

The Philippians were concerned about Paul's arrest and imprisonment, that he might not be well (1:30) and that the ministry might be limited. But though his circumstances might appear to be bad, Paul assures them that the gospel had spread despite these circumstances. And he himself was rejoicing at what God was doing. Paul's "bad" circumstances actually are used by God for the good.

**I. The first "bad" circumstance: Paul's imprisonment**

1. *Paul's imprisonment was not a "bad" circumstance but surprisingly good.*

It actually helped the spread of the gospel. This came as a surprise as the little word "really" (v. 12) indicates. Humanly it looked bad, but God works all things for the good of those who love Him.

2. *Paul's imprisonment resulted directly in the advance of the gospel throughout the whole palace guard.*

- a. Acts 28 reports the beginning of Paul's imprisonment, although he had already been a prisoner for two years in Caesarea. He had fairly free access to people, but would have been chained to two guards, apparently from the elite Praetorian guard (v. 13).
- b. Though Paul was captive, the soldiers were also a captive audience to all that Paul taught and shared which frequently included the gospel.
- c. Eventually from Paul or from one another the entire Praetorian guard heard that Paul was in chains for Christ.
- d. Some soldiers apparently became believers and they talked with others of Caesar's household (v.13; cf. 4:22).
- e. The Praetorian troops would be sent elsewhere in the empire and those who became believers took the gospel with them. Without having to leave his house in Rome, Paul's imprisonment resulted directly in the spread of the gospel in Rome and throughout the empire!

3. *Paul's imprisonment resulted indirectly in the advance of the gospel by encouraging most other brothers to preach.*

- a. Most of the brothers had become more confident in the Lord by Paul's imprisonment (v. 14). Perhaps they saw the value placed on the gospel, or the grace given to Paul and its sufficiency, or the need now for others to evangelize. Some might just have been stirred to resist the opposition.
- b. These brothers had much courage because they were trusting the Lord. Boldness is from the Lord and is even a prayer request of Paul for himself (Ephesians 6:19).
- c. But not everyone was so bold to share the gospel fearlessly. Perhaps they had fear or were indifferent. Some may have opposed Paul.

Circumstances and people often disappoint us, but both are in the hands of God to accomplish His purposes.

**II. The second "bad" circumstance: Preachers with wrong motives**

1. *Paul acknowledges and reveals the mixed motives.*

- a. There was some among the brothers who were preaching with the wrong motives (vv. 15, 17): envy, rivalry, and selfish ambition. But there is no indication that there was doctrinal error. Paul clearly spoke out against any deviation from the gospel, as he does in Galatians. These brothers in Rome simply had bad motives.
- b. But another group was preaching Christ with good motives, and that encouraged Paul.

2. *Paul evaluates the preaching of Christ, despite the motives, as something good (1:18a).*

- a. Whatever the motives, good or bad, Paul understood the true preaching of Christ as good (v. 18). The message was accurate although it did not excuse the wrong motives. He subtly rebukes those motives by calling them "false." (His purpose in the letter is to encourage the Philippians not approve or disapprove of the motives of others.)
- b. Because Christ was preached, Paul rejoiced. He was more concerned about Christ being proclaimed than what people thought of him. However, this does not mean he approved of wrong motives or that he enjoyed being in prison. He just did not let his circumstances dampen his joy that Christ was preached.

The Philippians were rightly concerned for Paul. But Paul assured them, that even his "bad" circumstances had furthered the gospel.

How should we respond to persecuted believers and the multitude of those claiming to preach the gospel?

Evaluate preachers first of all on the basis of the content of their preaching: are they preaching Christ crucified? If they are preaching any other message as good news, Paul would condemn them. But we can rejoice if salvation is preached in Christ alone by faith alone through grace alone.

Pray for those who are persecuted: their safety, their well-being, their boldness and opportunity to share Christ. Pray that they can sense the pleasure of Christ when they stand firm. And pray for ourselves that their stand would make us bolder to proclaim Christ as well. In this way we stand together, in Christ for Christ.