***Bondslaves of Jesus Christ - PH05-02

Advanced Bible Doctrine - Philippians 1:1***

We are studying the book of Philippians once more. We have just begun this book, and we have been looking at the author, Paul, in order to get some background concerning the writer of this book, and consequently to understand a little more about what we are going to learn in this book. Paul had years of preparation in order to fulfill eventually the plan that God had for his life. In this opening verse, Paul gives himself an honored title, and he associates his co-worker Timothy with him. He says, "Paul and Timothy, the servants of Jesus Christ." The word "servants" here is actually better translated as the word "bondslaves." This brings us to the subject of how a Christian should view himself and his life in this world.

**The Plan of God**

God is a sovereign God. That means that God is absolute king in all of the universe. There are only two ways that you can view God. You can actually view God as being an absolute sovereign, which means that everything that exists or will exist is by His plan and His determined counsel; or else, you can view that there are some things in the universe which exist in defiance of God and which are beyond His control--decisions and events over which God has no control. Those are the only two views that you can come up with concerning the role of God in the universe. Sovereign means that He is in control. This is what the Word of God does teach. This is a simple fact, and yet many people seem to balk at it. He has a plan. The various details of that plan are called the decrees of God. We have gone over those, and we have many words in Scripture that indicate that God has an overall decree--a plan.

We have in Ephesians 1:11 the word "purpose"--His own will. That is, He takes His own counsel. He doesn't take advice from somebody else. Acts 2:23 uses the word "determinate counsel." 1 Peter 1:1 and Acts 15:18 speak about the "foreknowledge" of God. 1 Thessalonians 1:4 speaks about "election." Romans 8:30 speaks of "predestination." John 15:16 speaks about being "chosen." Ephesians 1:9 speaks about the "good pleasure" of God which He purposes in Himself. All of these verses are saying that of all the possible plans that God could have come up with for the lives of all the people that He was ever going to bring into existence, and all the circumstances that were going to come about, He took the one plan that was absolutely the best and perfect of all the plans that He as an infinite God could conceive.

Some things in that plan are hard for us to understand. Things like sin and suffering are difficult for us to incorporate. Some things, because of our limitations, we are prone to misinterpret. However, God makes no mistakes. Deuteronomy 29:29 tells us that some things are for God to understand, and some things are for us and our children to understand. Isaiah 55:8-9 also confirm the same thing--that God's thinking is infinitely above our thinking. It is to be expected that there are some things of what God does that we will not understand. However, He has a plan; he is sovereign; and, His plan is going to be executed.

The purpose of this plan is to reveal His own perfection; to reveal His own glory; and, to demonstrate that He is supremely worth this honor and the position of respect that we hold toward Him as God. Romans 11:33 says that His plan is not a whim. It is a wise plan by deliberate choice. His plan is a sovereign choice. Isaiah 40:13-14 tell us that nobody tells God what to do. Nobody taught Him what He should choose. Also, this plan is unconditional. Isaiah 46:10 declares to us that what God is determined is going to be, and man will not frustrate it. So all of this has been incorporated into a decree which represents the fact that God is sovereign.

The sovereignty of God has a relationship to you and me as believers. It also has a relationship to this statement of Paul who says, "I am a bondslave of Jesus Christ." Why? Well obviously, if God is sovereign, then it would be natural that Paul and you and I should be slaves of this God. He is the one whose will should become our will, and whose determinate counsel should become our guide. The word "servants" should be translated as "slaves" of Jesus Christ. In New Testament times, there was the expression commonly used, "the slave of the emperor." This was in reference to the ruler of the Roman Empire. He was in charge. He was in command, in effect, of all the imperial slaves. The lord emperor was revered as the human ruler, and he was viewed and worshipped as God.

**Bondslaves**

The apostle Paul knew this expression in the Roman Empire--"slave of the emperor." So he speaks of himself as the "bondslave" of Jesus Christ. The Greek word is "doulos." That's the normal word most frequently used in the New Testament for slaves. It's the word which means a person born into slavery. It connotes a permanent relationship of servitude to a master. This word connotes a relationship to a master which can only be broken by death or by the deliberate act of that master to free the slave. So Paul says that he is a "bondslave" in contrast to being a slave to the lord emperor. He is a slave to the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was physically born into slavery just as you and I are physically born into slavery to sin and to Satan. Romans 6:17-18 and Ephesians 2:2 speak about this slavery into which you and I are born.

The relationship to our master Satan is terminated by our union with Jesus Christ. This is because when we are united to Christ, we enter into His death. On the cross, He died towards sin and towards Satan. Consequently, we, by entering into that death, are freed as slaves by death from Satan's controls. By that act, we become the bondslaves of the Lord Jesus Christ through the new birth and through the purchase which the Word of God describes as the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians 7:22, we read, "For he that is called in the Lord being a servant is the Lord's free man. Likewise also he that is called being free is Christ's servant. You are bought with a price. Be not the servants of men."

Since the Lord Jesus Christ can never die again, this indicates to us that we have a relationship to Christ which we can never sever. We will never again be slaves of anybody else. We will never again be sold to anybody else. We belong positionally to Christ, and we can never again positionally become the bondslaves of Satan. Now, we can, in practice, be Satan's slaves. However, that's the deliberate choice either through ignorance of the Word or through deliberate rejection of the Word. Then we start building a house on the sand because we are rejecting the house that we could have built on the rock of our positive response to the Word.

So we've been freed from slavery to Satan, and made bondslaves of Jesus Christ. However, we are also free men of Jesus Christ. That is, we have been freed from the penalty of sin. We have been freed from the consequences of sin. We have been freed from Satan, so we have this kind of a paradox. You and I as Christians are free men in Jesus Christ--the finest fullest kind of freedom we have ever experienced. Yet, at the same time, we glory in the position of being bondslaves of Jesus Christ.

Either God is sovereign; absolute King; He is in charge; He calls the plays; and, you are a "doulos" (a bond slave of Jesus Christ, consequently--there is no other position you could take), or else you are your own man, and you are declaring, in effect, that God is not sovereign and cannot tell you what to do.

This brings up the very crucial question, which we probably won't get to in this session, of: How do I know the will of God? If I am to be a servant (a bondslave of Jesus Christ); and, if I am to be subject to the God who is absolute King of this universe, then I have to know how to respond to what His will is. Now what does He want me to do? At this particular point in time, what does God want me to do? Now that is a crucial question. The apostle Paul found the answers, and he could open this letter with a word that seems very small, but one that he gloried in. He said, "I want to announce to you that my name is Paul, and I am a bondslave of Jesus Christ." He didn't say in this case, as he does in other cases, "I am an apostle." When he says, "I am an apostle," that's supreme authority. That's absolute dictatorship in spiritual things. But God is sovereign. We are His slaves. How do we approach to perform that function?

This is the implication of God's sovereignty. Every Christian's life is to glorify and satisfy God. 1 Corinthians 6:20 says, "For you are bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's." The only real happiness and satisfaction that we have as Christians is when we are yielded to the decree (to the plan) that God has for us. This is the path of normalcy. This is the path of joy. I can tell you right now that whatever unhappiness you experience in your life day-by-day is when you have fractured the relationship of a sovereign God to a bondslave. A slave is happy when he does what he is told. A slave is blessed and prospered when he does what he is told--when he fits into his master's plan.

However, when a slave begins bucking his master and begins taking off on his own, then he gets the whiplash on his back. What unhappiness is in our lives is because we are fracturing our relationship with our sovereign God, and violating His plan for us. I don't care what it is. You need not excuse yourself and tell yourself what a fine person you are, because that only means that you are better than some people in certain respects. Just don't forget your old sin nature is worse than theirs in other respects. So don't build anything on that. You aren't all that good. You aren't all that deserving. When you are unhappy, it is because of something that you have done--not something that comes upon you that you don't deserve.

The world, in seeking to bring happiness, seeks the immediate welfare, and the progress of mankind. So it devotes itself to materialism; to welfare programs; and, to poverty programs because this is assumed to be the way to happiness. The sense of well-being is sought in self-betterment and self-improvement. All of this ignores the fact that God has a plan tailor-made for your life. Until people are directed to seek that plan, there isn't going to be any joy. There isn't going to be any real satisfaction. Every device works when you use it the way it was designed. God tells us in 2 Timothy 1:7 that He did not design us for unhappiness. Rather, He designed us for a life of stability. "For God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

**A Bondslave**

So the sovereignty of God requires that we take the role of a bondslave. This is what Paul, with his associate Timothy, is declaring himself to be in this verse. A slave does not make his own decisions. A slave follows the plan of his master. So let's look at the nature of a bondslave. There are two things you should understand about a bondslave. First, he does not belong to himself. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: "What? Don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have of God, and you are not your own. For you are bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." A Christian's whole being (and that includes his human spirit, his soul, and his body) all belongs to God. You are not your own. You are God's free man from the penalties and consequences of sin, but you are also God's bondslave.

It was an honored title to be called a freed man of the emperor in the Roman Empire. It is a greater honor to be a free man of Jesus Christ, and an infinitely greater honor to be a bondslave of Jesus Christ. We belong to Him because He purchased us out of the slave market of sin. In Revelation 5:9, we have a group of people who are singing praises to the Lamb for this act of freeing them from slavery. Revelation 5:9: "And they sang a new song saying, 'You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals, for you were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation.'" Christ has redeemed us by His blood out of all people. He has purchased us and freed us. The Christian, as God's free man, rejoices to be the Lord's bondslave. He understands that he is to renounce himself and to serve the Lord and commit himself to the Lord with a reckless abandonment.

I don't know what you've been doing with your body. The question is whether you've been doing with it as if it belonged to you. I don't know what you've been doing with the areas of your soul--with your mind, with your emotions, and with your will. But the question is whether you have been doing with them as if they belong to you. I don't know what you've been doing with your human spirit, as if you could decide to feed on the Word of God or to ignore it--to be positive to it, or to be negative to it. But this is what we're talking about. If you are a bondslave of Jesus Christ, then you don't belong to yourself The Lord Jesus Christ owns you. That is the position of a bondslave.

There is a second thing that you are to understand about a slave. That is that he has absolutely no will of his own. In fact, he disregards his own interests to fulfill the will of his Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is why so much Christian service goes overboard. This is because Christians do not learn that they have no will of their own. You have heard me say many times (and it is one of the truest things you will ever hear), that Christian service always means not doing something else. Christian service is not something that gets left over.

This is out of keeping with the business of soldiering. You don't go to fight a battle in case you don't have anything else to do that day. You don't call the enemy up on the phone and say, "Listen, we don't have our buttons shined up yet, and some of the guys can't find their guns. Could we postpone this battle and have it tomorrow morning?" You don't do combat that way. It means that everything else is shoved out of the way when it's time to perform the service. If you don't learn that, I'll guarantee that you're going to be the sorriest saddest Christian someday in heaven that ever walked those golden streets. You're going to be in poverty all the way down the line. You may be the richest person on this earth, but you're going to be the cheapest poorest peon that ever walked the streets of heaven when it comes to spiritual rewards.

I want to make this perfectly clear because you're liable to hold it against me when you get up there and say, "You didn't make that perfectly clear to me." That's how it's going to work. You must take Christian service and say, "I don't let anything interfere with it. I put other things away so that I can perform this." Otherwise, you will never really get into service. You do that because you have no will of your own. When the Lord says, "Here it is, child, I want you to do this," you say, "OK." That's the commander-in-chief. You do what you're told. You don't go asking for a delay. You don't go arguing. You don't go debating. Many Christians have not learned the discipline that a military man knows--to do what he's told. That means that you disregard your own interests, and you fulfill the will of the Master Jesus Christ. The Christian's will is swallowed up in the will of a sovereign God.

Consequently, here comes God's will for your body. You have all kinds of opinions as to what you think is acceptable open range for you and your body. Romans 6:11-13 tell us, "Likewise reckon you also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. Neither yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but yield yourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God."

Verse 16 says, "Don't you know that to whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, whether of sin unto death or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked that whereas we were servants of sin, you have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered to you, being then made free from sin, you became the servants of righteousness." It says, "Being made then free men from sin, you became bondslaves of righteousness." There we have the beautiful contrast. "I am Christ's free man. I am Christ's bondslave. I share both roles." That is the role that God has designed for you and me as believers. That's what's involved in being able to carry the honored title of a bondslave of Christ. He tells you what to do with your body. It's not an instrument of righteousness, but an instrument of His righteousness. He tells you what to do with the facets of your soul.

1 John 2:16: "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (emotion) is not of the Father, but is of the world." 2 Corinthians 10:5: "Casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." The mentality of the soul, the emotions, and the will of the soul are all brought under the control of the Lord as His bondslave.

Then He controls our human spirit. John 4:24 tells us, "They that would worship God must worship Him in spirit (in your human spirit) and in truth" (in the truth of doctrine). So the Lord controls all the facets of the soul. No other Christian bondslave has the right to impose his will upon you either. This is another favorite trick that Christians like to pull on each other. We've always got pushy muscling elbowing Christians who are moving around and saying, "Now this is what you should do as a believer. This is how you should act. This is how you should perform." They're trying to tell you how to live your life as a priest. Usually they're trying to tell you how to live your life in some pattern that's acceptable to them, and is simply their personal preference and choice, and some pattern where they happen to be good maybe, but they don't want to talk too much about the patterns where they happen to be not so good.

So don't let any other Christian come along and try to impose his bondslavery on you. One slave does not tell another slave what to do. If you are the self-righteous type, I can tell you right now that it will not be very long before you'll be trying to tell other Christians (other slaves) how they should act. There isn't anything so pathetic as one slave telling another slave how to act. That is the Lord's business to tell you how to act.

Now here is the bondslave, Paul. Let's take a look at Paul in his role as a bondslave--a man who doesn't belong to himself, and a man that has no will of his own. How did it work out in the life of the apostle Paul? This is extremely illustrative for our blessing.

**Paul's Ministry**

The time came when God said, "Okay Paul, I've let you sit around Tarsus. You've been learning the Word of God." He had apparently established some works in the immediate area of Cilicia. He had reached out. He had been actually performing the work of the ministry. And, by the way, remember that that's what James means, in part, when he says, "Do not be hearers of the Word only, but doers." Hearing is learning the Word, and then there comes a time for doing the Word--the performance of the exercise of your gift and Christian service. The time came when God said, "Now Paul, you have learned the Word. The time has come for doing."

So in Acts 11:25, we read, "Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass that for a whole year, they assembled themselves with the church, and taught many people, and the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." The Lord laid it upon the heart of Barnabas, the older spiritual leader, to go to Tarsus and say, "Paul, I want you to come now, after the years that you've spent here in preparation, to come to the city of Antioch which has become the gentile center of Christianity. God has called you to be the unique missionary to the gentiles. I want you to come to Antioch and begin your ministry among the gentile people."

Paul also had this leading from the Lord, so he went. For a year, he exercised his gift of teaching. It was at Antioch that the Christian movement really began to take its firm solid hold upon the gentile world. Consequently, that's where they received this contemptuous title of "Christians." It was not a title of respect. It was a dirty word that was applied to the people who were followers of the Christ. But Paul was greatly used of the Lord in his teaching ministry there. To him had been revealed the gospel of the grace of God. It had been revealed to Paul in a distinctive clear way that it apparently had not been revealed to the other apostles.

In Galatians 1:11, Paul says, "But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not after man. (That is, I didn't get it from other people.) For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Now Paul actually received direct communications from the Lord Jesus Christ. He had the Lord as his teacher. Paul actually sat down with Him. The Lord Jesus Christ sat down with him and said, "Now Paul, I'm going to explain to you the doctrine of grace." That's the greatest thing in the world. Here Christ Himself is sitting down with Paul and explaining the doctrine of grace. The Lord would say, "Now Paul, I'm going to explain to you the doctrine of grace as it relates to the gospel in this age. And Paul, I'm going to explain the difference between Israel and the church," and so on. That's why through Paul's epistles, we have the full blossom distinction of what it means to be a Christian under grace. You won't learn it any place else.

And, it is not to be found in the gospels, incidentally. This is one of the keys that will signal to you that you have a church which is defective in its instruction. If every service, practically, is centered in one of the four gospels, that's a signal to you to watch out. That is because you will get very little truth relative to your place as a believer and your functioning in the grace age from the gospels. That was the life of Christ. It was the revelation of Paul which is contained in the epistles that tells us what the grace life is all about. So be careful that you do not put yourself under a ministry that is forever centering in the gospels. Even the liberals do that, by the way. To what extent they use the Bible, they use it practically entirely from the gospels. That is because they can just talk about the life of Christ, and make many inspirational points on that basis. To Paul was given the fullness of revelation concerning the one body of the Jew and gentile.

So the work in Antioch prospered. The believers multiplied. They were called Christians, finally, to distinguish them from the other gentile and Jewish unbelievers. And Paul had the experience here in this metropolitan center of learning again to meet people where they were to form a point of contact in order to explain God's Word to them. This is a point that you and I have to learn. We don't just barge up to people. You are sometimes given this impression, and I hope you will not fall for it. You are given the impression of a certain way to deal with people.

I used to do this when I was a kid in Chicago. I was a very zealous teenager for the Lord. I'd go down on Chicago's West side on Madison Street, and I would hand a person a tract. (There's nothing wrong with doing that.) However, I would say, "Are you a Christian?" If they said, "No," I would say, "Well, you're going to hell." And I would always make a big hit in Chicago. You might get a rap in the mouth for that. It was only the grace of God that kept me with this beautiful set of teeth that I have now. But there are ways of making your approach to win a hearing. This business of running around shouting some cliché things, "Jesus loves you; Jesus loves me; Jesus hates him;" or, whatever it is that you think will get somebody on your side--that's idiocy. That is not the Word of God.

Now here's what the apostle Paul has to tell you. This man was trained by God Himself to do his job. It took years of getting him set up to do it. In 1 Corinthians, it says, "For though I am free from all men, yet I have made myself servant (bondslave) unto all, that I might gain the more." And then what? "And unto the Jews, I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews. To them that are under the law, as under the law, not being myself under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law. To them that without the law, as without the law, being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ, that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak, I became as weak, that I might gain the weak. I am made all things to all men that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker of it with you." Now that's the divine biblical principle--that you find where a person is, and you approach it from that basis. If he's a Jew, you talk to him as a Jew, relative to the Messiah. If he's a gentile who is interested in material things and he wants rewards, you talk to him about the rewards that God has to offer. You make your point of contact where the person is, and it isn't the same for everybody.

So Paul learned this technique in Antioch. He taught the whole picture of Bible doctrine. That's one of the things that Acts 20 stresses--that Paul was a teacher of doctrine. In Acts 20:20, Paul says, "And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shown you and have taught you publicly, and from house to house. Verse 26: "Wherefore I testify unto you this day that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." That's something that a lot of ministers today (I'm sorry to say) cannot say--that they have not shunned to deliver to their people all the counsel of God. Most Christians are lucky if they hear anything beyond the gospel message Sunday after Sunday. So Paul's preaching was a ministry of the bondslave that had been prepared by God and was now ready to function under the Spirit's guidance.

Now, his preaching was strong medicine. He warned about following those who were negative to doctrine, and who were operating on corrupt motivations. Right here in Philippians 3:17, Paul says, "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them who walk even as you have us for an example. For many walk of whom I've told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is their appetite, and whose glory is their shame, and who mind earthly things." Paul didn't mind standing up and saying, "There are some members in this church whose appetites and whose inclinations and whose pursuits are not befitting you as a Christian, and don't follow them. Even if they're your strong, warm, personal friends, do not follow their interests and their ideals and their sense of values." Now that's strong medicine.

It was this quality in Paul that also led him to rebuke Peter for Peter's legalism in Galatians 2:11-12. Peter wouldn't sit down and eat with gentiles because other Jews were criticizing him. So Paul said to Peter, "You're wrong, Peter. You should know that the grace of God has freed you from those legalisms. You were wrong not to sit down and eat with gentile Christians. In the Corinthian church, he had lots of malcontents, and he skinned those people alive. He was a preacher of strong medicine. In 1 Corinthians 4:18, Paul says, "And now some are puffed up as though I would not come to you. But I will come to you shortly if the Lord wills, and will know not the speech of them who are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of meekness?" Paul says, "Make your choice. Straighten up and go positive toward the Word of God, or when I get there, it will be to discipline, with rebuking you as an apostle." That was strong medicine.

Now that's the kind of a man that the apostle Paul was. He was, as a matter of fact, ready to wash his hands of people who were rejectors. That's the point that a lot of us have not yet learned--that when we get to people who are rejecting us for what God is doing; who are rejectors of the truth of the Word of God; and, who are rejectors of true preaching of the Word, that there is upon us, as faithful bondslaves of Jesus Christ (in loyalty to Christ), to also be rejectors of the rejector. In Acts 13:50, Paul says, "But the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas (on one of their missionary tours) and expelled them out of their borders. But they shook off the dust of their feet against them and came unto Iconium."

This was their way of declaring that they, who had been rejected for the positive truth they taught, had washed their hands of the rejectors. To shake the dust off their feet was a significant act, and the people in front of whom they did this understood what they were saying. Most of us, when we meet the rejectors of the Word, and most of us who, when we meet the people who have rejected our local church ministry, and we meet these people someplace else, we meet them with grins and smiles, and happy, "Hail fellow well met." The apostle Paul, when he met them, turned and shook the dust off his feet against them. He said, "You have chosen dirt. You have chosen to be rejectors of the Word, and you have thereby chosen dirt. And I have separated myself from your position."

This doesn't mean that you don't like the person. It doesn't mean that you don't hope for his reconciliation, and that he comes to his senses. But you do not play this deceptive role that are our old sin natures love to play with people who are rejectors of God's word, and rejectors of the Lord to whom we are loyal. If they are rejectors of God's Word, they are rejectors of your Lord. If you are a true bondslave, you will not take that. Paul's teaching was strong medicine.

There were times when the apostle Paul had to labor to finance his own ministry. Now he had the divine right of being supplied. Galatians 6:6 makes it very clear that no preacher should ever have to go out and do one ounce of work in order to finance himself in the performance of his ministry. And the apostle Paul, while he had this right, and this was very clearly stated elsewhere, on occasions would not accept this right. In Galatians 6:6, he says, "Let him that is taught in the Word share with him that teaches in all good things." There are a lot of good things that are not just marginal things. There are a lot of churches that feel that if they manage to give the pastor enough to survive, that they have done enough to get into heaven on that alone. But the Word of God says that if somebody is communicating the Word of God to you, then you share with him in all good things.

There are many a Christian who enters into many good things in his life, but he doesn't realize that the people who are teaching him the Word of God are giving him the most important thing he's getting. What the butcher does for you is nothing. Suppose that the butcher is not there and the grocery store man closes up. What can happen to you? You'll starve and go to heaven. That's all. That's not bad. Most of you would be better off anyhow. You would save a lot of money.

There is nothing in life that is so important to you as that which is delivered to you by the communicator. That doesn't mean that the communicator is something. He's nothing. The fact is that I've noticed that God has a way of taking all the dunderheads and putting them in the ministry. Anyhow, it seems that there are a lot of them in there. If He can't figure out what to do with them: "Oh, I'll put them in the ministry." Yet, once they are communicating true doctrine, they become the most important personality in your life. From heaven's perspective, you will look back and see how true that was.

So it makes a lot of sense that I don't just share marginal things. If I have good things, I share it with this person. I communicate. That's what it means. I share with him these good things of my life--not just the things that sustain me, and that are essentials in my life. The communicator himself is nothing, but what God gives you through him, that is what is crucial. That's why we say, "Be objective." You don't have to like the communicator. All you have to love is the Word that he gives. If his word is true, God will discipline you if you reject it.

The apostle Paul had the divine right of financial support. In 2 Corinthians 12:13, he reminds these people of their attitude. You remember that the Corinthian church was one of those finky carnal churches that the apostle Paul really had to take to task in a strong way. He told those people that he would not even take their financial assistance. In 2 Corinthians 12:13, Paul says, "For what is it in which you were inferior to other churches?" He's being sarcastic in this verse. These people had written and said, "We are inferior to the other churches here. We're at Corinth. We're a metropolitan center, and we are inferior to the other churches because of the ministry of Paul. He didn't give us what all the other good churches have." They would look at other churches and say, "Look what this church has, and we don't have that in Corinth. So Paul says, "What is it in which you were inferior to other churches, except it be that I myself was not burdensome to you? Forgive me this wrong."

Paul says, "Because I took no financial support from you--that's how you were inferior. The other churches were taking care of their pastors all over that province, and you weren't taking care of yours because I wouldn't take your money." There were times when the apostle Paul, who was a tent maker, went to work with his own two hands, and he provided his own sustenance when he saw that this was necessary in order to make the point to a group of people who needed to get straightened out spiritually. That is what you do first, before you give your money. So he could say, in Acts 20:33-34, "I have coveted no man's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shown you all things, how that, so laboring, you ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Paul prepared others by supporting them in the very ministry in which he was engaged, and he prepared them to carry on after him. This man entered a great deal of suffering. In Acts 16:22-24, we read about his Philippian jail experience. In 2 Corinthians 11:23-28, we have a summary of his sufferings--all the things that he suffered physically and otherwise. Paul understood the business of Christian soldiering. He understood that serving the Lord means suffering in various ways. In 2 Timothy 2:3-4, he says, "Therefore, endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that fights entangles himself in the affairs of this life, that he may please Him who has chosen him to be a soldier." He suffered physically and he suffered psychologically. 1 Corinthians 4:9-13 tell us how he was held in contempt by those to whom he ministered. In Acts 17:31-32, we're told how he was scoffed at by the intellectuals at Athens. And this fellow was no dummy by any means himself.

Philippians 1:15-16 tell us how he was undermined by other Christians in order to give him misery in his ministry. However, Acts 20:22-24 show us that Paul was not dissuaded by any of these psychological pressures against him. He says, "And now, behold, I go bound in spirit into Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me, except that the Holy Spirit witnesses in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me, but none of these things move me; neither count on my life, dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus to testify the gospel of the grace of God." He rejoiced in his role as a bondslave. That was the thing that he pursued to the end.

Paul's desire was the Lord's commendation. He had a spiritual maturity structure. Philippians 3:13-14 teaches us that. 2 Timothy 4:6-8 was written just before he was executed, and it tells us that he was satisfied with the way that he had run his life--the course that he had followed. 1 Corinthians 9:25 tells us that he was looking for that crown of reward.

The apostle Paul was a man of great personal affection. He was capable of sadness in the face of negative volition. Acts 20:19 tells us how he even had tears when people said, "No" to the truth. 2 Corinthians 12:15 told how he loved people, and he loved them without expecting them to be nice to him back, or to love him back. When you really catch the spirit of love, one of the first things you discover about yourself is that it doesn't make any difference whether this person loves me back. However, when you are not loving toward people, then you will be running around demanding that they treat you nicely. Once you catch the spirit of Holy Spirit love, then it doesn't make any difference anymore whether people are nice to you or not. The love of Christ drove him to seek the good of everybody (Galatians 6:10). Even in this very book of Philippians, like in Philippians 4:1, he calls these Philippians "beloved" twice in one verse. He was a man of affection.

Well, his life came to an end, as you know. He had a desire to be with the Lord. This was something that all through his ministry he looked forward to. In Philippians 1:23, Paul says, "I am in a strait between two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better." Yet, he had the sense of obligation to keep on in the ministry. The time came, under the persecution of the emperor Nero, that Christianity became an illegal religion. Up to then, Paul had not been able to be touched because it was a legal religion. It was considered a sect of the legal religion of Judaism. At that point, it was separated from Judaism. It was given the contemptuous name of "Christian;" it was called a religion in itself; and, the Roman government stamped it illegal.

That's what got the apostle Paul. He didn't do anything wrong, but the fact that he was a Christian; the fact that he was a minister of the gospel, which was well known; and, the fact that Christianity was now illegal was all that Nero needed. So, in the year 68 A.D., Paul was finally tried. In that year, the head of the apostle Paul was put on the chopping block, and he was beheaded, as this was the method of execution for a Roman citizen. The life of the great apostle Paul, who gave us the book of Philippians, came to an end.

Now this does raise the issue, as I said earlier, that as bondslaves of Jesus Christ, we have no will of our own. What kind of a will do we have? How do we function? How do we know the will of God? We will take that up next time.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1973

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