***Triumph out of Trouble, No. 1 - PH16-01  
  
Advanced Bible Doctrine - Philippians 1:12-14***

We are looking at Philippians 1:12-14. Our subject is triumph out of trouble. Philippians is the "Happiness Is" book. The word "happy" does not occur in the book of Philippians, but rather the word "joy" does appear in our translation. The word "joy" means happiness. This refers to that inner quality (that inner happiness) which is the product of positive volition response to Bible doctrine. In other words, learning the Word of God is growing in happiness. Paul regularly prays for the Philippian Christians in a spirit of happiness. We have found that what he prays for in their behalf is that he is asking God to expand their divine mental attitude love.

However, what we are talking about here is divine mental attitude love that originated with God the Holy Spirit ("agape"), as well as the "philos" type. Paul prays that this would mount in an increasing tidal wave with the Philippian believers. He also prays that God would give them a sense of true values--that they would have the sense to know what's worthwhile in life and what is not worthwhile. He prays that they would have the good sense to recognize the people that are worthy of their association, and the people that are unworthy for them to associate themselves with as believers. We should discern between people who will be a blessing and people who will be a hindrance. He prays that they all have a sense of what to do with their money and what to do with their lives. Many Christians simply dissipate their lives uselessly. Young people do, because they invest their life in causes that are worthless--causes that any unbeliever can pursue.

It is a very foolish, dangerous, self-defeating thing for you as a young person (or an older person) to be looking toward your life and to be making decisions about the things that you're going to do (the involvement of your life) apart from the will of God, and for you to be pursuing goals that are not based on, "I want to serve the Lord." That should be number one. I want my life to serve the Lord. I want my life to count for the Lord. God has no other plan for you but the plan that involves His glory and your service to his glory. Therefore, the apostle Paul prays, "O God, give the Philippians a sense of discernment and good judgment relative to values and goals that are befitting them as Christians." Paul also prayed that they may be productive in divine good. You find this in verses 9-11.

**Paul's Imprisonment**

In verse 12, the apostle Paul turns to an issue which appears to be a cause for unhappiness for the apostle. Here is a book on "Happiness Is," and here is a situation immediately in which we find the apostle Paul which would seem to be, if anything, the most unhappy thing in the world, and the most disastrous thing in the world for him as a Christian missionary. Therefore, Paul takes up the cause of the gospel in the Roman Empire while he, the chief exponent of that gospel among the gentiles, is a prisoner. The line of thinking here in these verses is probably in response to a question which was raised by Epaphroditus, the man who brought the letter to him from the Philippian church. The question that was probably raised by Epaphroditus was, "What's happening to the gospel? What's happening to the Lord's cause when you're in prison here?"

I want to remind you that as of this point when the book of Philippians was written, Paul has now been in prison for almost 4 years. He is coming down to the end of the fourth year of imprisonment. In other words, the apostle Paul, when we pick up the story here, is in a boxed-in situation. He is in prison awaiting the final disposition of his case. This is the first Roman imprisonment. Paul had two Roman imprisonments. The first time, he was in prison for this period of almost 4 years between Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Rome, and then he was released (apparently for about a year). Then Nero heightened the persecution toward Christians and made Christianity automatically an illegal religion against the empire. Therefore, immediately, no matter what Paul did and no matter what Paul said, he was guilty, and he was taken prisoner about a year later. Ultimately, as a result of that second imprisonment, he was executed.

Therefore, Paul here at this time has been in Rome for two years. He is nearing the end of this second year of imprisonment, and he is under house arrest. He is not in a dungeon as he is during the second imprisonment. Here, they have allowed him simply to rent an apartment or to rent a house, and he is under house arrest. You find this taught in Acts 28:30. The area of his activity however is restricted to this house jail in which he is under constant guard and constantly chained to a Roman soldier.

This is what's known as being boxed-in. There is so much to be done for the Lord's work in this empire, and here the apostle to the gentiles is out of action. All of his contact with the churches is only through agents. He has no direct contact communication involvement with the churches. His situation certainly is conducive to a lot of personal discouragement and depression. The concern on the part of the believers is what raises the issue, "What's happening while you're boxed-in?"

We all sooner or later find ourselves in a position in life where we too are boxed in. The question then arises as to how we are going to handle that situation. Sooner or later, you find yourself in a condition where, in some circumstance relative to some factors, you too are boxed-in. It's going to be vital to know how to respond in order that you do not become a casualty. The apostle Paul did not become a casualty. You and I as Christians will face pressures. We'll face restrictions--things that we have to live with. It takes divine viewpoint enablement for us to cope with these boxed-in situations.

I suppose this position of restriction was even more painful with the apostle Paul because his condition resulted from a lapse on his part in grace, of all things. The great apostle of the grace of God is in prison in this boxed-in situation relative to his ministry as a Christian missionary because of a lapse of grace. Four years prior to this time, the apostle Paul was in the city of Jerusalem, and there he engaged in an act of legalism in taking a Jewish vow in the temple. Acts 21:17-39 gives you the basic story. The chapters that follow unravel the results of that act of legalism. The purpose of this act was to convince the opposition (the opposing Jews in Jerusalem) that Paul kept the law (Acts 21:24). Therefore, Paul took this vow (this act of Jewish legalism), and he took this course of action, mind you, on the advice of the pastors at Jerusalem. The pastors in effect had advised him to play ball with the Jewish social, civic, and spiritual prejudices which were an expression of their human viewpoint. Paul should have championed the grace of God and made his point to these people with sound doctrine. Instead, he decided to play ball and to compromise with their human viewpoint.

In other words, he's trying to reassure his opponents and approve himself so that he can gain a hearing for the Word. He made himself the issue rather than the Word of God. When you run around as believers trying to prove yourself to people and trying to reassure people concerning yourself, you have brought yourself into a position that God has never allowed you (or given you cause or justification) to place yourself. You and I are not the issue. It is doctrine and it is the gospel that are the issues. The apostle Paul should have zeroed in on the subject of grace, and the whole new era of grace, and he should not have compromised himself by trying to appeal to the legalists in Jerusalem. Human viewpoint devices are never called upon in order to secure a hearing for the Word of God. Therefore, Paul should have rejected this well-meaning advice of the Jerusalem pastors instead of being persuaded by them.

This is one of the problems when you talk to a group of pastors. Pastors have individual frailties and bad habits of one kind and another, and bad viewpoints. There is something about getting a group of them together that seems to bring out the worst parts about them. It just stimulates all of their bad viewpoints and their bad habits. Generally, I have found, in speaking to men who have been in the ministry for many many years and who have done a substantial work for the Lord, that they find it to their advantage to avoid getting themselves involved with pastor fellowships and pastor groups and pastor movements. They find that they pick up a lot of bad habits.

Well, the apostle Paul would have been better off had he steered clear of this pastors' fellowship, which was a very natural thing for him to do because he was reporting to them what God had done among the gentiles. However, in the process, he suffered the loss of a prime precious possession that we have, and that is the freedom of our choice. The result was that Paul's independent responsiveness to the Lord's will was destroyed.

For so long, Paul had been following what the Lord wanted him to do. From the day that he went blind on the Damascus road, when he met Christ for the first time, and all through the years of his ministry, it has been responsiveness to the Lord, and let the chips fall where they may. He was not preoccupied with the opinions of people and what people thought about his ministry. He was responsive to the Lord, and he was not squeezed off into the mold of what someone else thought he should do. Instead, here Paul suddenly moves away from that position, and the result is four years of imprisonment--four boxed-in out-of-action years. Therefore, this must have been a rather painful subject that he picks up here in the book of Philippians because he's in this position in Rome as the result of that action on his part so long ago. He took the vow; a riot took place in Jerusalem; and, he almost got killed (Acts 22:22-24).

Finally, he was arrested by the Roman officials. He was taken into protective custody because they discovered that there was a plot to assassinate him. Therefore, they moved him to Caesarea, the headquarters of the province. For two years he was in prison in Caesarea (Acts 24:27). Finally, he saw that he was getting nowhere, so he appealed his case to the Roman Empire as was his privilege as a citizen of Rome. So he appealed the case to Nero in Rome (Acts 25:10-12, Acts 26:32). Therefore, between Caesarea (two years there) and Rome (two years), there he had four years under the discipline of God as the result of that act of legalism violating the principle of grace. This was the price of accommodating himself to willful spiritual ignorance. Therefore, the apostle Paul was acting in the freedom of choice which was his all the time, but the choice was one that indeed cost a very substantial time period in his ministry. That's the background when we come to verse 12. These people are concerned what has happened to the Lord's work with Paul tied up in prison, and the question is painful because of how he got there.

**Philippians 1:12**

So he says in verse 12, "I would you should understand." The word "would" is the Greek word "boulomai." "Boulomai" is present active indicative. This word "boulomai" is the Greek word which means a decision that a person reaches as the result of thinking something through. In other words, it means after you have sat down and considered a deliberate exercise of consideration, then you deliberately exercised your will. Therefore, in other words, this was a decision after previous deliberation, and it indicates a strong desire. What the word stresses is the fact that our volition produces decisions and choices which are based upon our thinking.

Our thinking flows from what the Bible calls our heart, or that part of our mind that makes decisions. Our thinking is influenced either by the old sin nature, or it is influenced by God the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul, in the word "boulomai", declares to them that he has been thinking; he has come to a decision; and, he is now going to share that with them. After thinking it over, he is going to explain to them the factors that are involved relative to his imprisonment. The present tense indicates his constant desire. Active indicates his free and deliberate decision. Indicative means a statement of fact. This expression signals that something of considerable importance is going to follow. It will be a declaration stemming from his freedom to decide on an action. You have freedom to decide on an action.

**Our Freedom of Choice**

Let's pause for a moment and take a look at this business of the freedom of your choice. Modern psychiatry has learned a hard lesson the hard way. The old Freudian concept used to be that people are not responsible for their choices. It claimed that something causes them to act, and they should not be held responsible. Modern psychiatry realizes that this is the kiss of death upon ever getting a person straightened out within his being. Everybody has to be faced with the fact that he's responsible for his choices, and that he has the freedom to make choices. Therefore, here are a few points.

1. The fact of volition in the human soul connotes responsibility for one's action. The Mosaic Law established protection for human rights and freedom of choice. As a system, the Mosaic Law connoted certain responsibilities. It told people certain things they were to do and certain things they were not to do. All of this therefore connoted freedom and responsibility to take certain actions in order to protect that freedom. People will hurt themselves when they use their volition according to human viewpoint guidelines. Therefore, the Mosaic Law gave divine viewpoint guidelines in order to protect freedom.

A person's maturity is actually indicated by how much responsibility he takes for what happens to him. When something happens to you, you should not be forever looking for a patsy; you should not be forever engaging in a deluge of gorging yourself with self-pity; you should not be forever looking to blame someone else for your situation; and, you should not be looking back and saying, "Oh, if only I had been this;" "If only you had done this;" or, "If only I had done this." The issue is personal responsibility. Where you and I are at this point in time is the result of our own choices. One of the marvelous things about grace is that *grace overrules our stupidity*. The grace of God overrules our bad decisions and our bad choices, and it works them for good. That's one of the magnificent promises of Romans 8:28.

1. Human freedom of choice was established in Eden as a divine institution for the human race. Freedom to choose exists in the soul of every person. During this time of the angelic warfare in which you and I live, the demonic angels zero in on separating a person from his freedom to choose. The demonic host is very much interested in frustrating your ability to make choices. They will hit you in any number of directions in order to keep you from making free choices that God has ordained as your right and privilege. They will do this to you physically; they will do this to you socially; they will do this to you in the economic circumstances of your life; they will do this in the surroundings of your family; and, they will do this to you in various spiritual ways. In one way or another, you ought to be deeply aware of the fact that all the forces of hell are out to frustrate your right to make decisions relative to, and compatible with, the plan of God for your life. Human freedom was established as a divine institution. No person; no human organization; and, no government has the right to deny you the freedom of your choice.

God has designed laws to preserve human freedom. These include such laws, for example, as the Ten Commandments. Here is a moral code which is designed specifically to preserve freedom. The rejection of true morality will lead to the destroying of freedom. One of the reasons freedom is quickly coming to an end in this nation is in part due to the fact that this nation has accepted violations of many of the basic principles of the moral code of the Word of God. The basic code of the Ten Commandments is being violated again and again by the statesmen of this nation. Divine laws are there because God recognizes (and we are to recognize) the rights of others. These laws are to preserve the option to choose. God has designed laws to preserve our freedom and to enable us to have the option to choose. All laws, rightly constituted, are simply an attempt to preserve the right to choose.

1. God's plan of grace involves the option of human volition; that is, making decisions compatible with a grace attitude. For example, believing in Christ is a decision compatible with grace. God has set up a plan so that we can make decisions that are compatible with this plan of grace. The techniques of the Christian life, which we've been studying, are compatible with grace. These decisions are made on the basis of doctrine. They enable us to enter the right relationships with the Lord. The freedom of choice that you and I have is confronted by everybody else's freedom of choice. Everywhere you move, you are confronted by this mass of free choices--this mass of free wills of other people. You can see what a problem this immediately presents--the conflicts and the influences upon us.

So God has set up a system to enable us to act in grace relative to the free choices of other people. Sometimes we don't do what we might like to do. Sometimes we choose to bypass something that is our preference. Happiness is not always gained by doing exactly what we want in spite of the free wills of other people. Freedom of choice requires the exercise of authority to preserve that freedom. That is a control element over the mass of free wills. When we act in grace, we maintain our freedom, and we maintain the freedom of other people.

1. All sin, known and unknown, involves the action of human volition. *Nobody ever sins without deciding to do so*. You and I do what we want to do. Therefore, quit excusing yourself for doing something that you should not have done. When you have done it, don't be justifying it as if there were some circumstances that were overriding your will. Sin, whether we know we're sinning or if we do not know we're sinning, is a result of the exercise of our will. The old sin nature within us cannot produce sin except as the result of the exercise of our own wills.

It is not unusual for people to say to me, "Well, yes I did choose to do this, but the reason was because I had this background. This is the way I was trained at home. This is the way they taught me to think." Whether you believe yourself to have been programmed; whether you just do not pay attention; or, whether you do not know the Word of God, your choices are your responsibility, and your sin is your deliberate doing. Therefore, these crimes that so often are excused as not being a person's responsibility are not well taken because a person performs crimes by choice. So outwardly, the sweetest meekest looking person can be the most self-willed and bullheaded character you ever met. Everybody has a will, and everybody is responsible for the choices that he makes. He cannot make wrong choices without deliberately deciding to do so.

1. Free choice is the basis for the functioning of true love. A man is the aggressor in love. He is the aggressor toward his right woman, and he must have freedom in that aggression. If his right woman squelches the freedom of his aggression, she will not receive his love. The woman, in her role as responder, must also have freedom to be able to respond from her will to that aggression of her right man. If her volition is squelched, she will not be able to respond in love. A man has to be free to pursue his particular woman without being squelched. She has to be free to respond and to respond aggressively, or true love cannot exist. It cannot be coerced. The more vigorous the male pursuit, and the more vigorous the female response, the more the volition is involved. Therefore, free choice is the basis of the functioning of true love. This is why God was very careful to make it possible for us to be able to choose. Volition cannot trigger something if the will of the other person does not choose to respond.
2. Human freedom is the basis for determining personal maturity. When we are mature, we do not excuse ourselves. When we are babies, then emotion dominates our souls; it destroys our maturity; and, we are excusing ourselves for our choices. Human freedom is the basis for determining our personal maturity. Human freedom calls for responsibility. When we are responsible, we reflect a maturity.
3. Freedom of choice is the issue in personal salvation. All that is necessary for salvation has been provided through the work of Christ on the cross. The question is, "What do we choose to do with Christ?" (John 3:36). So freedom of choice has to be involved in salvation.
4. Every command in the Bible, positive and negative, indicates responsibility for protecting human freedom through observing divine laws. The reason that God tells us not to do something and to do other things is to protect your freedom. Therefore, to obey these rules is to respect that wonderful quality of our personal choice.

Therefore, getting back to the apostle Paul here, he has exercised his free choice, and he is in prison because of it. He has acted on the basis of some advice that he received which he should not have acted upon. He now exercises that same freedom of choice to clarify the implications of the boxed-in situation in which he has found himself. Therefore, he says, "I would (after having thought this through and having come to this decision) that you should understand." This word "understand" is "ginosko." "Ginosko" is present tense which means that he constantly wants this issue to be clear in their minds. He wants them to understand what has happened to the gospel with his imprisonment. It is active--that they should personally grasp this. Infinitive indicates a purpose. This signals to us that it is his purpose to clarify this issue for them. He addresses them as "brethren" which means that he is talking to Christians. He says, "The things which happened to me," and this is a Greek idiom--simply my experience. Things don't just happen to us. They come to us either as a result of the sovereign will of God or of the permissive will of God in the exercise of our free choice.

However, Paul says, "The things of my experience (referring to these four years that he's been in prison) have fallen out." The phrase "have fallen out" is the Greek word "erchomai." "Erchomai" actually means "to come." So he is saying, "I want you to understand that my experience, which has come to pass for me." This is in the perfect tense which means that it has happened in the past but the effects have continued to the present. Perfect means something takes place in the past, and then the results of that keep on being experienced. He's still experiencing the results of the decision to follow the advice of those Jerusalem pastors. They have fallen out as the result of his personal choices. Active means that these things are moving together for good. Indicative means a statement of fact which is true as the result of Paul's boxed-in experience. In spite of his situation, what he is going to tell them is that the gospel is moving out in new ways and in new directions. The work is not stalled. The prison epistles, as a matter of fact, were the result of this period in his life. He is going to point out that some people have been made bold by his imprisonment to become witnesses for the Lord.

However, some people, he's going to point out, dislike the apostle Paul. So, they're on a witness kick. They're off on a big witnessing jag in Rome. He says the reason they're doing that is because they want to show how spiritual they are, and that although they are negative toward him and his ministry, that God is really prospering them. So they're off on this big witnessing kick all over the city of Rome. Some of them wouldn't be hustling so hard if it wasn't because of their antagonism toward Paul. In other words, they were eager to cut the apostle Paul down, and approve how unnecessary he was to their spiritual lives. The reason they were doing this was because they were negative toward Paul. They were negative toward his ministry. They were negative toward his teaching. So they had to get out there and hustle and say, "Look how the Lord is using us. Look how wonderful is the circle of Christians that we move in. See how we are being prospered. They wanted to be more successful than the apostle Paul.

However, the question was, "What constitutes success?" We're going to get into that. This is in the context which follows. However, this is part of what the apostle Paul is trying to make clear to these Philippians. It is also the background for us to realize that a lot of people were giving Paul a lot of mean treatment. This was in addition to his boxed-in circumstance, and yet he possessed fantastic inner happiness.

He realized his mistake four years before. He had confessed it. What was now a continuing period of discipline turned into a period of blessing. That's the point. When we make a wrong move, and even a move that boxes us in, yet, at the point of confession, all of the agony turns to blessing. While he was not released for four years from this imprisonment, yet marvelous things of long range blessing were the result. Do you see what I mean by grace? *You cannot foul up your life*. Sooner or later, the grace of God comes in and works all things together for good. Just as soon as you see how good it's going, you get your crummy little hands on it, and you say, "Let me see if I can make it bad again," and you can. You say, "Now see that. See what you can do with that Lord." He turns right in and he makes it good, and it makes you so mad that you get in there and you tear it all apart and stomp on it and tear to shreds and say, "Now let me see you make it good." He comes in and He makes it good again. Sooner or later, you relax and say, "Grace is always a winner. Because I am in grace, I am always a winner."

Here's a period in which Paul recognize the consequences, and yet the blessings of his act. Now he wants to make it clear to these concerned Philippian Christians. So a Christian can have a super abundance of happiness in the midst of suffering, and in the midst of very restricted circumstances on restriction to his freedom. This condition is very wonderfully illustrated, for example, by the Macedonian Christians in 2 Corinthians 8:2 who gave their money so fantastically out of the depths of trials, tribulation, and personal poverty. Mind you, they gave it out of personal poverty. By the way, they did this graciously. They didn't come along to that offering box and say, "Oh, well listen. You know I don't know that I can give. We are really having a hard time. My wife has lost her job, and there are only three of the kids in the family who are working now. That's only four paychecks. However, we're going to try to do something." There's nothing so cheap like having a couple of people in the family working, and then people saying, "Well, I don't know if I can afford" some trivial thing.

People who have money but no class do this. People who have money but no class are constantly pretending that they can't afford something. People who have class have 15 cents in their pocket, and you think they're ready to take a trip to Europe and around the world, and are going to invite you to join them. Now that's class. He can hardly buy a Coke for you, but you think he's going to take you around the world. That's class. However, when you're cheap, you've got money, and you go around saying, "Oh, I don't know if I can afford that." If you're a Christian and you're oriented to the Word of God, you're going to develop some class. You're not going to be cheap relative to material things. That's one of the tremendous things about these Macedonian Christians. They were really poor, and yet they gave in such liberality that Paul felt extremely humbled and almost moved to tears as he saw these people giving to Jerusalem Christians who were in poverty, and maybe many of them perhaps had even more than the Macedonians who were giving to them.

The apostle Paul knows that you can be in suffering and you can be in restricted circumstances, and yet have great happiness. Therefore, he says that he wants them to understand that all of this has "fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel." "Furtherance" is the word "proskope." "Proskope" simply means "forward progress." It actually comes from a Greek word that means "to cut before." It is used of an advance party in the army which is clearing the way for the advancing forces. Therefore, Paul's circumstances, he said, have been an advance force clearing the way for what is to follow. What is to follow? The most magnificent testimony to the city of Rome that Rome has ever experienced.

Please remember that up to this time, the apostle Paul in his ministry has never reached the western part of the greatest empire of all times, the Roman Empire. Up to this time, he has been restricted to the eastern portion of the empire. He has moved in through this disciplinary situation and through the reworking of the grace of God that has now made him a winner. He is opening the way to the influence of the gospel of the grace of God, and the full counsel of grace, into the western part of the Roman Empire. This is a magnificent thing. Paul is the pioneer missionary who is opening up this area of the world.

This is illustrated throughout the Word of God. Look at Joseph. Joseph was clearing the way into Egypt. That brought 70 people and turned them into a magnificent nation of 2 million people. Israel was boxed in at the Red Sea and saw the power of God open the way in their behalf. Consequently, from then on, forever Israel referred back to the deliverance at the Red Sea as the standard of the power of God being exercised in their behalf. This is as we today as believers look back to the resurrection and say, "That's the kind of power that God exercises for us now." The Jews of the Old Testament said, "Look what God did for us at the Red Sea. Now that was power." We today say, "Look what God did in raising a dead body in Jesus Christ. That's power. That's what I have in my life day-by-day." You look at Job in his sufferings, and the magnificent statement from him relative to what God will do for the man who says, "Blessed be the name of the Lord. The Lord has given. The Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." The same was true of the apostles; the early Christians; and, even the Lord Jesus Christ. These were people who cut their way for the rest of us to follow.

**Witnessing**

All of this is the furtherance specifically, he says, of the gospel. That is referring here to witnessing which is described now in the context which follows. Paul here is declaring the grace way of witnessing, and how it is opening up new doors in the city of Rome. By the way, this is not some hotshot technique that someone has come up with and says, "Listen, I'll sell you this book for a dollar. I'll tell you how to witness. It will make you a very marvelous witness. You'll be very successful as a witness." So you say, "Oh, I'd like to be a witness. I'll buy that book for a dollar." And the man who sold the book becomes so rich that he sends a lot of money to missionaries, and he becomes a great witness. Meanwhile, you don't learn very much of anything. Powerful witnessing is not a gimmick device. I'm not going to go into those here. You know them. You know all the little trinkets and little booklets and little approaches. If you want to use that, alright.

However, I remind you that the basic approach for witnessing is a natural approach as the result of those who love the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you know what a lot of witnessing amounts to? It amounts to salesmanship. It amounts to people trying to sell Jesus Christ to you. You're not going to make much of a salesman on anything if you're not in love with the product. So we come up with these gimmick devices. Or some of you feel like, "Well, it doesn't seem very nice if I don't witness. All the other Christians do. I'm intimidated." Or somebody has put you under pressure. Listen, if anybody ever puts you under pressure for witnessing, you're out of it. Don't let anybody ever challenge you by saying, "If you really loved the Lord, you'd storm out this door; you'd walk down this aisle; and, you'd witness to ten people today." You've heard the device that if all of you would just witness to five people and lead them to the Lord, and then all of those would lead five more, and all of those would lead five more, we'd have the whole world in short order, wouldn't we?

All of these are human viewpoint devices, and you don't want to fall for the trap. The Bible very clearly says that we are to witness. The Bible very clearly declares that we are to be prepared to witness through the Word of God. As we are prepared, the Bible makes it very clear that God is going to bring people into the orbit of your life, and He will present the opportunity for you to witness, and you will know under the guidance of the Holy Spirit that this is it. You will know what to say, and you'll say it the right way. Preachers like to get you to go storming out. They like to sic people on the unsaved. They challenge you, as a light of God, to storm out into the world and win the world for Christ. That's the average church witnessing program, "Sic 'em!" Well, you're just not going to get very far with that. I don't want to discourage you, but there is a way to do it, and the Bible says we should do it. We are very much interested in doing it; I know that many of you are very effective in doing it; and, you do it. You're constantly reporting the opportunities that God has given you. You know enough about doctrine that you can talk intelligently. The gospel is a teaching game.

Don't get carried away because a high-priced evangelist comes to town with his high-priced team. He proceeds to witness with entertainment. That's another device. You get a lot of entertainment up there. These guys are strumming the guitar and the old drum is beating. Well, we pull that out on Sunday nights ourselves with our band. We know that gimmick. We entertain you. When we have a good march; we play the Marine Corps Hymn; or, Anchors Away, the offering goes right up. That's an old game. However, this is not God's program of witnessing.

Nor is it His program to bring VIPs in (bring the important personalities). We're going to find here in a little bit that the apostle Paul was witnessing not only to individual believers, but he was witnessing to the biggest of people. However, he was not impressed with them. He was impressed with the gospel that he was delivering. You may be sure that the apostle Paul didn't gather a few of the entertainment stars in his home, and come by and say, "You can come up here; we're going to let you meet these folks; they all love the Lord; and, maybe it'll rub off on you. That is evangelism by entertainment. Because it's popular; because everybody says, "Oh, it's so wonderful;" and, because everybody will storm to attend something like that, don't you be trapped relative to your life. God has a place for you to witness, and that witnessing is done in an orderly effective form. The apostle Paul is declaring the fantastic outreach now that has been opened to him as the result, of all things, of a move on his part that put him into prison and boxed him in.

What's your situation today? What has boxed you in so that you think that you cannot survive; so that you are thinking that you're at the end of the rope; so that you just don't think you can stand it any longer; and, that you can carry the burden no longer? Whatever it is, if it's a matter of discipline, confession removes the pressure, and immediately it turns to blessing. Right within this kind of a situation, God will again re-weave the patterns of your life, and you will be a winner.

So, the apostle Paul says in verse 12, "After having thought this through very carefully, I have come to a deliberate decision that I want it made clear to you believers that certain things have taken place in my experience which have come about, and these things have served to advance, as a pioneer forward movement on my part, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ." This in the midst of a situation where it wouldn't seem, Paul says, that he could have much of an outreach with anything. Next time, we're going to take a look at how fascinating and how extensive this outreach became from this jail house that he himself rented and paid for in the city of Rome, and as he ministered from a situation of great restriction. Therefore, let us not weep and wail over the problems and trials that are our normal lot as believers. Let us reach out for the realization that grace will make a way open to you to be as magnificent in your outreach within the circle that you move as Paul was in his.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1973

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