

The Important Thing ... Christ is Preached

Paul was in prison in Rome when he wrote his upbeat, confident and joyful letter to the Philippians. From his chains, he relayed to his readers: "... what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel" (1:12). He explains that statement by reflecting on the opportunity his chains gave him to proclaim the Gospel "throughout the whole palace guard." Also, because his incarceration did not hinder him from proclaiming Christ, his companions in Rome, who might otherwise have been frightened into silence, were finding the boldness to continue to preach Christ as well.

God worked through Paul's difficult circumstance in two ways that are easy for us to comprehend: **1)** the apostle was able to preach to his own captive audience and, **2)** others were inspired to preach Christ unafraid. But, God also used Paul's chains to advance the Gospel in a third manner, one not quite so easy to process:

¹⁵It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. ¹⁶The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. ¹⁸But 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. – Philippians 1:15-18

What a testimony these words are to the power of the proclaimed Word of God. There is a dynamic inherent to God's Word that is utterly independent of the human vessels that are advancing it, even when the human intent is to advance self.

Apparently, there were individuals who saw Paul's imprisonment as an opportunity to become big men in the Christian brotherhood in Rome by taking Paul down a notch. The single word translated "selfish ambition" means to "canvass for support" or to "party-monger." These men felt that they could become more respected by undermining Paul. For some petty reason, they resented the Apostle and wanted to be esteemed beyond him in the eyes of the local saints. The doctrine of these men was orthodox enough, but even the most gifted spokesman for Christ can have a personal axe to grind.

Paul's gentlemanliness is commendable, but that's hardly the most remarkable lesson to draw from the text. He could so easily dismiss preaching that came from impure motives against him and even be grateful for it. How? He understood that while God prefers pure vessels, when left with no other choice He can even work through people who are still very immature, competitive, and ambitious. God's Word accurately proclaimed has a life of its own!

"As long as the antagonism was only personal, Paul could rejoice that the greater purpose of disseminating the gospel was being served. Even when some of the preaching was actually a pretext, utilized to camouflage attacks on Paul, the apostle took the magnanimous view that affronts to himself could be ignored, provided that the truth of the Gospel of Christ was proclaimed." - Homer Kent

God can work through the worst in man. That, of course, should never tempt us to be less than we can be in the cause of Christ. Still, we can be comforted and encouraged in knowing that ultimately the advancement of the Gospel is not dependent on our human strength and capableness, but on the remarkable power of the Word of God.