

*Fact Sheet for “**Looking at Circumstances  
from God’s Perspective”**”*  
**Philippians 1:12-18b**

Pastor Bob Singer  
08/09/2015

The prison epistles—Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon—are so named because they were written by the apostle Paul during his incarceration in Rome. This passage in Philippians is a window into what Paul thought of his imprisonment, even though unjust.

It is a wonderful encouragement that God has put in His Word as to how we should think about our own circumstances (see 1 Corinthians 10:11).

**<sup>12</sup> I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, <sup>13</sup> so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. <sup>14</sup> And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.**

“imperial guard” – likely a reference to the praetorian guard, made up of Roman soldiers.

“and to all the rest” – both the Jewish community and the gentile community.

You have often heard the saying, “Is your glass half full or half empty?” Abraham Lincoln put it this way... “We can complain because rose bushes have thorns, or rejoice because thorn bushes have roses.” Paul could have complained big time about his unjust imprisonment (see Acts 21-26). But instead he looked on two positive aspects of his imprisonment... the results of his own evangelism efforts and the boldness that others gained to speak the word.

**<sup>15</sup> Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. <sup>16</sup> The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. <sup>17</sup> The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. <sup>18a</sup> What then? <sup>18b</sup> Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.**

Even those who did not like Paul but promoted themselves preached Christ more because Paul was imprisoned. They stirred up division within the Christian community over Paul and hoped to gain a larger following for themselves.

Now, there was something that Paul had that we do not. Paul knew in advance that his circumstances were engineered by God (see Acts 20:22-23; 21:8-14). But this really makes very little difference in what our thoughts should be about our personal circumstances. We still know that God has arranged them, even though we only see those circumstances with certainty when we look in the rear view mirror. God is still in control. Do you trust Him?

“It is easy to get faith into our heads. It is hard to get faith into our bloodstream.”  
— R.C. Sproul

Think about it for a moment. Is the God who spoke the universe into existence too weak to be sovereign over our own circumstances (see Isaiah 59:1)?

What can we learn from Paul’s life here?

1<sup>st</sup> – Paul did not just sit back and wait for God to do something with his life. He set goals and planned, but his plans were always subject to God’s will. Set goals and plan, but trust God for the outcome (see Proverbs 19:21).

2<sup>nd</sup> – Focus on the rosy side of God’s choice of circumstances for you, not on the thorny side. I know Christians, as you do, who always seem to complain about things in their lives. They can’t seem to see or enjoy God’s blessings now. They are also reinforcing a strong pattern that will only get worse as they begin to experience the losses that inevitably will come with their older years.

3<sup>rd</sup> – Seek to serve God best in whatever circumstances He has placed you. Cooperate with Him. Don’t fight against Him.

4<sup>th</sup> – Remember that God deals individually with others, even those we love. God is sovereign over their lives too.

I want to finish with an illustration from one of my favorite books by Charles Dodgson, an Anglican deacon. His pen name was Lewis Carroll. He wrote *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*.

“As children’, wrote Alice Raikes (Mrs. Wilson Fox) in *The Times*, January 22, 1932, ‘we lived in Onslow Square and used to play in the garden behind the houses. Charles Dodgson used to stay with an old uncle there, and walk up and down, his hands behind him, on the strip of lawn. One day, hearing my name, he called me to him saying, “So you are another Alice. I’m very fond of Alices. Would you like to come and see something which is rather puzzling?” We followed him into his house which opened, as ours did, upon the garden, into a room full of furniture with a tall mirror standing across one corner.’ “Now”, he said giving me an orange, “first tell me which hand you have got that in.” “The right” I said. “Now”, he said, “go and stand before that glass, and tell me which hand the little girl you see there has got it in.” After some perplexed contemplation, I said, “The left hand.” “Exactly,” he said, “and how do you explain that?” I couldn’t explain it, but seeing that some solution was expected, I ventured, “If I was on the other side of the glass, wouldn’t the orange still be in my right hand?” I can remember his laugh. “Well done, little Alice,” he said. “The best answer I’ve heard yet.” “I heard no more then, but in after years was told that he said that had given him his first idea for *Through the Looking-Glass*, a copy of which, together with each of his other books, he regularly sent me.”

Are the details of your life in your hand, or are they in God’s? Do you trust Him with those details?

The great challenge is to serve God best where He has placed you.