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Philippians – The Blueprint for Joy #4

Welcome to OIC. We are glad you are here! We are studying the letter Paul wrote to the church at Philippi. It was a church that Paul had begun and had great affection for. The entire first chapter really focuses on joy in the midst of difficult circumstances. Remember, Paul wrote this letter from prison. As we discussed earlier in our study, Paul writes this letter in response to 2 questions the church at Philippi had for him. The questions were basically “how are you doing?” and “how is the message of the Gospel proceeding?” Last week we answered the question concerning the Gospel and we discovered that Jesus was being presented throughout the city of Rome and it was progressing very nicely. Now this week, we will answer the question “how are you doing?” The church at Philippi knew Paul was passionate for the things of Jesus. Our Scripture text for today is Philippians 1:15-18 but I think it is also necessary to read verses 12 through 14 as well. So Paul begins to answer these questions.

Philippians 1:12-18

¹²Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel,¹³ so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else,¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will;¹⁶ the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel;¹⁷ the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment.¹⁸ What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice,

The key words seem to be the last ones in verse 18 “because of this I rejoice and I will continue to rejoice”. Today’s support text, verses 15 through 18 are put into this letter for a reason. Paul wants us as Christians to know that we can have joy regardless of persecution in our lives. In this case, some of the persecution was coming from fellow Christians who were preaching with wrong motives. Obviously, there was some intense pain in Paul’s life. Today I want to show you 3 ways how we can respond to people who are afflicting or are even at times attacking us, even from within the body of believers.

#1 Do not react

Philippians 1:15,16,17

¹⁵Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will;¹⁶ the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel;¹⁷ the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment.

Verses 15 and 17 both seem to suggest a similar theme. The detractors were preaching out of envy and strife and selfish ambition to cause distress to Paul. You’ll notice Paul gives us practically no details about the affliction. Why? Paul was not about to get into a war of words concerning his credibility. Some less than mature Christians think the best defense against attack is an offensive barrage against the perpetrator of the pain.

Romans 12:19

Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

When we assume the position of the one who can take vengeance, we are usurping God's authority. It is God who will take vengeance on those who will attack us. If you notice carefully Paul is using Jesus Christ as his model. As far back as Isaiah 53:7 we are told how Jesus would react when He was falsely accused.

Isaiah 53:7

He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth.

Isaiah says he opened not his mouth. He was like a lamb being led to slaughter. When someone is attacking you, what do you do? You should be quiet. Wait for the truth to come out. It may be a short time or it may be a long time. But don't go down that road of self defense. If indeed you have done something wrong, make it right. If you are not sure, do what I do. Refer to the Scripture

Psalms 139:23,24

Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts;²⁴ And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.

Let the Holy Spirit reveal to you what may need to be corrected. None of us, including me, can say we have never made a mistake.

#2 Take a look at the motives for their attack

Philippians 1:17

¹⁷ the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment.

Paul says why they were doing this. They were doing it out of envy and a desire to stir up trouble for him while he was in chains. Why were they jealous? Remember these people were fellow Christians. Ever hear the term 'friendly fire'? It's when people who are in your own army fire upon you. In this case, it is deliberate. In most cases, however it is accidental. If you look carefully at what is spoken of by these detractors, they are very hypocritical in the fact that they are preaching Christ yet acting like the world. Maybe their envy was because Paul was successful or because they didn't have Paul's giftedness. It seems hard to believe that pastors could be jealous of each other but almost every time I get together with a group of pastors one of the first questions I am asked is "how big is your congregation". What they are really asking is "how successful are you?" When people within a local church attack each other, do what Paul does. Sit quietly and check out their motives. Check yourself out, maybe there is something you have done wrong. When we fail to understand their motives, we will be tempted to fight back. Take time to ponder the situation.

#3 Focus on those you can trust

Philippians 1:16

the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel;

In this case, the "latter" represents those whom Paul could trust. When someone says or does something against you, it feels like the whole world is coming down on you! We forget the people who are our detractors are just a small portion of those we know. Paul reminded himself of his friends and those were the people at the church at Philippi. He reminds himself of what his friends

knew. His friends knew he was in jail, because of the defense of the Gospel. What is Paul's reaction through all of this? Verse 18. He says this. But what does it matter? He's really saying, what the big deal anyway? Yes, it hurts, but let's make some sense of it. It's kind of like when someone says, when you are given lemons, make lemonade. Paul knew who he was. He was a man who wanted to glorify God and that was all that really mattered. Paul could overlook the failure of others because He knew he had failures of his own.

Romans 7:15-17 The Living Bible

¹⁵ I don't understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I can't. I do what I don't want to—what I hate. ¹⁶ I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong, and my bad conscience proves that I agree with these laws I am breaking.

¹⁷ But I can't help myself because I'm no longer doing it. It is sin inside me that is stronger than I am that makes me do these evil things.

Paul admits he had his own failures but in spite of that he wanted to overcome them and be used of God. Although our sin nature for our propensity to sin has been crucified with Christ, we still at times fall prey to the sin nature within us. It's almost as if it lies dormant at times but at intervals in our life we get triggers that come in the form of temptation and we fall victim to doing the things that we really don't want to do.

Conclusion

Philippians 1:18

¹⁸ What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice,

See how Paul ends this short paragraph. He says whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached, and because of this I rejoice, yes, I will continue to rejoice. Well, we see the model that the apostle Paul, a man of God, put forth and we can have joy regardless of persecution. Regardless of people who may cause us pain. We are all going to have the pain throwers in our life. We also see that Paul could have joy regardless of his personal failures. Sometimes we let detractors steal our joy and when we are in the midst of walking under that cloud we fail to take the necessary steps to maturity in Christ. We spend more time defending ourselves than representing the Lord Jesus.