

## Philippians 3 - Appreciating The Opposition

In preaching about appreciating the opposition I don't mean those who are difficult personalities in our lives, but rather religious opposition.

One of the great things about Baptist distinctives, or those things that make Baptists distinct from other kinds of churches, has been what we call the doctrine of the *Priesthood of the Believer*. Basically stated, Baptists of all kinds have consistently held that each individual is responsible before God directly. There is no intermediary who makes intercession for us. There is no middle man who takes the place of Christ. There is no go between that the individual *primarily* depends on. Jesus Christ is the High Priest of our faith who is present in the heart of each believer.

1Tim 2:5 For *there is* one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;

Each believer has direct access to the presence of the Holy Spirit to instruct and to guide him. Even though we benefit from preachers and teachers, we are not *required* to go by the interpretation of a religious official. We can study the Word of God with the assumption that the Holy Spirit will aid us in our understanding. Baptists don't even have *official* doctrinal statements. We typically might have a *Statement of Faith* for the sake of convenience, but the *Bible* is the only thing *official*. Baptists are free to make official statements, but it would be totally self-contradictory and illogical. This also does not mean that you can't have standards for covenanting to work together, but this is done so *voluntarily*. We have to each believe as we are convinced from the Bible. Those churches who study the Bible end up being pretty much unified on what they teach. We appreciate the importance of the freedom of the individual as opposed to the dictates of some official or official council, but it is still possible that the

range of thought can run from believers being *very* compatible to being very much at odds with each other. Paul's personal dealing with those who downright opposed him served as a testimony to the Philippians of the power of Christian unity.

## 1. The Struggle

First, we need to understand the struggle that Paul was going through at this time.

Phil 1:12-14 But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things *which happened* unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel;

13So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other *places*;

14And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

What Paul is referring to here is his imprisonment in Rome. His letter to the Philippians are one of four epistles that he wrote while in prison. Paul had been taken there because of accusations made when he had visited Jerusalem for Pentecost. At first, he was attacked because of rumors about him being a Gentile sympathizer. The case quickly turned to be an issue about the teaching of the resurrection. Because he had appealed to his right as a Roman citizen to appear before Caesar when he discerned a conspiracy forming, Paul was taken to Rome.

Paul *had* wanted to visit Rome so that he could preach and have fruit there also, but he had just not counted on going there by courtesy of the Roman government. The fact that he was imprisoned there for his faith served as a testimony of God's grace under pressure to many of the believers. It had a great impact on the Romans, too. In vs. 13, he mentioned that there were those even in the palace who were being reached. Later In his closing, Paul spoke specifically

about believers who were part of Caesar's very own household.

Phil 4:22 All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household.

We are very happy to enjoy the blessings of God when the days are easy, but as anyone with any experience as a Christian knows, we must brace ourselves for the difficult times of trial also. Paul's attitude was that there was a blessing to being in prison. He praised God for the Gospel going out. We need to be ready to see the blessing that comes through tribulation.

Rom 5:3-5 And not only *so*, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

4And patience, experience; and experience, hope:

5And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

Jas 1:2-5 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;

3Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

4But let patience have *her* perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

5If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all *men* liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

The struggle Paul faced was his imprisonment, but there was more. Paul rejoiced not only for the impact he was having through the Gospel, but also for the opposition he faced.

## 2. The Opposition

Paul was in prison waiting for a hearing before Caesar over his dispute with the Jewish leadership back in Jerusalem, but there was another more

common problem that had dogged him while he was on the mission field. Men called *Judaizers* argued that it was necessary to observe Jewish law for Christian salvation. The major reason for Paul's missionary work was to reach the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas had been sent out from Antioch where Gentiles were becoming believers. As they came back from their first mission's trip, the Judaizers disputed with him and Barnabas.

Acts 15:1-2 And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, *and said*, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

2When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

It might seem a little strange that they held that circumcision was necessary for salvation, but today it is just as wrong to teach that baptism is necessary for salvation. In either case, when the issue was brought to the apostles in Jerusalem, they rejected any such notion:

Acts 15:24 Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, *Ye must* be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no *such* commandment:

Paul later contended with the Galatians over being influenced by the Judaizers:

Gal 1:6-9 I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:

7Which is not another; but there

be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

8But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

9As we said before, so say I now again, If any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

Gal 3:1-5 O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?

2This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

3Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

4Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if *it be* yet in vain.

5He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, *doeth he it* by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

These are the same kind of people Paul encountered in Rome. There were those who were supportive of Paul, but there were also those who took advantage of his trial and used it against him.

Phil 1:15-17 Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will:

16The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds:

17But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel.

Paul's opposition evidently argued

against Paul's Gospel, which would have elevated their standing at Paul's expense. What you should notice about the opposition was that it was over very objectionable teaching. In spite of that, Paul was *still* able to be thankful.

Phil 1:18 What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.

We should be careful to note that there is nothing here to suggest that Paul is *approving* of *them*. Neither is he approving of *working* with them. What it does suggest is that between simple variations of belief, alternate interpretations of Scripture, erroneous expositions, and outright false doctrine, we can be thankful that at least Christ is lifted up. This does not mean that we should avoid condemning false doctrine, but that we should be glad that there is the opportunity for debate. Paul points this out when he says,

Phil 1:19 For I know that this [both the positive and negative preaching] shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

Debate is not for the faint of heart. Before condemning debate because it is not all positive and happy, you will appreciate Paul's stand when you consider the alternative to debate. Trying to force people to conform to any speech code begs the question as to whom will be the enforcers. Paul could have desired that his opponents be eliminated. The only *true* way to overcome them is to have a *better* argument that will turn to their salvation. Paul appreciated his opponents, though, in that at least they were arguing over the significant issue of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and that Christ was at the center of the debate.

This very kind of setting played out in the ministry of Dr. Carl McIntire in Cape May, New Jersey. He had started a Christian college that ran counter to the

counter-culture of the hippies back in the '60s. Nancy's sister had become frustrated with the Marxist mentality on the secular college campuses. One day, they read about Dr. McIntire's college coming under attack. It was described as "right wing religious crazies." They could not tell that this was a *Christian* college, but as devout Catholics they appreciated that it was *religious* and as Americans they appreciated their patriotic stands. The reporters thought they were using envy and strife to add on to the affliction of Dr. McIntire, but they only succeeding in turning the situation to the salvation of Nancy and her family!

Consider another benefit of the envy and strife they presented to Paul. Not only because of the Judaizers, but others also who tried to argue with Paul, *we* are the beneficiaries of the Word of God, today. Because of the contention that Paul had to deal with, we have the book to the Galatians and others where the doctrine against the Judaizers is laid out for us. Other books deal with salvation by faith, the Rapture, the deity of Christ, Jew and Gentile in the church, communion, speaking in tongues, the structure of the church, and more.

Debate and argumentation is primarily for the benefit of those *observing* the debate. There is a time for debate, but then there are other times when you just share your views with each other. I was visited recently by a Roman Catholic gentlemen who had a very valid concern about an issue. In the course of his visit, the conversation turned to a discussion where there were significant things we could agree on, such as the Trinity, Christ dying for sins on the cross, the Bible being the Word of God, and Heaven and Hell. But he also used what he genuinely thought would be certain doctrines that would lend significance to his case, but were to our understanding totally false. This did not require misleading him by some desire to smooth things over. The occasion did not lend itself to delving into the differences, but my disagreement was able to be covered by at least saying "Well, we don't see it quite that way." The blessing

was that he was given food for thought and at least the door was left open for more discussion. From his well wishes as he left, I think he properly understood my genuine concern, support, and equally wishing him well. Over the years, Nancy and I have had occasions to talk with priests. She has been able to thoughtfully and academically engage them based on her experience and education. Appreciation does not require *liking* something or *approving of* something. But, it *does* require *understanding* where someone is coming from.

What would be counterproductive is what took place especially to Baptists in history where believers were forbidden to even *think* for themselves let alone *talk* about what they believed. Dictators have risen where speech was controlled or forbidden.

I am thankful that because of all the teaching that is out there, the better *or* the worse, there are many things that people have become aware of so that I don't have to start from nothing. It is sad when you talk to someone and they don't even have any idea about who Jesus or when I have to ask if they know what the word *sin* means.

### 3. The Glory of God

This brings us to the glory of God in all of this. The larger take away from this passage in Philippians is that no matter what, God is glorified. We should be thankful for the opportunities to be able present Christ whether those opportunities are pleasant or not.

2Tim 4:2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

We need to remember that those in opposition are not our enemy. They are our ministry. The enemy is the one whose deceptions they have accepted.

Eph 6:10-13,18-20 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.



11Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*.

13Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

...

18Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;

19And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel,  
20For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

God will always get the glory, even from the opposition, although it will not be so pleasant for them.

Rom 9:21-24 Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?

22*What* if God, willing to shew *his* wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction:

23And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory,

24Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

Romans 9 makes a special reference to Pharaoh as a vessel unto dishonor. His persecution of the Jews became an opportunity for the glory of God to be

manifested as His power brought him to judgment in the crashing waves of the Red Sea.

Phil 1:12,19,20 But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things *which happened* unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel;

19For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

20According to my earnest expectation and *my* hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but *that* with all boldness, as always, *so* now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether *it be* by life, or by death.

We should certainly pray, work, witness, teach, and preach. The time actually could come when we could lose the freedom to preach. It would be a shame if that is what it took for us to appreciate our freedom. We felt something of that effect during the recent lockdown. Those restrictions caused a quite a bit of grief, even to the point that churches went to court and won against government overreach. Don't wait till some time of censorship makes you appreciate your freedom. Know that their freedom is our freedom, too. This is how the opposition, as frustrating as it might be, can inspire us to give thanks to God.

The question for some, now, is what will we do with the free expression of the Gospel? Some people want to avoid the discomfort of the challenge of the Gospel. They squander the opportunity they have to hear the Gospel by posting such signs as "No Trespassing" on their house. Some will resist the payment of Christ's blood for their sin because they think they can keep God at bay forever. They don't realize that they can't avoid facing God. Everyone will stand before Him as either their Judge or their Savior someday. If this is someone's need, let today be the day that you call on Christ for salvation.

Then there are those of us who *do*

know Christ and will speak up when we can. If the opposition irks you, as it should, don't just hope they go away. The remedy for bad speech is good speech and there is no better speech than the Gospel and the Word of God. Our prayer as Christians today should be that God give us the boldness we need to make the Gospel known. The entire way we live should be a statement about the Gospel.

1Tim 2:5,

1. The Struggle - Phil 1:12-14, Phil 4:22, Rom 5:3-5, Jas 1:2-5
2. The Opposition - Acts 15:1-2,15:24, Gal 1:6-9,3:1-5, Phil 1:15-19
3. The Glory of God - 2Tim 4:2, Eph 6:10-13,18-20, Rom 9:21-24, Phil 1:12,19,20