any comforts of a normal life, and you guys are out there trying to ruin my credibility and trying to make my life harder than it already is?"

I'd also be tempted to not call them brothers, like Paul does. I'd call them pretenders, false brothers, people who clearly don't know Christ

But Paul doesn't go down that route because his personal affliction is insignificant. Paul's response to this mistreatment revealed that his priority was the gospel

Notice verse 18, "What then?" In other words, how should I and you all process this turn of events. How am I going to respond, what's my mindset?"

"only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in this I rejoice."

Now, we must first take note of what this is not saying: This is not Paul's way of saying we are free to do ministry any way we want as long as Christ is made known

That's how this verse has been abused at times. "Paul didn't get caught up in method, he didn't even care what the motive was, as long as Christ was made known, that's all that mattered to Paul."

"So we don't need to preach on Sunday mornings, we can just do dramas or watch movies, or any other way we can think of to get the truth across to our culture."

But this is far from Paul's point here in verse 18: First of all, there's a little phrase that is repeated several times which debunks that idea:

Notice verse 15, "preaching Christ."

Verse 17, "proclaim Christ."

Verse 18, "Christ is proclaimed."

These words, preaching and proclaiming Christ are explaining what Paul said at the end of verse 14, "they speak the Word of God without fear."

So, it is clear that Paul has in mind the faithful proclamation of the gospel message. He is in no way advocating a "free for all" when it comes to how we do ministry and share the gospel

Second of all, the *context* has nothing to do with a philosophy of ministry. In other words, why is Paul even bringing up the fact that some of these brothers are preaching with impure motives?

Because he is modeling for the church how to have gospel priorities even when it comes to personal harm

Paul's response to adversity proved he had gospel priorities because even when it meant significant personal harm, even when it meant he had to be grieved at seeing Christian brothers preach with impure motives, even when it meant his reputation would be tarnished and he would be slandered, even when it meant he would have to give up all of his comforts in life and sit in prison, *he could rejoice*

He could rejoice because his priority was the gospel, that's the point. Adversity reveals our source of joy and gratitude. We can only rejoice in adversity if our priority is Christ and the gospel

Otherwise, if our priority is comfort and smooth circumstances, the last thing we would do when life gets hard is rejoice

You see if Paul had selfish ambition in his heart, when he was squeezed by the pressures of life he would have responded with bitterness and anger toward these brothers. "you guys are ruining my life, you are ruining my reputation."

But because Paul was humble in his heart, and loved Christ in his heart, what came out when he was squeezed by the pressures of life were gospel priorities

Even when it meant he wasn't recognized or he was made to look bad, even when it meant that his already uncomfortable life would become even more uncomfortable, he could still rejoice that Christ was made much of because that is what life is about if you are a Christian

So we've seen two responses to adversity which prove you have gospel priorities:

One, you are able and willing to *recognize* that adversity advances the gospel. And that is your priority in your adversity

And secondly, you *rejoice* when adversity does advance the gospel, even at great cost to yourself

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