

Facing Times Of Stress: Persecution

Pilippians 1:12-20

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Persecution falls upon God's people by virtue of our relationship with Jesus Christ. This sense of unity with Christ and His people is movingly described in Acts 9, where the risen Christ asks Saul, persecutor of followers of the Way, "Why do you persecute Me?"

In fact, persecution serves as a sign of the authenticity of our relationship to Christ and our response as a true litmus test to determine that authenticity. Christ's disciples should expect persecution. It will happen. Those who respond in faith will be counted as righteous. However, as it says, "many will turn away from the faith."

The God-given challenge to live His way of life, which is placed before us when we are called by the Father, initially seems overwhelming but we are advised to look to Christ in faith and to consider what the saints have already patiently endured.

Biblically, in a spiritual context, persecution assumes a number of different forms: physical, such as beatings and stonings; verbal, such as mocking, insults, and slander; social, such as excommunication or ostracism; or mental, such as intimidation and threats.

Speaking of the troubles of the faithful who have resisted this world, we will read Hebrews 11.

Hebrews 11:36-40 Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

Now dropping down a couple of verses.

Hebrews 12:3-4 For consider Him [Christ] who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.

So as mentioned here, persecution also involves, or can lead to, imprisonment, banishment, and even death. Imprisonment is the condition in which we find the apostle Paul while writing to the church at Philippi.

Paul encouraged the brethren to speak the Word of God more courageously and fearlessly because of his chains of imprisonment, suffering, and persecution. Why was this?

Some passages of the Bible have to be understood by the emotions as well as by the mind. To be able to understand how they handled times of stress we must put ourselves into the shoes of the biblical characters and try to feel as they felt.

Can we really understand the chapter in Genesis, where God asked Abraham to offer his son as a sacrifice? Unless we identify with Abraham in his struggles and understand something of what it means to lose a son, it is impossible to understand without feeling. Also, it is only on that basis that we can go on to understand the story as a revelation of what it meant to God to sacrifice His own Son.

It requires similar sympathy with the apostle Paul to understand Philippians 1:12-14. Put yourself in the shoes of the Philippian Christians for a few minutes. It had been at least four years since they had seen Paul. They had heard rumors of the things that had happened to him and they were worried.

News had reached Philippi from Rome regarding their fellow church member, Epaphroditus, who had been sick. Those who bore the news certainly told all they knew of Paul's condition. But now some time had elapsed, and the Christians would be asking serious questions such as, "Was Paul still in chains? Perhaps he was sick? Had he already come to trial? Perhaps he had already been martyred for his faith in Jesus Christ?" The Philippians had no way of knowing the answer to these speculations.

At last news arrived from Rome and with that news, a letter written by Paul. At least he was alive. No doubt they were eager to read it. You can imagine them reading through the first eleven verses of the letter where the references are only to themselves. Perhaps they read these rather quickly the first time, hurrying on in the letter until they received news about Paul himself. Then, they were to get some news. Picking up the story here in Philippians 1.

Philippians 1:12-14 But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

So here is some news from Paul. Many of the rumors they had heard were true after all and many terrible things had actually happened to Paul. He was still in chains and the future was still uncertain, yet something else is true also.

These things have really served to advance God's truth, and for that Paul rejoices. In one insightful sentence Paul shifts the legitimate interest of the Philippians from himself to the great, undeterred purposes of God in preaching the gospel to the world and in setting the right example as a witness of God's way of life.

Paul has written that the things that happened to him have actually furthered God's truth. What are those things and how did they further the truth? We must remember, first, that the things that had happened to Paul were quite different from the things he had planned for himself.

Paul was the great apostle to the Gentiles, and for years he had carried the gospel to various parts of the world. Roughly ten years before that he had gone to the Corinthians. He had traveled through Syria and Crete, through most of what is now Turkey, and through Greece. Somewhere along the way he conceived the plan of taking the gospel to the far west, to Spain, after returning once more to Jerusalem and stopping for a visit in Rome. These plans were not fulfilled.

Instead of this, he found himself a prisoner on trial for his life. And at the time of writing Philippians he could have no real confidence he would ever be free again. What actually happened? Notice what led up to this.

What actually happened began in Acts 21:17 when the apostle Paul set foot in Jerusalem, being forewarned through the Holy Spirit that bonds and imprisonment await him. An entirely false accusation was leveled at him by his own people; he was nearly lynched by a religious mob; and ended up in the Roman prison, having escaped a flogging only by pleading citizenship.

His whole case was plagued by a mockery of justice, because, though he was guiltless, he could not secure a hearing. He was made the subject of unjust and unprovoked insult and shame, malicious misrepresentation, and a deadly plot. He was kept imprisoned because of the politics of the day, or for money, or because of the protected jurisdictions.

Even then his sufferings were not over. There came the prolonged trial of the storm at sea where his life hung, by a thread it seemed, both because of the elements and because of petty bureaucracy.

Eventually, when he reached Rome, it was far from the ambassadorial entry that he had possibly expected. He came in the company of the condemned, bound by a chain, and destined to drag out at least two years under arrest awaiting the uncertain decision of a secular leader.

Nevertheless, still imprisoned, still chained, still unheard, and still uncertain, he looks back and declares, "What happened to me has really served to advance the gospel!" That was his focus and he wanted to pass that on to the Philippians, and to us today.

Think of it, all the frustration, all the delay, all the physical suffering, and yet this is overshadowed by the fact that it has served to spread the gospel, to teach God's way of life, or to preach virtue.

Now all suffering is not only for this purpose. There are different kinds of suffering and God has different purposes in allowing it to come upon us. Some suffering is corrective, and is intended to get us on the right path when we have gone astray. In Proverbs 3, Solomon refers to such suffering.

Proverbs 3:11-12 My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor detest His correction; for whom the Lord loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights.

Some suffering is intended to cause us to take notice of the needs and feelings of other people and some of it is instructive. It is intended to mold us into the image of Jesus Christ, because we learn through the things that we suffer and thus, Peter speaks of the Christian's confidence in God but adds, in I Peter 1 that:

I Peter 1:6-7 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

In a sense, the purpose of Paul's suffering was neither corrective nor instructive. I am certain that he learned lessons from it, but that was not necessarily its specific purpose. It was simply a suffering permitted by God so that the gospel might be spread to others.

God greatly honors us with this suffering and we must find joy even in the midst of it as we see how our suffering has encouraged God's way of life to others.

Now the second question that Paul's statement raises is this: how did the things that happened to the great apostle result in the spread of the gospel? The first answer is that through them, Paul was able to bear a remarkable witness to the Praetorian Guard.

Philippians 1:13 so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ.

In the King James Version of the Bible, the key verse is translated, "So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places." Sadly, the King James translators did not possess all of the information that we have today, and as a result the translation they made is slightly in error.

The word translated "palace" is the word praetorium, which the ancient translators thought referred to a building. Since the 17th century, however, many ancient manuscripts have been uncovered that mention the Roman Praetorium, and in none of these manuscripts does the word ever refer to a palace or a building of any kind. In all of them it refers to people—to the Praetorian Guard.

This guard was the official bodyguard of the emperor, which took charge of all imperial prisoners. Now knowing this, it is now necessary to translate the verse: "So that my bonds in Christ are manifest to the whole praetorian [or palace] guard and to all others."

The importance of this is that even the Praetorian Guard, the imperial guards, came to realize Paul's suffering and the reason he was put in prison was because of his faith and following Jesus Christ. So it is possible and probable that some of those people might have been converted during Paul's time there.

God placed him there, in that prison, for various reasons, but one of those reasons was to call some of those individuals that were there in Rome, even in government.

Now we must visualize the scene at this point. Paul is imprisoned in Rome, and ever since his arrest in Jerusalem he had been chained to a guard, except for the moments on the ship carrying him to Rome. He is now in the care of the picked troops who guard the emperor. Paul has some freedom of action. He may have visitors, and for a while he lived in a private home, but there was always the guard.

Now what did Paul do in this situation? He could have complained, saying: "This is unjust! Roman law is slow. This soldier represents all that Rome stands for that is bad." But this was never Paul's attitude, at least as far as we know from the records.

He himself was a soldier for Christ, and the guard at the end of the chain represented a person for whom Christ died. Paul bore a witness not only to this soldier but to the one who replaced him for the second watch and the one who replaced him for the third watch, and so on, throughout the days and years. In this way, in time, Paul reached most of the Imperial Guard.

Think how Paul must have lived to have this effect on a corps of tough Roman soldiers. Here was a man who had every right to be thinking about himself, but instead he spoke of Christ, even under house arrest and in prison, and the soldiers listened.

The witness of a life lived for Christ, even in the midst of suffering also spreads to others, only the results are opposite. Paul triumphed over his circumstances and the result spread through Rome. Even in prison he was able to make a great witness of God's way of life and of the message Jesus Christ brought.

There is a special application here for those who do not have the freedom to preach the gospel. Paul was chained in a prison room. You may have chains of your own, somewhat different from Paul's. You may be tied to a desk when you would like to be out in more direct Christian service. You may be tied to a home, especially when the children are young and need constant care. You may be tied to a sickbed and may never see beyond your hospital room. This should not be a cause for discouragement.

If you are in circumstances like these, this has been given to you by God and can be used by Him. You can be a witness to people who come by your desk, your kitchen sink, or your hospital bed, or whatever your situation may be. If you do, God will bless your efforts and you will see spiritual fruit. What is more, it will entirely change the way you look at your limitations. You can learn to say with Paul:

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.

There is a further way in which Paul's suffering for Christ served to advance the gospel and it had an effect on other Christians. Paul says in verse 14:

Philippians 1:14 and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Some might say that Christians should always be bold in their witness for Jesus Christ, that Christians should always be ready to testify. That is true in a sense, but it is equally true that many Christians are shy and afraid, personality-wise, and they might lack an example. It may be that God has placed you in a position where you are to move one of God's shy witnesses to boldness.

Boldness does not mean standing on a street corner casting pearls to swine. It means that when the opportunity arises, do not hesitate to promote God's way of life, either by your example or by what you have to say in stating scripture.

Now Paul's words about the spread of the gospel through suffering reveals the effect of his life on non-Christians and on believers as well. Non-Christians became Christians, believers were emboldened to preach the gospel and this was encouraging to everyone. So do not think that just

because no one sees you that you are not providing a witness. You never know who is watching. We should imitate Christ at all times.

But there is one more thing to be said. If these things are to be true in your life, you must let suffering draw you closer to God. However, it can do the opposite, it can draw you away. It can embitter your heart and produce a complainer in you where there should be a victorious Christian. This is what Paul's example does for us, it shows us how not to become a complainer.

It was entirely the opposite in the case of Job. Job trusted God even in the midst of great suffering, and suffering drew him closer to his God. All that Job had was taken away from him. His oxen and donkeys were stolen; his sheep were destroyed by lightning; raiders made off with his camels; his children perished in a single moment.

Satan stepped back waiting for Job to turn and curse God. Instead, Job received the evil with a quiet trust in God. Instead of cursing God, he blessed him and said,

Job 1:21 And he said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

How many of us could go through what Job went through and come out of it like he did? We probably would not have answered as Job did, we probably would have complained. However if we have God's Holy Spirit we should trust Him to get us through it. He says that He will not give us more than we are able to handle and He gives us what we need to get us through it.

Satan fought against Job even more intensely and inflicted him with boils. And once again Job triumphed, blessing God even in the midst of his pain. Did suffering drive Job farther from God? No! It drew Job to Him and deepened his faith. In time, God restored all that Job had lost and Job became a great example to God's people of patience in suffering.

Has suffering ever brought you closer to God? That is something we should think about. If it has, you are well on the way to being a great blessing to God's people and to tasting the joy of seeing the gospel spread through suffering. Now continuing on in Philippians 1, Paul writes:

Philippians 1:15-18 Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill [So there is a contrast of attitudes there.]: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.

So Paul looks at these people as furthering Christ's Gospel, even though their attitude is not right. And even in their attack on him, he still appreciates what they are doing in furthering the Scriptures.

There are always people who complain that it just is not like the good old days anymore, but this may be nothing more than foolishness, because in terms of all the important things of life, human aspirations, human feelings and failures, and human nature, the good old days were no different from our own present day.

How does this apply to Christianity? Every now and then, we hear someone talking about the early church as though it had been perfect. But this is a false idolization and an attempt to make the early church into something it never was. It is an attempt to escape the problems of our day by looking back to something that exists only in the Christian imagination.

One only need look at the problems of the seven churches exposed in Revelation 2-3 to see that spiritual problems, false doctrines, and church agitators were consistently everywhere. Now let me read a series of seven scriptures taken from Revelation 2-3.

Revelation 2:4-5 “Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.”

Revelation 2:9-10 “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

Revelation 2:14-15 “But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.”

Revelation 2:20-22 “Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds.”

Revelation 3:1-2 “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, ‘These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.”’

Revelation 3:9 “Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you.”

Revelation 3:15-17 “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.”

These are attitudes that carry on through the centuries to our day today and all these attitudes can be seen throughout the churches of God, even today.

In addition to all of this, there is hardly a problem in the church today that did not exist in some form in the church of the first Christian century. The apostle Paul acknowledged the church in Corinth to be a true church in every respect.

We know that Corinth was a vile city, yet in the first verses of I Corinthians Paul says the Christians at Corinth are, “sanctified in Christ Jesus,” they are recipients of “grace,” they are “enriched in every way,” the testimony of Christ is “confirmed” in them; and they do not lack any spiritual “gift.” Yet this church was filled with problems. There were divisions. Some people said they were of Paul’s party, others of Peter’s, still others of Apollos’, but the holy ones said that they were of Christ.

We turn to chapter 3 and find that they were immature, unable to digest the deep things of the faith. One of the Christians was living in fornication with his stepmother; some were going to the pagan temples; others were drunk when they came to Sabbath services. They had all the problems that we have in our congregations today and perhaps even more besides.

There were also problems at Rome. Even though some of the members of the Praetorian Guard had been converted, and those who were already Christians were encouraged to bear witness for Christ, there was also a darker side to the situation.

Paul writes that some Christians preached the gospel out of partisanship, hoping to make life more miserable for him.

Philippians 1:15-17 Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel.

Imagine that! Some preached Christ in order to cause grief to Paul in his imprisonment. And those were the so called “good old days” in the Christian church at Rome.

If we are to understand the full impact of Paul’s experiences in Rome, we must recognize that it was Christians who were trying to get Paul into trouble by their preaching, not in every case, but it did happen multiple times.

Some commentators have found this fact difficult to accept and have sought to dodge it by arguing that the ones who preached Christ out of strife and envy were either nonbelievers or Judaizers, the kind of teachers that had tried to undermine Paul’s work in Galatia. But those commentators are wrong.

In other words, Paul said, “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.” But of the Judaizers in Galatia, Paul wrote:

Galatians 1:7-9 which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other

gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

In Philippians, Paul is talking about believers; in Galatians he is talking about unbelievers. These people in Philippi were Christians. They were not anti-Christ, they were anti-Paul in some cases, but they were anti-Paul with a vengeance.

Philippians 1:15-18 tell us that these “Christians” preached Christ out of unworthy motives: envy, contention, and partiality. Envy refers to their envy of Paul. Beyond any doubt Paul’s mind was the greatest of the early Christian church. No one came near to matching his comprehension of Scripture.

Paul had a long string of triumphs to his credit. He had taken the gospel to what is now Turkey. He was the first missionary to Greece. The Roman Christians were probably jealous of his success.

Also, their attitude was characterized by contention. Some were argumentative Christians, the kind who loved to do battle by debate and did not care if they destroyed their own while attacking the enemy. We see the examples today with ministers attacking other ministers. So it can and does happen, even in our time.

In fact, they even preferred arguing with Christians. This attitude led them into opposing camps, and their primary efforts were directed toward promoting their own interests rather than the interests of the entire church of God. What a disgrace!

The church was divided by envy, contention, and partiality. But what does Paul say? Strangely enough, he points to the fact that even in the midst of such conditions Jesus Christ was preached and the gospel was spread, and in that, he says he rejoices.

Paul is not justifying or condoning what was going on, he was just stating the fact that the truth of God was still getting out, it was just that the witnesses were falling on their faces. None of this is meant to imply that envy, contention, and partiality will not yield bitter fruit to the one who sows them. They are not of the Spirit and God will not bless them. In fact, they will often hurt the witness of the church and other Christians.

Let me illustrate this from Paul’s day. Did you know that Paul very likely lost his life partly as the result of the trouble caused by the trouble making Christians at Rome?

There tends to be quite a bit of persecution that comes from within the church. Who knows us better than those who meet with us? And when they turn on you, they do it with a vengeance sometimes. That is not to say that persecution does not come from the world even worse. They will reach a point where they will want to kill us. The point is that persecution can come from anyone, anywhere, even those close to you.

The information that exists from the early church age about the death of Paul and the things that led up to it points to this conclusion. Envy led some Christians to denounce Paul and, as a result of their denunciation Paul, and perhaps others also, were presumably executed under Nero.

The first strand of evidence for this view lies in the New Testament itself. Paul was not very well received in Rome. For a while he was forgotten. However, a church member came to his aid. Paul writes in II Timothy 1,

II Timothy 1:16-17 The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; but when he arrived in Rome, he sought me out very zealously and found me.

So when Onesiphorus arrived in Rome no one seemed able to tell him where Paul was, and it was only after considerable searching that this faithful Christian actually found him. Then Paul began to make converts through the Praetorian Guard. His views spread through Rome and those who thought they were the leaders of the Roman congregation became envious and preached against him. Paul alludes to this situation in Philippians and in the second letter to Timothy.

The second strand of evidence is from Roman historians who knew of unrest within the Christian-Jewish community under the Emperor Claudius and later under Nero.

Suetonius, a Roman historian who wrote of the lives of the Caesars, tells us that “since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus,” Claudius expelled them from Rome. The word *Chrestus* means Christ. So this says supposedly that the instigation made here were because of the belief of Christ.

Later, it seems that Suetonius was actually alluding to friction in Rome brought about by those who preached Christ’s name. Apparently he thought that Christ was the ringleader. The New Testament also knows of this expulsion of Christians and Jews, because it speaks of the edict of Claudius under which Aquila and Priscilla left Rome.

Acts 18:2 And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them.

The third strand of evidence comes from an historical letter, written about AD 90, to the believers at Corinth from a Roman Christian named Clement. In chapters 3-6 Clement warns the Corinthians about the bad effects of envy which, he says, has always resulted in suffering and death among God’s people.

This was true in Old Testament times, according to Clement, and he includes seven examples to prove it. Among them are Cain’s envy of Abel, Esau’s envy of Jacob, the friction between Joseph and his brothers, and similar examples of envy from the lives of Moses, David, and Saul.

Clement also gives seven examples from, what were to him, more recent times. Among these he speaks of Paul and he says, “By reason of envy and strife Paul, by his example, pointed out the prize of patient endurance. . . . and when he had borne his testimony before the rulers...” (I Clement 5). That is only useful as a historical reference.

Some of these statements may only be tradition and may be unreliable. Suetonius and Clement are not infallible, and they may be wrong, but the lines of evidence seem to present a remarkably consistent picture. They suggest that after Paul had written Philippians, the contention and envy

already present in the church at Rome degenerated into open attacks on him. These may have led some of the Christians to denounce Paul to the authorities.

In this case, Christ's statement that His disciples would betray one another, would have an early and literal fulfillment in the first century. Now what is certain is that Clement believed Paul perished partly as a result of the envy and contention that existed among the Roman Christians. Two scriptures describe this type of thing.

Mark 13:12 "Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death."

Matthew 24:10 "And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another."

We have seen this even in the church when people leave and trash the organization they came from. They do this to justify, in their own mind, why they did what they did.

Envy and contention caused trouble in those days and likewise they cause trouble today, not necessarily in death, but in the declining impact of the gospel of Christ on our society and on the world. Never in the history of the world have the opportunities been greater for the proclamation of the gospel. Yet never has the believing church seemed more irrelevant or more divided to the world and even to mainstream Christians.

God has a remedy for this situation which He reveals through Paul in the next chapter, Philippians 2.

First, he says that we are to develop a low opinion of ourselves, humility. This is often hard to do, but it should be easy. We are merely to see ourselves as God sees us and this will happen as we study His Word. In the same way, as we draw near to Christ by reading the Scriptures, Christ's light will fall on us and we will begin to see ourselves as He sees us. When we do, we will look to Him for cleansing.

Second, we are to have a better opinion of others, even of those who are troublemakers or agitators. In Philippians 2:3 Paul says:

Philippians 2:3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

This will come about as God makes us sensitive to the power of His Holy Spirit within other believers. We will look into our own hearts and minds for those areas where God wants to be at work in us. It will not mean that we will consider another Christian honest if he is not. But we will see that he is more honest as a Christian than he was before becoming one. We are all working in our lives to overcome something and repent and we must remember that we are all in the same boat, as it were.

Third, Paul says that we are to possess the mind of Christ. He challenges the Philippians here in verse 5,

Philippians 2:5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.

We develop this mind through fellowship with Him as He works in us, gradually molding us into His own image. God will give you the strength to do it. You are to see His hand at work in the lives of

other Christians, even those who are obnoxious to you, and you are to think highly of God's work in them. Moreover, you are to work with them, as far as possible. For in this way the gospel is spread, believers are strengthened, and Jesus Christ is honored.

There is a great deal of disappointment in this life, and everyone has experienced it. People know disappointment as children when they do not receive something they want. Young people know disappointment when they are left out by their friends. Business people struggling to be successful are often disappointed since only a few make it to the top. Some of us are disappointed in love, and we all face disappointments with other people.

Everything human is stained with disappointment, yet there is no disappointment with God. There is deliverance and satisfaction. Philippians 1:19-20 is a great expression of this truth.

Paul had carried the gospel of Jesus Christ through much of the Roman Empire, and now he was imprisoned in Rome itself. He wanted to preach the gospel in the western part of the Roman Empire, but instead it seemed that he must soon be executed for his faith.

From a human point of view, everything seemed to be going against him. But despite this, Paul remained confident that God's purpose for his life would not be shaken. Paul was an amazingly faithful man even under these circumstances.

Philippians 1:19 For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

In his present situation Paul knows that he has two great supports. He has the support of the prayers of his friends and brethren. Never underestimate this. The prayer of faith is a very powerful tool that we have.

One of the most touching things in Paul's letters is the way in which he asks again and again for his friends' prayers. "Brethren," he writes to the Thessalonians, "pray for us." "Finally, brethren," he writes, "pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed on and triumph." He says to the Corinthians, "You must help us by prayer."

He writes that he is sure that through the Philippians' prayers he will be given back to his friends. Before he sets out on his perilous journey to Jerusalem, he writes to the church at Rome asking for their prayers.

Paul was never too proud to remember that he needed the prayers of the brethren. He never talked to people as if he could do everything and they could do nothing. He always remembered that neither he, nor they, could do anything without the help of God.

There is something to be remembered here. When people are in sorrow, one of their greatest comforts is the awareness that others are sending their prayers for them up to God's throne. When they have to face some back-breaking effort or some heart-breaking decision, there is new strength in remembering that others are remembering them before God.

When they go into new places and are far from home, it is an upholding thing to know that the prayers of those who love them are crossing continents to bring them before God's throne. We cannot call a person our friend unless we pray for him.

The second thing is that Paul knows that he has the support of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The presence of God's Spirit is the fulfillment of the promise of Jesus that He will be with us to the end of the world.

In this entire situation, Paul has one expectation and one hope. The word he uses for expectation is very vivid and unusual. No one uses it before Paul and he may well have coined it himself. Transliterated from Greek, it is *apokaradokia*.

Apo means "away from," *kara* means "the head," *dokein* "to look," so *apo-kara-dokia* means: the eager, intense look which turns away from everything else to fix on the one object of desire.

Paul's hope is that he will never be shamed into silence, either by cowardice or a feeling of ineffectiveness. Paul is certain that in Christ he will find courage never to be ashamed of God's truth. He knows that through Christ his labors will be made effective in promoting God's truth.

To speak the truth with boldness is not only the privilege of the servant of Christ, it is also his duty. So, then, if Paul courageously and effectively seizes his opportunity, Christ will be glorified in him. It does not matter how things go with him, if he dies he will receive the martyr's crown, and if he lives he will still have the privilege to preach and to witness for Christ. In this, we see the conviction necessary in carrying out our Christian responsibility.

Even facing death, he was duty bound, so we see the conviction in this. Once we have accepted God's call and accepted Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, how we live our lives and conduct ourselves will bring either glory or shame to Christ, so we must be careful to provide a righteous witness of God's way of life.

Philippians 1:19-20 For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.

He knew that he would triumph and win regardless of which way the wind blew, because God was directing the wind.

To understand verse 20, we have to understand that the word "ashamed" did not always have the meaning for the biblical writers that it has for us today. The primary biblical meaning is not even in most of our dictionaries.

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defines "shame" as a painful emotion excited by a consciousness of guilt, disgrace, or dishonor." When you are ridiculed in public and are humiliated you are ashamed. Or, if you make a fool of yourself publicly, you are ashamed.

But this is not the biblical understanding of "shame." The biblical understanding has to do with disappointment. According to Scripture, the person who is not ashamed is the person whose trust is not misplaced and who, therefore, is never disillusioned.

This meaning is unmistakable at several important places in the Bible. In Romans 5, Paul writes about the Christian hope.

Romans 5:5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

J. B. Phillips correctly paraphrases verse 5 as, “A steady hope that will never disappoint us.” Another verse that requires this translation is in Isaiah 49.

Isaiah 49:23 “Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers; they shall bow down to you with their faces to the earth, and lick up the dust of your feet. Then you will know that I am the Lord, for they shall not be ashamed [disappointed] who wait for Me.”

Have you ever thought of the ways God does not disappoint the Christian? There are three verses in the Bible, that state more than the others, the great ways in which God does not disappoint us. All contain the word “ashamed,” and all teach that there is no shame for Christians.

The first verse that tells of a way in which God will not disappoint us is in Romans 1.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

So Paul says that he has never been disappointed in the gospel, because whenever and wherever it is preached the power of God accompanies it and produces supernatural results.

It is interesting that Paul speaks of the power of the gospel when writing to the church at Rome. He was entirely at home in three conflicting cultures: Jewish culture, Greek culture, and Roman culture. When I say that, I emphasize that he was in the world, but not of the world, and he preached the gospel to each of these diverse groups of people.

Each had its particular difficulty in accepting the gospel. The Jews came with centuries of religious training and tradition. They lived within a fixed spiritual system, and Jesus Christ had no place within that humanly reasoned system. Therefore, for the Jews, Jesus was a stumbling block. It was necessary for Paul to show that Jesus, far from being a stumbling block, was actually God’s foundation for the entire structure of His revealed religion.

The Greeks did not pride themselves on their religious traditions. But they were proud of their wisdom. The Greeks traced their intellectual ancestry to Homer, Plato, Aristotle, the Cynics, the Epicureans, and Neo-Platonists, all the competing systems of knowledge that preceded Paul’s day.

Most of these systems spoke of an unbridgeable gap between the infinite and the finite, between God and man. Later, to the Greeks, the preaching of the birth, death, and resurrection of God’s Son was foolishness.

Paul approached the Greeks in a way that found it necessary to show that the cross of Christ was actually the wisdom of God, a wisdom that exposes the foolishness of human reasoning and understanding.

The Romans took pride in their power. The power of the Roman legions had conquered the civilized world, and it was the strong arm of Rome that guaranteed Roman justice throughout the conquered dominions. To the Romans this was power, but the gospel of Jesus Christ was weakness.

Paul found it necessary to show the Romans that it was actually the power of God. The gospel possesses a power that does not disappoint the Christian.

There are several words for “power” in the Greek language, and each moves within a different sphere of thought. There is the word *exousia*. This word refers to the power that comes from authority. There is also the word *kratos* from which we get the words democrat, autocrat, and plutocrat. It refers to the naked power of rule; a power one may exercise whether or not one has legitimate authority to do so.

Then there is the word *dynamis* from which we get the explosive words dynamite, dynamo, and dynamic. This is the word that occurs in Romans 1:16.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power [*dynamis*] of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

This is the word by which Paul commends the gospel of Christ to the power-conscious Romans. Paul says that it is the effective, explosive power of God.

He knew that the gospel always accomplished the purpose for which God sent it forth. It still does today. It can transform your life and satisfy your deepest spiritual longing. It is a powerful, dynamic written word for us, with spiritual power and impact.

The second verse that tells of a way in which God will not disappoint us is in II Timothy 1.

II Timothy 1:12 For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.

In verse 12, the word “committed” is translated from a very vivid Greek word with a double meaning. Paul talks of that which he has entrusted to God, and he urges Timothy to safeguard the trust God has put in him.

In both cases the word is *paratheke*, which means a deposit committed to someone's trust. A person might deposit something with a trusted friend to be kept for his children or his loved ones. In this case the thing deposited was a *paratheke*. The translation actually means, “God has the power to keep that which I have deposited with Him.”

People insist on placing their deposit with those who cannot guard it, with false religions; with schemes from world government; with dreams of human improvement. But all these devices fail the investor. Only God is able to guarantee our deposits.

We must take the time to realize and appreciate the security of the spiritual investments that we have placed on deposit with God. We have been promised this as a guarantee, by way of the Holy Spirit, of God's grace.

John 10:27-28 “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.”

Romans 8:38-39 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Certainly, God is able to safely keep our spiritual commitments and deposits. And think about what wonderful dividends He pays on the investment that we make with Him. It is not only that we are secure for this life and for the future, but also that we participate so richly of God's present blessings such as His love, joy, and peace that passes understanding, and in numerous other things too. Providences, wisdom, and beneficial coincidences are often God's dividends. They are additional evidence that He is guarding our spiritual deposits.

The third verse that tells a way God will not disappoint us is in Philippians 1:20. Paul is on trial for his life, but only on a human level is he uncertain of the outcome. On the spiritual level Paul knows that whatever happens will work to his salvation, and the promotion of the gospel.

Philippians 1:19-20 For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.

Think of the scope of his statement in verse 20. I want to briefly point out three things here.

First is that Paul knew that Christ would be magnified. Paul lived in an environment in which the pagan gods were worshipped and all power seemed to be on the side of pagan Rome, at least from a human standpoint.

Nevertheless, Paul knew that Christ would ultimately be exalted and would rule in power until he had crushed all enemies beneath His feet. Paul had vision; he saw victory coming in the end and he wrote about it here in I Corinthians 15.

I Corinthians 15:24-25 Then comes the end, when He [Christ] delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet.

So Paul knew Christ would be declared great partly as a result of his witness.

Second, Paul knew that God's determination to exalt His Son also extends to those who are united to Him by faith. Paul did not merely say that Christ would be magnified, he said that Christ would be magnified in him. God the Father is determined to exalt His Son in us.

II Thessalonians 1:11-12 Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;

We will not be disappointed when God finishes us. We will share in Christ's glory and be magnified, to a lesser degree, with Him.

Third, Paul recognized that Christ would be magnified in him whether he lived or died. This means Paul was so confident that God's will for him was perfect, that it was the best possible thing for him, that he was able to accept it willingly even if it meant death at the hands of a Roman executioner.

When life is smooth, it is easy to quote the apostle Paul in Romans 8 and say:

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

That is very comforting. However it is easy to say these things when you have everything you want, when God blesses you and your family, but it is not so easy when you are dying, or in the face of bitter disappointment and pain. If you are to have confidence in God at such times, you must learn to trust Him in the small disappointments of life.

If we practice on our small disappointments, turning them around and looking at the positive aspect of them, then when the major trials hit we will be better able to handle them in a godly way because we had practiced in the little things. Either way God gives the strength to be able to bear it.

You may not see it now and you may resist God's will drowning yourself in pity, even in legitimate sorrow, but the day is coming when you will see it as you stand before your loving heavenly Father. You will look back from a vantage point in the future, from eternity in God's Kingdom, and will confess that God knew what He was doing in your life. You will see that Christ was certainly exalted, and you will not be disappointed.

Job expressed this clearly following his severe trials and testing, stating in Job 42, that:

Job 42:5 "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You."