

From Pastor Ron. Please read, reflect and reply, if you wish, with further insights!

Paul's Reflections From Prison (2nd Installment) *Philippians 1:12-26*

In verse 12 (chapter 1), Paul begins **Personal Reflections** on his imprisonment (1:12-30). His reflections focus on two particular areas:

1. **First**, Paul's *reflections* on the SUFFERINGS of imprisonment (1:12-18)

We considered this in **last week's** message.

Paul's reflections on the sufferings he endured did not result in, "Whoa is me," "Why me?" attitude, or mentality. His focus was NOT on his sufferings: the "pain and discomfort" of them, or the "injustice" of them, or even a plea for prayer to relieve his sufferings. NO, none of these! Rather, Paul reflected on the positive impact his sufferings had and were having to advance the GOSPEL of Jesus Christ and build Christ's church! Paul's positivity was certainly to be an example for the Philippian church and the beloved believers in Philippi. Likewise, it is to be an example to all believers, both then and TODAY. Paul was confident that God always works for good purposes (Rom. 8:28) – the glory of His Name, the advance of His church – in all the trials, adversities and circumstances of life. For at such times, the Spirit of God is at work, both in the believer and through the believer in ways that only eternity will reveal. But always for God's good, glorious and eternal purpose. That is why Paul could repeatedly say, "in that I rejoice," and, "Yes, I will rejoice," or "Rejoice in the Lord always!" Such a mentality, attitude and spirit does not come naturally; but it comes through faith and the transforming work of the Spirit. This is God's will for every believer. It is a progressive, unceasing work of the Spirit. For if we trust the Lord like Paul, then our reflections also will be like his?

2. **Second**, Paul's *reflections* on LIFE in the face of likely Execution (1:19-26)

(This will be taken up in a future message. A key verse is 1:21; also compare Luke 12:15-21.)

One of the very painful aspects of Paul's imprisonment was to be cutoff from loved ones and friends: in particular, the fellowship of his *Christian* family. The suffering Paul experienced in this regard is both seen and felt in his writing. Notice verses 3 and 7: "*I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy ... I hold you in my heart*" Paul deeply missed the fellowship of the saints in Philippi, many of whom he led to Christ and who he dearly loved.

To contemplate this aspect of Paul's suffering in prison is a good and needful reminder of the importance of seeking and enjoying the fellowship of believers in Jesus; indeed, of treasuring times of relationship that we can have with one another: our brothers and sisters in Christ. In Paul's imprisonment he yearned for Christian, like-minded, companionship. But for him, it could only be in memory and in prayer. Often we do not fully appreciate what we have until it's gone. Paul's "alone-ness" reminds us that Christian fellowship is something to be cherished; it is something for which to thank God, something to greatly value and earnestly maintain; it is a wonderful purpose that Jesus Christ designed for His church.

In this matter and many more, Paul's *recorded* reflections on his imprisonment are filled with purpose and with his heart. Clearly they open a window on his **mind** (i.e., his thinking) and on his **heart** (i.e., his deepest desires, and affections) that he wanted the Philippian believers to see and to know. Why? Because, as he prayed in verses 9-11, his great desire and prayer to God for them was their continued spiritual growth: specifically, in the matter of loving as Christ loved, especially, loving one another.

Paul knew that people are born imitators. Children naturally copy the mannerisms of their parents: they walk like them, laugh like them, adopt the same values and disciplines. In other words, children bear the image of their parents; in fact, God created it so (cf. Gen. 5:3). Paul wanted the Philippian believers to be good imitators, ones who would follow the **very best role models**. That meant first of all, he wanted them to follow the perfect example of Jesus Christ (see 2:4-9; 3:10). Then, he also wanted them to follow his own example. Listen to Paul's words in this regard:

"Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us." (3:17)

"What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me – practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you." (4:9)

So, in the Philippian letter and in these personal reflections, Paul lays bear before these believers his own life, his struggles and adversities, his reflections and thoughts, his fears and concerns, his hopes and desires, as an example to imitate both in thought and deed. From this, we learn several insights into our own Christian journey:

#1. The importance of setting the right example in life, of being a Christian role model for others to follow. This is especially critical for a pastor; but also, it is for all believers who desire to follow Jesus Christ. May the Spirit of God stir your desire to do so *more and more!*

#2. The impact (i.e., the *power*) Godly examples have in building up Christ's church. May we all better understand & prayerfully apply this!

#3. In our discipleship of others, it must be through both **lip and life**. In other words, if we desire to see others grow in Christ, then leading by example is a *must*. This Paul knew; and this he shows us in the book of Philippians. Let's follow Paul's example as he follows the Lord!