



**A Spiritual Encouragement Message
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Overcoming Circumstances (Part 1)

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Philippians 1:12-18

Introduction

The Christian life should be one of joy. There should not be any group of people more joyful than those who have had their sins forgiven through faith in Jesus. Yet, at the same time, the reality is that Christians can also have a lot of sorrows. We can go through some very rough times. In fact, we are warned that as Christians we will have tribulation in this world (John 16:33) and will be persecuted by the unrighteous for striving to live godly lives (2 Tim. 3:12). 1 Peter 2:9 speaks of the way in which a Christian is to “bear up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.” We are to have “godly sorrow” over our sins that lead to repentance (2 Cor. 7:10,11) Even Jesus was called a “man of sorrows” in Isaiah 53:3. How then do these two things go together? A Christian will go through great sorrow, yet is to also be joyful. How can we be as described in 2 Corinthians 6:10, “as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing”? We will see the answers to that question in our study today of Philippians 1:12-18, for Paul is able to be joyful even in the midst of very difficult circumstances.

Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and 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. Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from goodwill; the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice

Basic Principle – vs. 12, 13a

The basic principle of overcoming circumstances is seen in Paul's response to his situation.

The Philippians knew that Paul's circumstances were not good. He was in prison and they were concerned for him. Paul's response to their concern was to let them know how things were going, but he does not focus on the circumstances. Consider the way in which most of us respond when someone we know cares about us asks us how we are doing. I emphasize here that this is a person that we know genuinely cares about us. While a common courteous greeting is to ask a person how they are doing, the expected answer, and the one usually given, is "fine," even when things are bad. People usually will not open themselves up if they do not trust the one asking or do not think their inquiry is sincere. When we are asked that same question by someone we know loves us, we will usually give them more information about how we are really doing. What do we focus on when that happens? If the circumstances we are facing are overwhelming us, we will talk about the situation we are facing. We might complain. We might share our sorrows and woes feeling we just need a shoulder to cry on for a while. We might seek their advice on how to deal with things. We may even ask them to pray for us. All those responses are common among all people, even Christians. Though a Christian should not be a complainer, the other responses may be fine. We need to be able to speak freely with one another about the tough issues we may be facing and receive advice and be prayed for. But there is a better way, and Paul shows it to us by his response. Paul does not overlook his hard circumstances for he plainly states in this passage that he wants his Philippian brethren in the Lord to know the things related to him, his circumstances (vs. 12). He is in prison (vs. 13) and there are other believers who out of their selfish ambition and envy seek to cause Paul additional distress in his imprisonment (vs. 15-17). But Paul is not overcome by these circumstances, and he does not dwell on them. Instead, he is overcoming them by focusing on what God was doing in the midst of them, and in this case, the gospel was being spread. Circumstances, whether bad or good, when joined with a godly perspective will result in rejoicing. (The opposite is also true. Good circumstances when joined to an ungodly perspective will result in a host of negative attitudes and actions).

While this may seem like an unattainable level of Christian maturity to some, it is actually only living out the truths Paul and James had already presented. The tough circumstances, trials, and tribulations we face as Christians are used by God to mature us into Godly people.