

# Rejoice in All Circumstances

Philippians 1:12-21  
SS Lesson for 01/20/2019

**Devotional Scripture:** 1 Peter 4:12-19

## OUTLINE

### LESSON BACKGROUND AND KEY VERSE

*Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary*

*Key Verse: Philippians 1:12*

*Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary*

### MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

#### REJOICE OVER THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE GOSPEL (1:12-14)

*Rejoice over getting rid of hindrances (12)*

By removing everything that hinders (Heb 12:1-2)

By forgetting the sinful pass and being committed to the future (Phil 3:13-14)

By enduring hardships and serving God (2 Tim 2:3-4)

*Rejoice over understanding that all things are part of God's purposes (13)*

God's purposes will always prevail (Prov 19:21)

Know that we are called according to God's purposes (Rom 8:28)

We need to be transformed to learn and discern God's purposes (Rom 12:2)

Seek to always make the most of opportunities that are a part of God's purposes (Eph 5:15-17)

*Rejoice by praying for the bold preaching and teaching of God's Word (14)*

Pray for the discernment and clarity of God's Word (Eph 6:18-20)

Praying as a group or congregation has great power (Acts 4:31)

Pray for open doors for God's Word (Col 4:2-4)

#### REJOICE THAT CHRIST IS PREACHED (1:15-18)

*Know that some will use God for selfish ambitions (15, 17)*

Some will be greedy for money (1 Peter 5:2)

Some will have their minds on earthly things (Phil 3:18-19)

Some will be teachers of false doctrines as a means for financial gain (1 Tim 6:3-5)

*Know that others follow God out of love (15, 16)*

Love by voluntarily discharging the trust of God (1 Cor 9:16-17)

Love by being faithful (1 Cor 4:1-3)

Love by doing God's work free of charge (2 Cor 11:7)

*Know that all that matters is that Christ is preached (18)*

Christ preached has the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:22-25)

One can only truly preach if he is sent from God (Rom 10:15)

Jesus Christ should be preached both in season and out of season (2 Tim 4:2)

#### REJOICE OVER COMMITTED CHRISTIANS (1:19-21)

*Committed to pray for spiritual advancement (19)*

Pray for advancement through maturity (Heb 6:1)

Pray for advancement through the Church (Eph 4:11-13)

Pray for advancement through the power of the Holy Spirit in the inner being (Eph 3:16-19)

*Committed to bold support for spiritual advancement (20-21)*

Support through giving of oneself (2 Cor 8:1-5)

Support through godly caring for one another (Phil 2:19-21)

Support through financial giving (Phil 4:14-16)

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*Paul's Circumstances and His Prison Guards (1:13)*

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# Lesson Background and Key Verse

## Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Why do some people respond to hardship differently than others? That question drove Francis Collins, former head of the Human Genome Project and later director of the National Institutes of Health, to look for an answer. Collins was in his residency as a physician when he realized how differently his patients responded to devastating illnesses. Some seemed more resilient under the stress of pain and with the knowledge that their illnesses were terminal. In time, Collins realized that many of the resilient patients were Christians with deep personal faith. He began investigating Christianity and eventually came to faith himself. Our text is one of the great expressions of Christian faith that is resilient in the worst of conditions.

Paul's letter to the Philippians was written to Christians in Philippi, a city in Macedonia (northern Greece). Paul founded the church there during his second missionary journey (Acts 16:11–40). Philippi was a well-established, prosperous city on a major Roman road, the Via Egnatia, which connected the east and west coasts of the Grecian peninsula. Philippi had a rich history, of which its inhabitants were proud. In 42 BC, war between factions of the Roman ruling classes came to an end with a battle fought near Philippi. The victors rewarded their soldiers by granting them nearby lands, establishing Philippi as a Roman colony. Paul wrote this letter while a prisoner (Philippians 1:7, 12–14). Though some scholars have suggested other possible places and times in Paul's life, it remains most likely that Paul wrote Philippians while under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:16–31), awaiting trial before Nero. This was during Paul's first Roman imprisonment of AD 61–63, with another following in AD 67. For the Philippian Christians, those circumstances likely prompted a crisis of faith. Accustomed to taking pride in all things Roman and to looking up to Paul, God's apostle, they had to come to terms with their hero's imprisonment at the hands of Rome. But the church had problems in addition to this crisis. Conflict and rivalry had begun to threaten the church's unity. Paul mentions by name two who were in conflict (Philippians 4:2, 3). But the letter's contents suggest this was an example of a wider problem.

## Key Verse: Philippians 1:12

*But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel,*

## Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

The apostle faced opposition from those outside the church and misrepresentation from some within. But this did not dissuade or distract him from fulfilling God's call. Through it all, Christ was being preached, which brought him great delight. So his bonds, instead of hindering his outreach, resulted in a greater spreading of the gospel of Christ. Paul's friends back in Philippi were apparently quite concerned about him, thinking he was discouraged and that God's plan had gone awry. Not so, the apostle responded.

**1:12-14.** From his own experiences Paul wanted the believers at Philippi to learn an important truth: there are no accidents with God. Instead of Paul's ministry being curtailed because of his bondage, it was being advanced. The advance came partly because **the whole palace guard**, as well as others, were hearing about Christ (vv. 12-13). The "palace guard" (*praitōriō*) likely refers to the praetorian guard, made up of Roman soldiers. Though Paul resided in his own rented facility (Acts 28:30), he was guarded by these soldiers all the time. The custom was for a prisoner to be chained at the wrist to a soldier. All in Rome who came in contact with Paul heard about Christ. It was well known that he was not under guard for being a lawbreaker. Instead he was **in chains for Christ** (Phil. 1:13). In an effort to silence the truth, the authorities had incarcerated the one who spoke it, but their plan did not work. Paul's incarceration had another effect: it encouraged those who had been reluctant about speaking for Christ (v. 14). Large numbers of believers became bold for Christ when they saw how God was spreading the gospel through Paul. The positive response Paul received in the face of opposition caused others to speak **more courageously and fearlessly** for Christ. Paul's confinement was doing what his circumstances outside of prison could never do.

**1:15-18.** The people who were emboldened to speak God's Word were of two kinds. Some preached Christ **out of envy and rivalry**, but others preached Him **out of good will** (v. 15). Those who preached out of good will did so **in love** (v. 16), knowing that Paul was in chains because of his **defense of the gospel**. The word "defense" is the Greek *apologia*, also used in verse 7. The group that preached Christ out of envy and rivalry (v. 15) had **selfish ambition** (v. 17) as their motive. They purposely wanted to **stir up trouble** for Paul while he was in bondage. They were probably not Judaizers, as some suppose, because Paul said they

were preaching Christ, though insincerely. The Judaizers believed that keeping the Old Testament Law was a means of salvation. Paul had sternly rebuked them as preachers of “a different gospel” (Gal. 1:6). However, since he did not accuse these in Philippi of presenting “another gospel,” it seems that they were believers who for some unknown reason did not love the apostle or appreciate his work. Though they were doctrinally sound, they promoted themselves. What rejoiced Paul’s heart was that Christ was being preached, even though it was from wrong motives by some (Phil. 1:18). Since the content of the preaching was the same for both groups, the apostle could rejoice. He did not **rejoice** because there was a faction among members of Christ’s body, for this brought him grief. Instead, it was the preaching of Christ that brought him joy.

**1:19.** As a man of convictions, Paul shared his assurance that his fetters would eventually result in his **deliverance**. The Greek word translated “deliverance” here was used in different ways in the New Testament. It often meant spiritual deliverance—salvation, being born again. Here (v. 19) Paul used the word to refer to either the final stage of his salvation (cf. Rom. 5:9) or future vindication in a Roman court. It seems unlikely that he had his release in mind since in the next two sentences he wrote of the real possibility of his near death. The bases on which the apostle’s assurance rested were the **prayers** of the saints and the **help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ** (Phil. 1:19). He knew he could count on the Philippians’ prayers, and also on the Holy Spirit’s ministry (cf. Rom. 8:26-27). “Help” (*epichorēgias*) carries the meaning of “support,” much as a ligament provides support in a physical body. (This Gr. word is used in the NT only here and in Eph. 4:16.)

**1:20.** Paul was not sure whether he would experience release or martyrdom for his faith. He was certain of one thing though, that he wanted Christ to be **exalted** in his **body** either way (cf. “in the body,” vv. 22, 24). This was Paul’s expectation and hope. The apostle also knew full well that it would take courage to face death with the proper attitude. **Eagerly expect** is the translation of a unique word. It describes straining one’s neck to catch a glimpse of something that is ahead. (*Apokaradokia*, a noun, is used only here and in Rom. 8:19.) Paul’s concern was not what would happen to him but what testimony would be left for his Lord. Release would allow him to continue preaching Christ. But martyrdom would also advance the cause of Christ.

**1:21.** Paul’s main purpose in living was to glorify Christ. Christ was the essence of his life. Yet Paul knew that if he were martyred, Christ would be glorified through the promotion of the gospel which would result from his testimony in death. And Paul himself would benefit, for death would result in his being with Christ (v. 23). The words **to die** suggest the act of dying, not the state of death.

**1:22-24.** The apostle’s seeming frustration of mind is apparent in these verses. He knew if he could **go on living** there would certainly be fruit from his labor (v. 22). God would bless his work and continue to use him as He had in the past. Yet if Paul had a choice between going on living or dying for Christ, he was at a loss as to how to decide. He simply did not know which to choose. Of course the choice was really not up to him anyway. Paul was distressed. He was hard-pressed to know which would bring the most glory to God and therefore be to everyone’s advantage in the long run. His personal desire was **to depart and be with Christ** (v. 23). This he knew would be **better by far** for him since it would mean his release from the persecutions and other hardships that he suffered. But he also knew that the Philippians needed him. For them it was **more necessary** that he **remain in the body**, or stay alive (v. 24). Paul’s selfless attitude is revealed here by his placing his friends’ needs above his own desires.

**1:25-26.** New confidence of his release appears to have come to Paul. (The word **convinced** is the same word rendered “being confident” in v. 6.) By his release and return to them they would **progress... in the faith** and would experience great **joy** (v. 25). The rejoicing of the Philippians would **overflow** (v. 26; the same word is rendered “abound” in v. 9), and that exulting would be **in Christ Jesus**, the source of true joy for all believers. (“Joy” in v. 26 is the word “exulting” [*kauchēma*] which differs from the more common word for “joy” used more often in Phil., including v. 25.) They would exult because the one who had taught them about Christ would be with them again.

## Major Theme Analysis

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

### **Rejoice Over the Advancement of the Gospel (1:12-14)**

12 Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really 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 Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

### **Rejoice over getting rid of hindrances (12)**

*By removing everything that hinders (Heb 12:1-2)*

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. 2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

*By forgetting the sinful pass and being committed to the future (Phil 3:13-14)*

13 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

*By enduring hardships and serving God (2 Tim 2:3-4)*

3 Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs — he wants to please his commanding officer.

### **Rejoice over understanding that all things are part of God's purposes (13)**

*God's purposes will always prevail (Prov 19:21)*

21 Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.

*Know that we are called according to God's purposes (Rom 8:28)*

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

*We need to be transformed to learn and discern God's purposes (Rom 12:2)*

2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.

*Seek to always make the most of opportunities that are a part of God's purposes (Eph 5:15-17)*

15 Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is

### **Rejoice by praying for the bold preaching and teaching of God's Word (14)**

*Pray for the discernment and clarity of God's Word (Eph 6:18-20)*

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. 19 Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

*Praying as a group or congregation has great power (Acts 4:31)*

31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

*Pray for open doors for God's Word (Col 4:2-4)*

2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. 3 And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. 4 Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

### **Rejoice that Christ is Preached (1:15-18)**

15 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill.

16 The latter do so in 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. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice,

### **Know that some will use God for selfish ambitions (15, 17)**

*Some will be greedy for money (1 Peter 5:2)*

2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve;

*Some will have their minds on earthly things (Phil 3:18-19)*

18 For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things

*Some will be teachers of false doctrines as a means for financial gain (1 Tim 6:3-5)*

3 If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, 4 he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions 5 and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

### **Know that others follow God out of love (15, 16)**

*Love by voluntarily discharging the trust of God (1 Cor 9:16-17)*

6 Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! 17 If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me.

*Love by being faithful (1 Cor 4:1-3)*

So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. 2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

*Love by doing God's work free of charge (2 Cor 11:7)*

7 Was it a sin for me to lower myself in order to elevate you by preaching the gospel of God to you free of charge?

## **Know that all that matters is that Christ is preached (18)**

*Christ preached has the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:22-25)*

Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

*One can only truly preach if he is sent from God (Rom 10:15)*

15 And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

*Jesus Christ should be preached both in season and out of season (2 Tim 4:2)*

2 Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction.

## **Rejoice Over Committed Christians (1:19-21)**

19 for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.

20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

## **Committed to pray for spiritual advancement (19)**

*Pray for advancement through maturity (Heb 6:1)*

6 Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God,

*Pray for advancement through the Church (Eph 4:11-13)*

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

*Pray for advancement through the power of the Holy Spirit in the inner being (Eph 3:16-19)*

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

## **Committed to bold support for spiritual advancement (20-21)**

*Support through giving of oneself (2 Cor 8:1-5)*

And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. 2 Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. 5 And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will

*Support through godly caring for one another (Phil 2:19-21)*

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. 20 I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. 21 For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ

*Support through financial giving (Phil 4:14-16)*

Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. 15 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need.

## **Conclusion and Other Thoughts**

### **Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh**

#### **Paul's Joy at the Advance of the Gospel (1:12)**

I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that my situation has actually turned out to advance the gospel.

We must admit that being arrested does not usually enhance the status of a person, and particularly a preacher. His situation in Rome might have shaken the faith of some who had become believers in Christ through Paul's preaching, or who had been taught by the apostle. His enemies and the enemies of the gospel would surely use this to oppose Paul and the gospel he declared and defended. Even some who were jealous of Paul might have used his incarceration to discredit him and to enhance their own status. Verses 12-18 set the record straight. They inform us how Paul's situation actually enhanced the cause of the gospel. They also inform us of Paul's response to adversity and abuse, even when it came from fellow believers.

#### **Paul's Circumstances and His Prison Guards (1:13)**

The results of this are that the whole imperial guard and everyone else knows that I am in prison for the sake of Christ.

I can tell you from a number of years of experience in prison ministry that there is no one more cynical about a prisoner's innocence than a prison guard. In their experience, almost no one on the inside thinks they deserve to be there. They also watch inmates "using" religion for self-serving reasons. They "meet Jesus at the gate," and they leave Him there "at the gate" when they leave. And even during their time in prison, many "talk the talk" in chapel, and fail to "walk the walk" in their cell. I've watched a prison guard explode, shaking his finger in an inmate's face, telling him what a hypocrite he is.

Paul tells the Philippians that even the most cynical and hardened group—the imperial guard and many others—has come to realize that Paul is no "hardened criminal" or "revolutionary," as he was charged by the Jewish religious leaders. Surely word of Paul's conduct—in Jerusalem, in Caesarea, and on board the ill-fated ship—had circulated widely among the imperial guard. They must have taken note of Paul's prayer life in prison and of those who came to visit him. If his confinement was anything like prison life today, all of his correspondence would have been read. From Paul's words here, we know that most of the guards realized the charges against him were trumped up and that the issue was really a religious one. From Paul's later words, we also know that some of those who had contact with Paul in prison came to faith in Christ: "Give greetings to all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers with me here send greetings. 22 All the saints greet you, especially those from the emperor's household" (Philippians 4:21-22).

Certainly Paul's "good reputation" among the imperial guard and by those who dealt with him enhanced his stature, and thus enhanced the gospel that he proclaimed. Paul's imprisonment had not damaged his testimony among those who did not believe in Christ; Paul's imprisonment enhanced his standing in the eyes of unbelievers, and paved the way for the proclamation of the gospel to them.

#### **Paul's Circumstances Encouraged Christians to Evangelize (1:14)**

And that most of the brothers, having confidence in the Lord because of my imprisonment, now more than ever dare to speak the word without fear.

After I graduated from college, I was a schoolteacher. The way I responded to one student had a great impact on the rest. If a student failed to give a good answer to a question, I could have responded with some very critical and harsh words of rebuke. But if I did, I can tell you that very few hands would have been raised when I asked additional questions. On the other hand, if I responded to a student's remarks in a very encouraging manner, the other members of the class would be encouraged to attempt to answer my next question.

It is very easy to see how Paul's incarceration could have silenced some saints. And even those who persisted in speaking openly of their faith might have been tempted to choose their words more carefully, so as not to be as direct in their declaration of the gospel. Paul's courage in the midst of his suffering for Christ and the gospel encouraged other saints to be bold in their faith as well.

### **Paul's Attitude Toward Self-Serving Saints (1:15-18)**

15 Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. 16 The latter do so from love because they know that I am placed here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former proclaim Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, because they think they can cause trouble for me in my imprisonment. 18 What is the result? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is being proclaimed, and in this I rejoice.

Paul has given us a very general picture of the outcome of his incarceration: (1) the unbelievers with whom he has come in contact have discerned that Paul is not a criminal, and that the issues are religious, not legal; and, (2) that by and large the believers who have been affected by his incarceration have been encouraged to proclaim the gospel more boldly. When one gets into the details of this second outcome, the picture is not quite as pretty as we might wish. Paul divides the second category of true believers into two further categories: (a) those who preach Christ out of love and goodwill toward Paul; and, (b) those who preach the gospel but are motivated by envy and rivalry toward Paul.

Those in the first group genuinely love and appreciate Paul. A number of them may have come to faith in Christ through Paul's ministry to them. If this were so, they, like many of those at Philippi, would proudly embrace and endorse Paul, not "in spite of his status" but because he was a "prisoner for Christ." They understood that the charges against Paul came from unbelieving Jews who hated the gospel and Paul, and that the real issue here was Paul's freedom as a Roman citizen to proclaim the gospel.

Paul's actions in his day would be something like appealing his case to the Supreme Court in our own times. Suppose, for example, that enemies of the gospel were able to pass a law that forbade preaching the gospel in any public meeting (this would include preaching the gospel in church on a Sunday morning). Paul would undoubtedly have preached the gospel in a very public way, and then would have been arrested for breaking this law. Paul would have appealed his case all the way to the Supreme Court, not just for his own sake, but for the sake of the gospel. In this way, the law forbidding the preaching of the gospel would be tested by the high court, and hopefully it would be declared unconstitutional.

We should remember that when Paul was illegally beaten and thrown into prison in Philippi, the Philippian jailor and his family came to faith, perhaps along with others. But when the authorities sent word the next morning that Paul and Silas were to be released, Paul refused to leave prison without the authorities coming to the prison in person, acknowledging that they had broken the law by the way they had dealt with Paul and Silas. This was not a petty matter of pride on Paul's part; it was his way of protecting the freedom of others to preach the gospel in Philippi.

Paul's appeal to Caesar was rightly understood by many of the saints as Paul's way of defending the gospel. In my opinion, he was not defending the purity of the gospel (as he was in his Epistle to the Galatians, for example), but rather he was defending the freedom to proclaim the gospel. Those who loved Paul were encouraged by his boldness and courage, and prompted to proclaim Christ with greater boldness.

There were others, however, who were not so noble minded. It is primarily these folks whom Paul has in mind in verses 15-18. I believe it is this group of folks who are most misunderstood by Christians today. We need to carefully define this group and to distinguish them from others, with whom they might be confused. Let me begin by pointing out what these folks are not: (a) They are not unbelievers. Unbelievers were dealt with in verse 13. These are "brothers" (verse 14). (b) They are not those who are accused of twisting or perverting the gospel. These are not said to be Judaisers or those who are diluting the gospel. They are said to "**proclaim Christ**" (verse 17).

These are folks who "preach Christ," but from impure motivation. They are hostile toward Paul, and they seek to add to his grief while in prison. They hope to gain at his expense, by accusing him of wrongdoing, adding to

the number of those who follow them. I fear that they are seeking to regain some of their authority and prominence at Paul's expense.

I think I have misunderstood this text for a long time, and I'm just now beginning to understand why. Let me suggest two ways that the meaning of this text can be missed.

*First, we will err if we assume that the **only** motivation of these “preachers” is their “envy and rivalry” toward Paul.* It has taken me a good while to see this, but I'm convinced that although Paul chooses to focus only on the sinful attitudes of these folks, they have other motivations that are much more noble. It may be easier to make this point by calling your attention first to those who preach Christ from a pure motivation. These folks, Paul has written, preach “**from goodwill**” (verse 15), “**because they know that I am placed here for the defense of the gospel**” (verse 16). Paul speaks only of the attitudes of these “godly preachers” toward Paul. Surely we would agree that in addition to their goodwill toward Paul, these folks preached Christ because of their love for Christ, and their love for the lost.

I am trying to say that very few of us act on the basis of a single motive. When we do most anything, we do it for a mixture of motives. For example, I am inclined to believe that Ananias and Sapphira were believers, and that they wanted to obey Christ by giving to the poor. They just did not want to give all of the proceeds of the sale of their land to the Lord. Thus, they were motivated, perhaps, by love for God and for man, but also by greed. Elsewhere Paul writes that the one who gives must do so “**with sincerity**” (Romans 12:8). The KJV renders these words, “**with simplicity.**” A number of the translations emphasize generosity, and I think that is part of what Paul is saying. But I also think that the apostle is encouraging saints to act with a simplicity of motivation and not to act with mixed motives. How easy it is to give out of a genuine concern for the poor and a love for God, *and* the desire to be seen and recognized by others as generous.

My point in all this is that I believe those who are preaching Christ from envy and rivalry are also preaching Christ because they love God and desire to see the lost saved. I am willing to believe that they wanted to be obedient to the Great Commission. In other words, their “**envy and rivalry**” was definitely a part of their motivation—the bad part!—but it was not their only motivation. It would be very difficult for me to think of anything I have ever done that was “purely” out of love for Christ, or out of a desire to obey His Word. Acting, no doubt, with a certain measure of godly motivation, these “preachers” have also acted out of ungodly motives. We might say that they have preached Christ “**in the flesh.**”

*Second, many Christians err in assuming that those who are in “full-time Christian ministry” cease to have fleshly desires and motivations.* I believe that those to whom Paul referred were Christian leaders who were once threatened by Paul's popularity and influence from a distance, but who are now intimidated by his presence. Many Christians seem to think that this is not possible. As one who has been involved in full-time Christian ministry for a number of years, I am here to tell you that Christians who are “in the ministry” are just as selfish, just as jealous, and just as manipulative as Christians who are not paid for their ministry. Indeed, some Christians in the ministry are more jealous and power hungry than some unbelievers I know.

Over the years, I have watched young people in search of a “significant ministry.” Very often these folks look for employment in churches, in Christian educational institutions, and in parachurch ministries. And more often than I would wish to admit, these folks are badly disillusioned by their experience with such ministries. Until they saw it with their own eyes, they would never have believed that Christian leaders could be so jealous of others in ministry, so threatened by the success of others, and so manipulative and vindictive. Two nationally known speakers at a Bible conference may find it almost impossible to get along with each other, because of rivalry and competition. One speaker may lose his credibility, not because of his speaking, but because he can't lose on the tennis courts or the golf course. Those of you who are in Christian ministry know that I am not exaggerating, and that what I am saying is true. Some of the most disillusioned people I know are those who were badly “burned” by Christian ministry, or by those in Christian ministry.

Let me be painfully blunt by using a very specific illustration. In the recent past, it became known that Chuck Swindoll had consented to serve as the next president of Dallas Theological Seminary. It was obvious that in order to maintain his excellent radio ministry he would have to continue preaching on a regular basis. Finally, it was announced that Chuck Swindoll would plant a church in the Dallas area. (To his credit, I believe that he did everything possible to avoid sheep-stealing and doing damage to existing churches and their ministries. He chose to start a church as far removed as possible from existing Bible churches, and in a rapidly growing suburb as far to the north of Dallas as possible.) We would be naive to think that every pastor in the Dallas area responded like this:

“Praise God! A wonderfully gifted preacher is coming to Dallas. What a blessing it will be to our city. How grateful to God I am that he is coming! I’m going to pray for Chuck, for his health, for physical strength, and for many new converts through his ministry.”

I am sure that there are many noble-minded pastors in Dallas who responded this way, but I am just as convinced that a disturbing number did not. If one is jealous of or threatened by Chuck Swindoll’s success, it will almost never be couched in honest terms like this: “I’m jealous of Chuck Swindoll and his success, and I regret his decision to come to Dallas. Indeed, I’m going to do all I can to discredit him and his ministry.” Instead, it will be “pietized,” so that our jealous criticism is camouflaged as “concern for pure doctrine,” or “contending for the faith.” We will look for failures in his personal life, in his ministry, or in his methods. We will listen for rumors, and accept them as true. And when we hear of anything negative, we will be sure to let others know, “for their edification,” or as “a matter for prayer,” of course.

I have to say that as I look back over my own ministry, I wonder how much of my criticism of other men and of other ministries was motivated (at least in part) by my own jealousy and ambition. I wonder how many church splits and how many doctrinal battles were really a matter of men’s egos, rather than of a love for the truth. It’s a sobering thought, but if we believe that the heart of man **“is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked”** (Jeremiah 17:9), it should not surprise us.

What I have said above paves the way for my understanding of Paul’s words in our text and of the circumstances he is describing. The church at Rome had been established through the preaching of men other than Paul, men who are not even named in the New Testament. From many miles away, Paul wrote his Epistle to the Romans, the definitive and authoritative declaration of the gospel, with special emphasis on the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in the gospel. Paul mentions his desire to come to Rome and to have a successful ministry there.

Surely some of those who had established themselves as leaders in the church at Rome were threatened by Paul’s announcement that he was planning on coming to Rome. If these men were those who first preached the gospel in Rome, and also the ones who founded the church in Rome, then they would have been tempted to feel that they “owned” this church. They would have been tempted to look on Paul as an intruder. They knew that when he came, many of the Roman saints would seek his counsel and would ask his opinion on matters of importance. These were some of the very ones who used to rely heavily on the advice and counsel of the church’s founding fathers. It would take great humility for them to welcome Paul and to be willing to step aside from their dominant role, at least for the time that Paul was in Rome. And now, to add insult to injury, Paul was a “jail bird.” The one to whom many would turn for leadership was actually awaiting trial, in a Roman prison (or at least in the custody of Rome).

How opportune it was for such folks that Paul’s arrival came about in a very different way. He did not arrive after a very effective ministry in Jerusalem. He did not come to Rome with an impressive entourage, received by Roman officials as an honored guest. He came as a prisoner to Rome, where he lived under house arrest for two years (Acts 28:16, 30-31). He could not attend their church services nor fellowship with them in their homes. Can’t you see how those who were jealous of Paul and threatened by him could put a “spin” on Paul’s circumstances to make Paul look bad and to make themselves look good? “Well,” they might say with a pained expression, “I wanted to believe the best about Paul, but now that it has come out that he is a trouble-maker, I think it is probably best for the church here to keep its distance from him. We don’t want our testimony to be tainted by such a fellow.”

I would not be surprised at all if some of those who turned against Paul in this way were men to whom Paul had entrusted himself and had invested in them by disciplining them. I wonder if any of these folks had actually come to faith through Paul’s ministry? Those who have invested deeply in the lives of Christians who later turn against them can identify with the pain Paul must have suffered from such folks.

How does Paul respond to this underhanded attack from those who know Christ, and who successfully preach Christ? Most of us would be greatly distressed, and perhaps even depressed by this kind of betrayal and opposition. We would probably spend a great deal of time and effort defending ourselves and exposing our opponents. Paul is not disposed to do this. He rejoices. He knows that God is in control. He knows that God will not allow the gospel to be defeated, whether that be by unbelievers who oppose it (for example, the unbelieving Jews who charged Paul with treason against Rome) or by those who profess and proclaim it (such as those who preached Christ with impure motives). He knew that while these folks **“meant it for evil,”** God **“meant it for good”** (see Genesis 50:20). Unbelievers were not deceived; they knew that the issue behind Paul’s imprisonment was really the gospel. And regardless of their motivation, the gospel of Jesus Christ was being vigorously proclaimed. Paul was resolved to rejoice in the success of the gospel, even if it was at his expense.

### **Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

Why are some people able to express joy in every circumstance, even the painful ones? It has to do with how God made us and with how, in Christ, he has remade us. We were made not to hold on to our lives but to give them away. When we try to hold on, we run away from our divinely created purpose. We mar our divine image. We destroy our joy. When we learn to let go, we discover again the reason we exist. We find our true selves. We reflect our true king. We find true joy. Paul found a way to serve others even as a prisoner. He knew that even in the bleakest circumstance, God provided a means for him to glorify Christ in self-giving. How do your circumstances present opportunities for you to serve selflessly? How has the faithful God delivered that joy to you before? Are you ready to discover how he will do so again?

### **Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary**

Joy in Suffering - Paul took advantage of his imprisonment to spread the Gospel, and he exhorted the Philippian believers to rejoice in the midst of life's troubles. Paul understood he was suffering for Christ's sake and to further His message. God can use any platform to lift up His Son. Paul encouraged the believers to endure their serious challenges with patience and joy, citing himself as an example of how to do that.

Demonstrate God's Power - Paul continued to claim that the Lord was blessing him in every way. In fact, during his prison time Paul wrote three other powerful letters now in our Bible: Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon. Also, as a result of Paul's imprisonment, his guards and those in Caesar's household heard the message. The apostle's positive response to his awful situation convinced unbelievers that his message about Christ must be authentic, *Sharing Christ for the Right and Wrong Reasons*—People may preach Christ for less-than-godly reasons. Some of those Paul knew wanted to prove themselves better than him, attempting to promote their own name. This group delighted in Paul's confinement. On the other hand, Paul knew others promoted Christ with a genuine heart. Paul resolved that either way, the Gospel was being preached and he rejoiced.

God's Will and Glory - We would do well to still follow Paul's example. He depended on the Lord's sovereignty in all areas of his life. His imprisonment, an impending trial, and possible martyrdom—all this could have brought about anger with God, depression, and despair. Instead, Paul remained confident in the prayers of the saints. He allowed the Holy Spirit to minister to Him, believing God is always present, and trusted Him completely. He rested in the assurance he was in the center of God's will. Paul realized his death might be imminent, but that did not matter to him. In life or death, he made it his goal to glorify God. Paul wanted the Philippian church to be clear, never associate God's goodness only when things are going well. God knows what will bring Him the most glory and deliver His message to the most people.