

PHILIPPIANS 1

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Philippians chapter 1 as we continue our study through the Word of God and we begin a new book, a letter or epistle that Paul wrote to the church in Philippi.

Let me give you some background information before we get started regarding Philippi and how the church got started there.

Philippi was not a big city, it probably had around 10,000 people who lived there. But like the cities, big and small around them, they needed the light of the Gospel to shine upon them so that they could come to saving faith!

Remember that Paul visited Philippi on his second missionary journey and during that time we know for certain that a woman named Lydia and her family were saved as well as the Philippian jailer and his family, besides others of course.

You can read of this first visit to Philippi by Paul in Acts 16:14-34. The timeframe for this first visit was around 51 A. D.

Also, Philippi was a Roman colony and enjoyed all the benefits.

It also was an important city in eastern Macedonia (Northern Greece).

The area was important for its gold mines and its soil that was very rich, it was very fertile.

Philippi was also located on the main road from Rome to Asia, the Via Egnatia, which made it a strategically important city.

Paul is the author of this letter to the Philippians, written from his imprisonment in Rome, probably around 61 A. D., some 10 years or so after his first visit to Philippi and the establishment of the church there.

As we saw in our study in Ephesians, Philippians is one of the four prison epistles that Paul wrote, along with Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon. Remember that Paul spent two years in prison in Rome waiting to stand before Caesar to present his case.

And I do find that interesting when you consider what this letter it called, ***THE EPISTLE OF JOY!***

Again, Paul is waiting to stand trial and he did not know the outcome of the trial that was before him. He could have been put to death for his faith in Christ. And yet, he is filled with ***JOY!***

How was it that Paul could have so much joy while in such a terrible place with his very life on the line?

I don't think the answer is earth shattering, but if we truly kept this focus, we too would be filled with ***JOY!***

What was his secret? Paul filled his mind, filled his life with ***JESUS!***

And the reason I can say that with such conviction is that in the first chapter alone Paul uses "**Christ**" or "**Jesus Christ**" 17 times. That means he speaks of Jesus more than once every two verses! So I think I can safely say that Paul's mind was focused upon Jesus!

People today are focused; their lives are consumed with trying to be happy. They are putting the cart in front of the horse you might say.

You see, they are trying to fill that void and find happiness by buying the latest gadget, the newest car, they might party hearty, look for that perfect job and still not be happy.

Thus, we have books, seminars, counseling and yet, for most people they cannot attain happiness because of the situations that come their way.

And in the end, they come to the conclusion of Solomon, the preacher, who said, **“Vanity of vanities,’ says the Preacher; ‘Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.’”** Ecclesiastes 1:2.

But, as I have said, there is something very different with Paul. He had joy in the midst of very difficult circumstances. And yet, in this little 4-chapter letter, some 104 verses, Paul uses the word **“joy”** four times, (1:4, 1:25, 2:2, 4:1). He uses the word **“rejoice”** eight times, (1:8, 2:16, 2:17, 2:18, 2:28, 3:1, 3:3, 4:4). And he uses the word **“glad”** two times, (2:17, 2:18).

And, like I have said, this letter has been called, ***“The Epistle of joy!”***

Now some of you may be thinking, ***“That’s great for Paul, but he doesn’t know what I am going through now! No one knows the trouble I’m in!”***

Let’s turn that around for a minute. You don’t know the trouble Paul was in – he was in prison, chained to soldiers 24 hours a day, seven days a week! It was not ideal circumstances at all!

Then how could Paul speak of joy, how could he rejoice in the situation and situations that he was in?

Because, like I have said, his mind was focused upon Jesus and that is where joy is found.

You see, biblical joy is not based upon outward circumstances but an inward reality that God is in control and He will use the situations in our life for His glory and our growth.

Thus, divine joy is available to every believer if they would only receive it into their lives.

David Hocking put it this way. He said, “There is ‘joy’ in the midst of trial when we understand God’s purposes and realize what He is accomplishing in our lives.”

If you are struggling in this area, always down in the dumps, I pray that you would be encouraged by this letter and focus back on Jesus and have that joy that only comes from Him.

One writer put it like this, “How much Christians need to learn this. There is so much bickering in Christian circles, so much complaining, so much unhappiness. This was never meant to be. Christians were meant to be filled with love and joy and peace - in short, with all the virtues that are the result of the life of Christ within the Christian . . . To be filled with Christ is the secret of real Christian living. It is the secret of true happiness.” (Source Unknown)

How true that is. And may we all take that to heart and learn that lesson so that joy will fill our lives.

Now, one more point before we get to our text.

As you read Paul’s letters to the Corinthians and the churches in Galatia, you find all kinds of correction for them because of the errors that had come into the church.

But Paul’s letter to the Philippians is not like that. It is filled with much warmth and love for the people, for this church in Philippi.

So Paul had this close relationship with the believers in Philippi and it shows in this letter he wrote to them.

With that as our background, let’s begin reading in Philippians chapter 1 beginning in verse 1 and let’s see what the Lord has for us this evening as we study through His Word.

PHILIPPIANS 1

VERSES 1-2

Again, Paul wrote this letter to his close friends, the Christians in Philippi, from his Roman house arrest described at the end of Acts (Acts 28:30-31) as he waited for his court appearance before Caesar.

And both Paul and Timothy are greeting them and notice what they are, ***“SERVANTS OF JESUS CHRIST!”***

The Greek word speaks of being a bondservant or DOULOS, (doo'-los). Yes, we are free in Christ, but we freely submit our lives to His authority, He is our master and we are bondslaves of Christ!

You see, if you do not submit to the authority and control of Jesus in your life, joy will elude you!

Paul, and his son in the faith, Timothy, freely surrendered their lives unto the Lord, then served others and then they were last on the list.

And it really boils down to this. ***JOY IS: JESUS, OTEHRS, YOU!***

And Paul is writing to the saints in Philippi or those who had been set-apart by God, those who are saved and not some bogus concept of what some say that saints are.

In the Roman Catholic Church they say that you have to be dead to be a saint and in your life minister to people and in your death, as they examine your life, you did so many miracles, and then the church can vote on making you into a saint.

No, Paul is writing to living people, those whose lives were touched by God!

He also is speaking to the leadership in the church.

Paul speaks of “**bishops**” or EPISKOPOS (ep-is’-kop-os) in the Greek and it means, “to look over or upon” an overseer. This word is synonymous with the term “*elder*” and “*pastor*” or “*shepherd*.”

We see this in Acts 20:28 where Paul tells us, “**Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.**”

I believe he is speaking to pastors here.

Paul doesn’t speak of “*elders*” or PRESBUTEROS (pres-boo’-ter-os) in the Greek, and the elders dealt with the spiritual matters of the church, they assisted the pastor.

In Acts 20:17 we are told, “**From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.**”

Thus, all bishops or pastors are elders but not all elders are pastors or shepherds of a flock.

Paul then speaks of “**deacons**” or DIAKONOS, (dee-ak’-on-os) in the Greek and deacons tend to deal with the physical matters of the church.

You can see this in Acts chapter 6 as men were raised up to wait on tables and minister to widows in the church.

You see, God does things decently and in order!

And again, we see Paul mention in his introduction the Siamese Twins of the New Testament, “*grace and peace.*”

Folks, you can never experience the peace of God in your life until you first make peace with God through Jesus Christ. It is a gift of grace or unmerited favor! You cannot have peace until you first receive His grace!

VERSES 3-6

Remember that Paul is in prison and yet, his focus is not on himself, but on others as he thanks the Philippian Christians for their love, their generosity towards him!

And as Paul prayed for these believers it filled his heart with joy as they were working together to bring the Gospel message to the lost.

And listen to these encouraging words that Paul gave them, “**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.**” Philippians 1:6.

Let me start out by saying this. How many of us have started a project and not finished it?

I’m sure we all have experienced that in our lives.

And that can be a problem. You see, when it comes to our Christian life, we tend to lose hope as we fall short of our goals with the Lord.

But Paul has total confidence that the work that God started in the Philippians, their salvation, He will bring to completion, their glorification. And what Paul says of the Philippian believers he is also saying to us.

Paul, in Colossians 3:4 tells us, “**When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.**”

Folks, when God saves us, He does so completely and eternally, and you can take that to the bank! Paul didn’t say that we “*might*” appear with Him but that we will!

Do you doubt that?

Do you think it is too hard for God and He might not complete the work?

Do you think if you don’t live up to a certain standard you will be cast out, the work won’t be completed?

Listen to what Jesus said in John 6:37, 39, **“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out . . . This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.”**

Also, in John 10:27-28 Jesus said, **“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.”**

And Paul tells us in Romans 8:37-39, **“Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 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.”**

And lastly, listen to what Paul said in Romans 8:30, **“Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”**

I want to focus on this glorification here because it is the final step of the sanctification process and it will occur when we go to be with the Lord.

What is interesting here is that Paul states this work, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is in the past tense.

Why does Paul speak of something that has not happened as if it already did? Because that is how sure it is, God will complete the work He started because He foreknew us!

If you are His, He will not lose you – it is a promise – you are already seen as glorified in the Father’s eyes – that is how certain it is, that is how secure we are in our eternal redemption!

Think of it like this, as the nineteenth-century commentator, F. B. Meyer put it, “We go into the artist’s studio and find there unfinished pictures covering large canvases, and suggesting great designs, but which have been left, either because the genius was not competent to complete the work, or because paralysis laid the hand low in death; but as we go into God’s great workshop we find nothing that bears the mark of haste or insufficiency of power to finish, and we are sure that the work which His grace has begun, the arm of His strength will complete.”

The work of sanctification is a work of God, the Holy Spirit, He has begun it and He will see it through to completion.

Don’t disbelieve but believe! God will finish what He has started!

The problem is that many try to make it their own work and then, if they fail, they would forfeit heaven.

It is not a work that we started, God did.

And, it is not a work that we finish, God does!

Praise God we can rest in the security of our salvation that is based in Christ!

One writer put it like this. He wrote,

As I reflect on my fifty plus years in Christ it is indeed God who has kept me. It is not my grip on God that has made the difference, but his grip on me. I am not confident in my goodness. I am not confident in my character. I am not confident in my history. I am not confident in my “reverend” persona. I am not confident in my perseverance.

But I am confident in God.

- R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians – The Fellowship of the Gospel*, p. 28

Absolutely. I am not confident in myself, but I am confident in the Lord and the work He began in my life, He will finish, He will bring me home to glory! And the same for you!

VERSES 7-8

As you read these verses you see the heart of Paul for the believers in Philippi.

You see, Paul lived what he believed, and his love was not just empty words, these believers were in his thoughts and in his heart!

It is as John said in I John 3:14, **“We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.”**

And this is important. Paul did not see himself as being better than they were, they all received the same grace and as he defended the Gospel so too the brethren in Philippi were!

I like the way that Adam Clarke paraphrased Paul’s words here, it does drive home the point. He wrote, “I call God to witness that I have the strongest affection for you, and that I love you with that same kind of tender concern with which Christ loved the world when he gave himself for it.”

May we have that kind of genuine love for the brethren!

VERSES 9-11

Keep in mind that Paul is some 800 miles away from them.

Not only that but it has been some 10 years or so since his first visit and yet his love for them is still rich, it is still deep as when he was first there with them and established the church.

Now, why did Paul pray for their love to grow?

Because *AGAPE* love, unconditional love will never fully be attained in this life. It doesn't matter how much love you have, when compared to Jesus and what He manifested in His earthly ministry, we need much more in our lives than what we have!

And Paul wants their love to grow, to super abound or excel in "**knowledge**" or maturity and "**discernment**" or being able to judge things correctly.

When Paul speaks of "**knowledge**" he is not just speaking of head knowledge but a knowledge that comes from God's Word and applying that to our lives, living what God desires of us.

It's one thing to understand the doctrines of the Christian faith but without living them out it's of no practical value.

And then Paul speaks of "**discernment**" and I think we have all seen how this is lacking in the church today.

This word carries with it the idea of being able to discern right from wrong, not because of some standards that we have set, but because that is what God has shown us in His Word.

I don't know if you have encountered this issue over the years, but I have. You expose a false teaching to someone, you tell someone about a false teacher and what they are teaching, and they are mad at you!

"That is so unloving, you need to repent! They are brothers or sisters in the Lord, and you should not say things like that about them!"

No, exposing false teachers and false doctrine is not unloving, but not doing that just shows you don't love the person enough to confront their sin. And, tragically today, their false teaching is embraced many times!

Let me show you what I mean by giving you an example of sloppy agape. Yes, I said it, sloppy agape and the example is given to us in I Corinthians 5:1-7 where we are told, **“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles - that a man has his father’s wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.”**

Obviously, that was wrong.

Sin, false teachers, false doctrine needs to be dealt with, we need to have the knowledge of God’s Word and discern between what is right and what is wrong!

And here’s the thing. The way to grow in love and to grow in the Lord is by being in His Word, for Paul told Timothy, **“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”** II Timothy 3:16-17.

Paul also wants them to be **“sincere”** or EILIKRINES, (i-lik-ree-nace’) in the Greek and it speaks of being “judged by sunlight, tested as genuine.”

When our actions are held up to the light of the Son of God, to His Word, will there be cracks in it?

Paul tells us in Hebrews 4:12, **“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”**

Expose your life to the Word of God because if you don't, if you try to cover your faults, when tough times come, the cracks will show and not only will you see them, but also those around you!

One writer summed it up like this for us. He wrote,

A virtuous man may be ignorant, but ignorance is not a virtue. It would be a strange God who could be loved better by being known less. Love of God is not the same thing as knowledge of God; love of God is immeasurably more important than knowledge of God; but if a man loves God knowing a little about Him, he should love God more from knowing more about Him: for every new thing known about God is a new reason for loving Him.

- Frank Sheed, *Theology and Sanity*, pp. 9-10

It is so important we continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And, without a doubt, to know Him more is to love Him more!

Now, how do we bear fruit in our lives as Christians?

By abiding in the giver and sustainer of life, Jesus Christ and fruit will then naturally be produced in your life, it will be real.

Jesus said in John 15:4-6, **“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.”**

And we do this all **“... to the glory and praise of God.”** Philippians 1:11.

VERSES 12-14

This is how you keep your circumstances from stealing your joy. You hold to the sovereignty of God. In other words, He is in complete control of every situation and that whatever circumstance you find yourself in, it is not a problem, but it is an opportunity to be a witness for Christ. That is what we see here with Paul.

Paul is in prison and yet, he turns it around and says that his imprisonment didn't stop the work of God but actually moved the Gospel message forward.

The word **“furtherance”** is PROKOPE, (prok-op-ay') in the Greek and it speaks of advancement, progress like that of an army or expedition.

And Paul lists two ways this happened to prove his point to the Philippians who may be discouraged seeing Paul in prison.

Here are those two reasons.

First of all, Paul tells us that the **“whole palace guard”** has taken notice of Paul and his faith.

You see, Paul, being a prisoner, was chained to a Roman soldier and these chains were about 18 inches long, but he was never alone.

Every six hours a new soldier would replace the old one and so, in two years' time, Paul had a large captive audience to witness to, they could not run away, they were guarding Paul and because of the witness of Paul and the love of God, many of the Imperial Guards of Rome were saved!

Not only that, but Paul encouraged the other believers in Rome by his example. You see, Paul, being under house arrest, could have visitors, and as the brethren came and saw Paul, saw people getting saved, even the soldiers guarding Paul, they were strengthened in the faith, they were bold in their witness because they saw that nothing could stop the Gospel message from going forward, not even chains!

Thus, instead of complaining about the situation we find ourselves in, look at Paul's example, be encouraged by it, for God is not chained nor is the Gospel message.

Rejoice in what God is doing even if you don't understand that situation you are in, for there are no accidents with God, He has a plan, He has a purpose for what we are going through!

Let me give you this example to encourage you. We are told of John Bunyan, the author of Pilgrim's Progress,

John Bunyan's preaching was so popular and powerful, and so unacceptable to leaders in the seventeenth-century Church of England, that he was jailed in order to silence him.

Refusing to be silent, he began to preach in the jail courtyard. He not only had a large audience of prisoners, but also hundreds of the citizens of Bedford and the surrounding area would come to the prison daily and stand outside to hear him expound Scripture. He was silenced verbally by being placed deep inside the jail and forbidden to preach at all.

Yet in that silence, he spoke loudest of all and to more people than he could have imagined. It was during that time that he wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the great Christian classic that has ministered the gospel to tens of millions throughout the world.

For several centuries, it was the most widely read and translated book in the world after the Bible. Bunyan's opponents were able to stop his preaching for a few years, but they were not able to stop his ministry. Instead, they provided opportunity for it to be extended from deep within a jail in the small town of Bedford to the ends of the earth.

- John MacArthur

That is our God, He takes what seems like a disaster, like no fruit can be borne from it, and He brings forth much fruit. Never forget that!

VERSES 15-18

As Paul was in prison there were those that were glad, they wanted to surpass Paul in the work and with him out of the picture, they had it made. It was a selfish ambition, they were exalting self, it was for show in a sense on their part.

On the other end were those who preached the Gospel out of love, not looking to make themselves look good but to build up the kingdom of God.

Now please understand the message they preached was not a false gospel, it was their motives that were wrong.

And Paul didn't care about their motives, why?

Because God would deal with that, they were believers, they were preaching the Gospel message, and for Paul that was the bigger picture and it should be for us also.

You see, Paul's imprisonment couldn't stop the spreading of the Gospel and neither could wrong motives on some of the believers and thus, Paul rejoiced!

What a lesson for us to learn. And that joy in situations like that, can only come as we focus our lives back on the Lord!

VERSES 19-20

Paul put his faith in the Lord, and he knew he could do all things through Christ who would strengthen him. He sought the empowerment of the Spirit of God to move his life along the way that God wanted it to go!

Then Paul says “**. . . so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.**”

It almost sounds like a fatalistic attitude by Paul.

No, Paul knew God was in control and yes, going before Nero did not look good, but he knew the Philippians were praying for him!

Paul did not live to promote or preserve himself, but the Lord, Jesus Christ!

So, whatever happened, God was in control and Paul could rest in that.

It is as one writer put it in regard to Paul's life, “My body will be the theater in which Christ's glory is displayed.”

That means no matter what happens!

VERSES 21-26

Paul knew that to be absent from the body he would be present with the Lord, (II Corinthians 5:8).

The one he loved, the one he gave his life for he would be with and thus the dilemma.

To remain on this earth and minister to the brethren, minister to the lost or be with the Lord.

Paul desired to be with Jesus but also realized the work that was still needed and so while martyrdom is a possibility here, he also tells the Philippians that he expects to be spared and minister to them, which did occur.

Paul was released for a time and then imprisoned again and martyred for his faith by Nero at God's appointed time, not Nero's!

It was time for Paul to go home and he finished the race and was received up into glory in around 66 A. D.

Let's think about what Paul said here and then apply that to our lives.

What can you say?

"For to me, to live is money?"

"For to me to live is a new car?"

"For to me, to live is that promotion?"

May we be able to say as Paul said, "**For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.**"

Philippians 1:21.

You see, death for the Christian is really just moving day as our spirit and our soul separate from our body, this temporary dwelling place or tent, and we receive our new body, a mansion made in the heavens, made by the Lord.

It is as Jim Elliot said who was martyred for his faith at a young age. He said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." May we not forget that.

Now I know we don't like to talk about death, but it is something we all will experience, and I think we need to have a correct perspective of what death is all about.

Let's compare this life with the life to come and see what we have, and as we do, you are going to wonder why we fight so much to remain, for there is a striking contrast between the two.

REMAINING HERE

A temporary residence, a tent.
Suffering mixed with joy.
Suffering for a little while.
Being absent from the Lord.
The fight.
The realm of sin.

DEPARTING TO BE WITH CHRIST

A permanent abode, a mansion.
Joy unmixed with suffering.
Joy forever.
Being at home with the Lord.
The feast.
The realm of complete deliverance from sin.

“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Philippians 1:21.

VERSE 27

The Greek word Paul uses for “**conduct**” is POLITEUOMAI, (pol-it-yoo'-om-ahee) and the idea is “to behave as a citizen.”

Philippi was a Roman colony and thus enjoyed all the benefits of Rome.

Thus, the people were not only proud of this but they also obeyed the rules of Rome so they would not lose their statues with Rome.

Paul is calling the Philippian believers to a higher standard for they are citizens of heaven and thus they should walk according to the high calling by which they have been called.

He wants then to live as faithful citizens of heaven according to God's Word.

Think about it, one of the greatest testimonies we have to a lost world is our integrity, that what we believe has impacted our lives in such a way that it is manifested in what we say and what we do!

Remember what Paul said of the Thessalonian believers in I Thessalonians chapter 1, **“For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”** I Thessalonians 1:5-10.

Their lives were a witness of their love for the Lord. They not only encouraged believers, but unbelievers also saw the change in them. May that be seen in our lives as well.

And here in Philippians, Paul also gives them some words of encouragement and accountability. He calls for them to conduct themselves in a godly way whether he is there or not, but he also tells them he is watching them.

Why is that, did Paul not trust them?

Not at all, but again, it has to do with accountability. We should all be accountable to each other so that if we start going astray, doing something that is not pleasing to God and we don't see it, or don't want to see it, a brother or sister in the Lord will let us know it in love!

In fact, Paul tells us we are one in Spirit, the Spirit of God.

We are one in mind; we have the mind of Christ.

And we are “**striving together**” and the Greek word that Paul uses is a compound Greek word that is composed of a preposition, SUN, (with) and the noun ATHLEO, that speaks of competing in a contest, such as a sporting event. It is the term from which we get our English words “athlete” and “athletics”.

Here’s the thing.

We are a team working together for a common goal, spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ, seeing the kingdom of God grow.

We are working together, giving it our all.

Now, for example, and this is from a few years back. But Randy Moss of the Minnesota Vikings. He plays football on a team and yet, at times he doesn’t run the routes all out. He gives a half-hearted effort. Sometimes he walks off the field before the game is over while the rest of the team is still playing. Sometimes he doesn’t even know what play is being run and walks off the field to the sidelines when he is supposed to be the receiver on the play.

The outcome is that it affects the whole team, not just Randy Moss and that is Paul’s point here. We are working together as Christians for the Gospel of Jesus Christ! May we not forget that!

VERSE 28

Paul wants the Philippian believers to remain focused and not be “**terrified**” or startled by the enemy.

Paul uses the Greek word PTURO, (ptoo'-ro) and the idea here is of an uncontrollable stampede of startled horses. Horses can be startled by something as small as a bee and the same is true for us as Christians and Paul wants them to stay focused, not be startled by anything the enemy might throw at them; be it persecution or even imprisonment or death!

Remember what Paul said in Philippians 1:21, **“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”**

I think that is important for us in the days we are living in. Not to be startled by what comes our way, the things that are happening in this nation and in the world. God has warned us, and we need to walk accordingly, shining the light of Jesus in this dark world!

And here's the thing. As you stand firm against the enemy it shows to them God's judgment upon them, eternal punishment.

It is as Paul said in II Thessalonians 1:4-10, **“so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.”**

Not only does it show their eternal punishment but our salvation because persecution shows we are His.

Persecution should not be discouraging to us, but it should be encouraging.

Paul said in Colossians 1:24, **“I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church.”**

In Galatians 6:17 Paul tells us, **“From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.”**

Folks, the enemy will be destroyed, and our salvation is secured in Christ because God is the one bringing these outcomes to pass!

It is as Jesus said in John 3:16-20, **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.”**

VERSES 29-30

Now how often do you hear this spoken of, that we are to suffer for His sake? Not too often!

But look again at what Paul is saying here. God, in His sovereign grace has given to us the gift to believe but also, He has given to us the *privilege* to suffer for His sake!

Now I believe this gift to believe is given to all, but all don't accept that gift. I just want to be clear on that or some may think that God has gifted some to be saved and some not to be saved! Not true, we have a choice, a free will to choose!

But in regard to suffering, Paul tells us in Romans 8:16-17, **“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.”**

Also, Peter tells us in I Peter 4:12-16, **“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people’s matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.”**

Thus, we should not be surprised when difficult times come as Paul tells us, **“that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this.”** I Thessalonians 3:3.

Paul, in a sense, is saying to the Philippian believers, ***“Brothers and sisters in the Lord, for you and for me the battle is on; let us not lose heart but let us do something great for the Lord!”***

Paul is trying to encourage them not because persecution might come but it has come and more is coming so don't give up, don't fall back, it is time to stand up and fight for the faith which has been entrusted to us!

And may we not just stand up and fight for the faith, but may we do it with joy in our hearts!

I think many Christians just have closed their eyes to what is going on around them, they don't seem to care, or they are so focused on self that they are missing what is going on around them.

I think our freedom in this country is coming to an end. We see it with the social media, that you can be shut down if you say something that Big Brother, I mean something that they don't agree with. And it will only continue to get worse.

Let me show you what I mean. We are told,

Before I speak about the ominous trends in America to curtail freedom of speech, let me tell you about Dr. Charles H. McVety, president of Canada Christian College in Toronto, whose television program was removed from the air because he had the temerity [gall] to preach against homosexuality.

Later, he was allowed back on television, but now he has to submit his program to the Canadian Broadcast Standard Council every Wednesday for review by the censors on Thursday, and then, if approved, can be broadcast on Sunday. As far as I know this panel does not rule on programs that are immoral or violent, just on those that dare to be politically incorrect, such as a minister who believes the Bible and therefore opposes same-sex marriage.

Closer to home in our great United States, hate speech laws and recent court rulings seek to restrict our right to believe, preach, and practice one's religious convictions (hate speech, someone said, is simply whatever the leftists among us hate to hear!) The supposed line of "separation between church and state" means that God must stay on His side of the line in our country's education, politics, law, science, and workplaces. Beware if you live out your religion in the so-called public square, because you just might find yourself slapped with a lawsuit.

Here is the irony: the censors, the radicals who are all too ready to deny freedom to those who disagree with them, are perceived in our culture as "tolerant," and we, who want to express our views, are viewed as "intolerant." In other words, the philosophy of the left is *preach tolerance, but practice inflexible intolerance to anyone who has the courage to express a different point of view.*

Here is but one example: Angela McCaskill was suspended as an administrator from Gallaudet University for signing a petition to put Maryland's same-sex legislation on a November ballot. In other words, even an innocuous act, such as allowing the electorate to decide the question of same-sex marriage, is enough for one to be suspended. Incredibly, the university justified its decision because of its view of *tolerance!* What they were saying was: *we exercise tolerance by censoring anyone who does not agree with our point of view!*

The loss of our freedoms can take an unusual twist. The lawsuit *Christian Legal Society v. Martinez* arose when Hastings University insisted that The Christian Legal Society could not require its leaders to adhere to a certain set of beliefs and behaviors, but it had to be open to all students, without discrimination.

This means, among other things, that an atheist could become president of The Christian Legal Society on campus. This action on the part of the university is a denial of freedom of association and the free exercise of religion. The notion that student groups at the university can have no religious, political, or moral requirements for leadership defies common sense and defeats the very purpose of such groups.

The list of cases where religious rights are being marginalized is endless. If the present trends continue, we must prepare ourselves for a dark and challenging future. Thankfully, we can face the future with confidence that God is with us. The Church in other eras has been here before. . . .

Returning to the matter of religious freedom. What should we do to prepare for the continuing attacks against Christianity in our culture?

. . . That is both an important and huge question. For every Christian the answer will be different, but minimally what we must do is, first, give thanks to God for the opportunity to live at this hour of history and prove the faithfulness of God to His people. Secondly, we must courageously and lovingly witness to Christ among our families, neighbors, and friends, and wherever we have influence. We must also support those organizations that are fighting our legal battles, which is really where the conflict comes in our culture.

And finally, let's realize that America has fallen too far for us to "turn it around." We have lost the so-called culture war. We must repent of our sins and cry out to God for mercy and for divine intervention. Whether or not God chooses to turn this country around, He will be with us as we live out our faith - even if it means death.

- <http://bit.ly/2ky8bYQ>

How should we respond to all of this? Paul said, **“Only let your conduct be worthy of the Gospel of Christ . . . and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God.”** Philippians 1:27, 28.

Let me close this evening with this story. We are told,

Principal Rainy, of whom a child once remarked that she believed he went to Heaven every night because he was so happy every day, once used a fine metaphor about a Christian’s joy.

“Joy,” he said, “is the flag which is flown from the castle of the heart when the King is in residence there.”

Who is on the throne of your heart? You can tell by the flag that is being flown over your life! May it be joy, may you rejoice in the Lord and the work He is doing no matter the situation you find yourself in as Paul did!

