



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Advancing the Gospel in the Capitol

PHILIPPIANS 1:12-18

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Tim Pauley / (304) 767-8430 / www.capitolcom.org / tim.pauley@capitolcom.org

There are many beliefs, viewpoints, convictions, and ideologies both held and promoted by those who serve in the West Virginia state capitol. It is fascinating to consider how these priorities are advanced in the statehouse, often finding their way into the laws that are passed each session. Perhaps it begins with a legislator with a strongly held passion for an issue. It may get its start with a group or even an individual that has a desire to see their cause move forward. There are meetings with lawmakers and legislative leaders. News conferences, media interviews, and advertising take place to inform the public and rally them to the issue. Constituents are encouraged to contact their legislators to make known their feelings. They may then flood the statehouse, meeting with their legislators and filling the galleries. Indeed, it is compelling to watch how an issue is advanced in the capitol. From watching all this, we realize it is someone who believes strongly in and feels passionately about an issue that makes the best lobbyist and advocate.

In Philippians we read of those whose passion was to see the good news of the gospel progress and advance to all those who are sinners in need of a Savior. We are examining how Paul encouraged the believers to live in a manner worthy of their citizenship in heaven (1:27; 3:20). Paul demonstrates that a believer, a good “citizen of heaven” will be involved in the task of advancing the gospel, the cause of sharing the good news of salvation through faith in Christ. This is true of believers serving in the capitol. Those who believe strongly and feel passionately about the gospel will seek to see it advance both in the capitol and at home.

In a previous study we saw how Paul himself was joyful and encouraged others to be joyful, even in the midst of difficult circumstances. How could he do this? He could rejoice in the middle of trials and difficulties because he was focused on the advance and progress of the gospel. This is described in Philippians 1:12-18:

¹²Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, ¹³so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else,

¹⁴and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.

¹⁵Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; ¹⁶the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; ¹⁷the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. ¹⁸What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice.

Paul wrote the letter of Philippians to thank the believers there and to reassure them regarding his own condition. They knew of his imprisonment and were concerned for his well being. They were also concerned for his mission of spreading the good news of the gospel. After the introduction of the letter sharing his love and thankfulness for them, Paul writes, “Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel ...” He concludes this section with the amazing statement, “...In every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice.” We can be encouraged in our own lives and work in the capitol by examining Paul’s circumstances and how he could rejoice in them.

PAUL’S DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

We have read about the persecution Paul faced right there in Philippi some years before (Acts 16). He was severely beaten and imprisoned for preaching the gospel. Now he found himself in a prison in Rome. While this was something of a “house arrest” and perhaps not the worst of conditions, (see Acts 28:16, 30) he had certainly undergone a dreadful ordeal in coming to this place in his life. (Acts 20-28) He had wanted to travel to Rome in order to have a fruitful ministry among the believers there (Romans 1:9-11; 16:29). His plan was to travel from Rome to Spain in order to continue the advance of the gospel across Europe. Indeed he made it to Rome, though certainly not as he had intended. His consuming goal in life was to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and he ends up spending **four years** as a captive of the Roman Empire.

BIBLE STUDIES

LOBBYIST / STAFF STUDY: TUESDAYS, 12:00 NOON – TREASURER’S CONFERENCE ROOM (EB 54)
LEGISLATOR / ELECTED OFFICIAL STUDY: THURSDAYS 8:00 A.M., SENATE PRES. CONF. ROOM (M219).
12:00 NOON, TREASURER’S CONF. ROOM (EB 54)

Advancing the Gospel in the Capitol (Philippians 1:12-18)

These circumstances may have been discouraging enough, but consider Paul's description of all the difficulties and challenges he had faced in his ministry:

²³...In far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. ²⁴Five times I received thirty-nine lashes. ²⁵Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. ²⁶I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; ²⁷I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. (2 Corinthians 11:23-28)

In the middle of all this, Paul says "I rejoice" and encourages the Philippian believers to rejoice as well. Why? All these circumstances led to the progress and advance of the gospel.

PAUL REJOICED BECAUSE HIS CIRCUMSTANCES LED TO THE ADVANCE OF THE GOSPEL

Paul encouraged his friends in Philippi with the news that **"...My circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole Praetorian Guard and to everyone else..."**

What was the "cause of Christ" whose advance and progress gave Paul such reason to rejoice? Paul was singularly focused on the message he proclaimed, and we see him write of it often. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth **"Christ sent me to preach the gospel"** (1 Cor. 1:17); **"We preach Christ crucified..."** (1 Cor. 1:23); and **"I determined to know nothing among you except Christ, and Him crucified"** (1 Cor. 2:2). To the believers in Galatia he wrote, **"...May it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ"** (Gal. 6:14). Paul's message was that **"God made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"** (2 Cor. 5:21). He constantly sought to share **"...It is by grace you are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast."** (Eph. 2:8-9).

The Praetorian Guard was a choice group of some ten thousand handpicked soldiers. They were strategically dispersed throughout

Rome in order to help keep peace, but their special task was to protect the emperor. They were in essence the emperor's "secret service" and served as his body guards. Members of this elite unit would serve for twelve, and later sixteen years. Upon completion of their duties they were granted the highest of honors and privileges including a generous pension. Eventually this group became so powerful they were known as "king-makers", not only protecting but actually helping to choose the emperor. Perhaps one of their less prestigious duties was that of guarding imperial prisoners, with a soldier always attached by a chain to the detainee. As a result, Paul always had one of these soldiers as a "captive audience". The last verses of Acts describe the situation. Even though in Roman custody, "...He stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered." (Acts 28:30-31) All the while with one of these elite Roman soldiers chained to him. They watched him minister and serve. They heard him teach and share the gospel. They listened as he dictated several of the letters we find in the New Testament.

What was the result? **"The cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole Praetorian Guard"**. We later read in the closing remarks of Philippians, **"All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household"** (Phil. 4:22). This likely refers to some of these very soldiers and other government officials who had trusted Christ through Paul's ministry. We know from Acts 21-28 that Paul had the opportunity to stand before the highest government leaders, even the emperor, and share the gospel. Paul's circumstances gave him the opportunity to share the gospel in places he could not have reached in any other way. This led him to write to Timothy about **"...My gospel, for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned."** (2 Timothy 2:8-9).

CONCLUSION

- Paul was on the front line of advancing the cause of the gospel. As "citizens of heaven" the believers at Philippi were "partners in the gospel" (Phil. 1:5). As a believer serving or working in the statehouse, is it your heart's desire to see the gospel advanced in the capitol?
- God will use your circumstances, what ever they may be, to make His cause known both here in the capitol and at home.