

## Week 2: Gospel Advance

### Chapter 1:12-18

#### So far...

We've seen Paul begin his letter by stating his affection for the Philippian church and his gratitude to God that they are already a Gospel-centred church who have stood side-by-side with him up to this point. He prays that this love that is already present would continue to grow and abound as they continue to serve God in the cause of the Gospel.

#### The Sovereign God of the Gospel

*"I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel" (1:12)*

As Paul begins the main content of his letter he refers straightaway to his own circumstances, and immediately draws us to the beautiful truth of God's sovereign control over all that goes on in our lives. It's likely the Philippian church had heard that Paul was in prison and so were probably concerned for him, but Paul quickly sets their mind at rest. I'm sure it wasn't easy for him to be held under guard and to have his freedom taken away from him, but Paul recognises that behind his difficulties is a God who can use absolutely anything to further His purposes.

We can only speculate at exactly what was behind Paul's imprisonment, but it wouldn't be far fetched at all to say that the enemy is doing his utmost to thwart the progress of the Gospel. With Paul as one of the major players in seeing the Good News spread across the world, surely locking him up would be a great victory for the kingdom of darkness, and a huge spanner in the works for the plans and purposes of God. Not so for Paul's God, and for ours too. Not only has locking Paul away not stopped the spread of the Gospel, Paul says it's even served to

increase its spread as Paul continues to witness to his captors, and the rest of the church is emboldened to continue preaching the Gospel to anyone who will listen.

This kind of response isn't a natural one - the world around us is running from pain and difficulty for the most part, yet this truth calls us to embrace them as part of the great plan of God that He is weaving throughout history. It requires a God-centred viewpoint not a self-centred one, but we should take great heart that the character of our God demands of Him to do for His children that which is best. He isn't out to use us as a harsh dictator might use his troops - rather He is a loving Father who even in our difficulties is giving His children the privilege of being involved in His great plan of salvation.

#### For Discussion:

What circumstances in our lives might tempt us to be bitter against God rather than trusting Him and embracing the purpose He has within them?

#### Other Verses for study:

- Acts 4:23-31
- Genesis 45:4-8, 50:15-21
- Romans 8:18-30

## Leaving Judgment to God

*“Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love... the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.” (1:15-17)*

Paul has explained to us that through his imprisonment, though it would seem to be a bad thing, it has actually served to propel the cause of the Gospel forwards by emboldening the people of God to speak more rather than cower away in fear. This in itself is remarkable, but Paul then goes on to explain that not all of those who are speaking boldly are actually doing it for the right reasons - some of them are doing it to hurt Paul, and to make his situation worse.

What's amazing about these verses is that Paul doesn't speak negatively about these people, condemning them for what they are doing - rather he rejoices that the Gospel is being preached. That can't have been an easy thing to do when our instinctive reaction to others seeking our hurt is to retaliate and seek vengeance. Paul is quite happy to let these people get on with what they are doing, and even look to the positives from their actions. This must surely come from a certain knowledge

## A Gospel-centred Attitude

*“What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.” (1:18)*

As well as Paul's clear lack of desire for revenge, we can also see clearly what is at the forefront of his mind as he views this situation. He's not being consumed with bitterness over the actions of these people, rather he's looking to a greater purpose and seeing that, even with some wonky motives, the end result is exactly what Paul's whole life is geared towards.

Paul's life is clearly not self-centred, or he'd be complaining about being in prison and would be focussed on what can be done to alleviate his suffering. His life is centred around something greater than himself, and that something is the Gospel. He's already commended the Philippian church for their partnership with him in the gospel, and he now demonstrates in very real terms that this is what matters to him in life - if the Gospel is preached even in less than perfect circumstances then that is a source of joy for the Apostle Paul.

Why is the Gospel precious and important to Paul? It can't be just because a certain set of teachings really gets Paul excited - it's surely because of who's

that it is God who will judge the thoughts and the intents of their hearts. Though Paul seems to be pretty clear on the reasons behind the actions of these people, he doesn't rush towards retribution or try to stop them in what they're doing. He is willing to let God deal with them and not take matters into his own hands.

Of course there are times when we see sin in a brother or sister's life and we must step in out of love for them, but a proper view of who's job it is to judge will stop us trying to do God's job, and possibly even get in the way of His perfect plan being worked out. Who's to say there won't be people in heaven because of this Gospel preaching with slightly dubious motives - all because Paul was willing to let it go and let God have His way.

### For Discussion:

Where does our desire for vengeance come from and how can we avoid its pitfalls in our lives?

### Other Verses for study:

- Matthew 7:1-5
- Romans 14:1-12
- James 4:11-12
- 1 Peter 2:21-25

behind the Gospel. Jesus is the centre of the Gospel, and therefore a Gospel-centred life is a Christ-centred life, longing for Him to be glorified.

What greater desire could we have then that our lives too are Gospel-centred lives - that the spread of the Gospel is of primary importance to us, before worldly gain, before temporary comfort and greater than any achievement this life offers. We have to be careful with this because it's highly likely that our Gospel-centred won't look exactly like it did for the Apostle Paul - most of us won't preach in the marketplace or synagogue everyday - but we too should teach ourselves that every day is an opportunity to show or tell the Gospel to those around us. Every interaction in life could be the one that brings another person face-to-face with the claims of Christ, and we should be constantly ready for exactly that.

### For Discussion:

What practical things can we do to make sure our lives are not self-centred but Gospel-centred?

### Other Verses for study:

- Romans 1:8-17
- 1 Peter 3:14-16
- 2 Corinthians 4:1-6, 13-15, 5:11-21