

KEEP THY HEART

A Bible-Based Devotional

Turn to: **Philippians 1:12-21**
“How God can turn bad to good”

God has a remarkable way of taking bad things and turning them around for good, such as in the story of Joseph (Genesis 50:20), or most significantly, with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ (John 11:50-52). In today's passage, I would like to look at three bad things that God can use for good when we trust Him.

1: Painful situations (v12-14). First, God can use painful situations in our lives to actually embolden others to live for Him better. That may sound odd, but it's something Paul **wants us to understand**; and he will illustrate with his own experience. He was a prisoner, and they say he had an elite group of Roman soldiers guarding him around the clock. Paul notices how things **have fallen out rather** for good—i.e., they just “happened” to work out, it would seem (but really, God was working them out). Paul's imprisonment, contrary to expectations, actually brought about **the furtherance of the gospel!** Throughout church history, much persecution meant to stamp out Christianity has actually spread it.

(v13) But how did this happen with Paul? Interestingly, the “buzz” around town was Paul's **bonds in Christ**; i.e., they knew he was locked up for being a Christian. Although Paul's *intellect* was formidable, it wasn't the talk around town; it was his imprisonment. Some say that Paul witnessed to all the rotating guards who regularly changed shifts until the entire palace had heard of this Christian! What a testimony. And since the palace was central, in Rome, news of Paul's bonds spread to other areas, as no doubt carpenters, masons, farmers, and other trades and people took the news of this intriguing prisoner around the world.

(v14) Not only that, but **many of the brethren in the Lord** actually **grew confident**, not *in spite* of Paul's bonds, but **by his bonds**. How is that possible? Perhaps you've seen a sweet saint going through a

terrible sickness, and instead of growing bitter, they get closer to Jesus. By their bonds, so to speak, you are convicted and emboldened to better live for God. Maybe Christians who formerly asked themselves, “What will happen to me if I share the gospel?” are now **much more bold to speak the word without fear**—not in a whisper, and less cautious about when, and with whom, they share it. Perhaps one way we can try to be more bold is to “parachute” references to Jesus and the gospel into everyday conversations.

2: Mean people (v15-18). Second, God can use unkind people to spread the gospel. It's hard to imagine how someone could **preach Christ even of envy and strive**; yet Paul says that this is **indeed** the case. Maybe they thought, “I'll show that Paul that he's not the *only* one who knows how to preach!” When faced with unkind people, like Paul, let's not forget about those who preach **of good will**; there are some good people who just want to serve Jesus.

(v16) How did some people **suppose to add affliction to Paul's bonds** by **preaching Christ of contention**? They were preaching the truth (at least essentially); yet even then, they did it with the wrong spirit. Maybe they tried to throw little jabs at Paul in their sermons that only he would understand. Maybe others have done that to you, saying things here or there in a group setting that you know are secretly directed toward you in a wrong spirit.

(v17) The **other** people preach **of love**; their motivation is correct. Do you witness to others because you *have* to, or because you love Jesus and them? Paul was **set for the defence of the gospel**; that is, he was positioned and fixed there by God to spread the gospel and to resist a great onslaught of devilish hate against Christians, I believe. Some people today are like that—stabilizing forces in our culture, set there by God to defend the gospel. Stand with them when they stand for the gospel.

(v18) Sometimes, we have to take a step back and ask, with Paul, “**What then?**” What does it all mean when some preach the truth with the wrong spirit...in a sense, so what? Paul **rejoices** that the end result is the same: **Christ**

is preached. Maybe a pastor has been unkind to you or isn't even saved; but you can still rejoice that the gospel is being preached. Maybe a church member or deacon made you feel unwanted; but although it stings, you can still rejoice that the gospel is being spread. You can feel Paul's strong will on this: **yea, and will rejoice**; rejoicing is partly a choice. There is plenty to complain about, and we do need to stand up to evil (as Paul is doing here); but there is also plenty of *good* we can praise God for. We stand against the darkness of our culture, but at the same time, we rejoice in the light of Jesus Christ.

3: Death (v19-21). Third, God can use even *death* for good, to call us home to heaven. Not only does Paul rejoice in what God is doing today, but **he knows that** God has great things in store for him in the future. Let's not take our eyes off of heaven. Sometimes, we can't see how God is working today; but as Christians, we can always rejoice in the future.

Earlier, Paul said things had "fallen" out for good; but here, he says **this shall turn** to good; in other words, sometimes God works the anonymity of seeming chance; and other times, He forcefully turns situations in a public and open way. As spiritual as Paul was, he still needed **their prayers** for his own life. Let's never be "too spiritual" to ask for prayer; we may not want to share every situation or all the details, but we should have the humility to really want the prayers of godly people for us.

(v20) What landed Paul in jail? Did he go wrong somewhere? Did he have some secret sin? No; he was right in the center of God's will. Other people were ashamed of Paul's chains (cf. implication of II Timothy 1:16); but Paul did not need to be himself. Don't let Satan make you feel **ashamed** for the godly standards that you hold. Don't feel embarrassed if you don't know the details of the latest ungodly movies or TV shows. What the world needs is people with biblical convictions to have **all boldness**; humble, but firm and grounded.

But how can **Christ be magnified in Paul's body**? I.e., isn't God big enough on His own, without needing a "microscope" or something to "magnify" Him? Someone wrote that it's more like a *telescope*; God is far off in

the minds of the world (Psalm 10:4), but through our testimony, we bring God closer to them. In that sense, we "magnify" Him. Would you say that your life brings Jesus closer to other people? Our testimony can be **by life, or by death**, or by anything in between. Our part is just staying faithful to God, and He will glorify Jesus through our bodies, as He did with Paul.

(v21) We need to determine to live for Jesus no matter what everyone else does (**For to me**, cf. Joshua 24:15). Don't say, "But my family doesn't care for the Bible," or, "My husband or wife doesn't love Jesus"; but with Paul, determine that *to you, to live is Christ*. To live is not a career, or fishing, or weekend parties, or the latest movie, or your hobby, or money. To the extent that such things are pure or neutral (like a godly career or money), they are simply means to an end, something to pay the bills, so to speak. What gets you up in the morning? What would you say gives you meaning in life? If it's a hobby, or a career, and that's it, then we should realize that those things will not last. And while death is feared by those who live only for today, a Christian can say that **to die is gain**. To the world, to die is the end of the party. Secular people may try to shun the term "funeral" and instead call it a "celebration of life," but they are desperately without hope outside of Jesus Christ, which makes me very sad to see. A Christian might say, "I'm not afraid to die, I just don't want to be there when it happens!" The *process* of dying can be fearful to us at times, but death itself isn't; it's just the doorway to a glorious, eternal heaven with Jesus Christ.

In summary, what are three bad things that God can use for good? (1) Painful situations; when we trust God in them, we can encourage others to live better lives for Him; (2) Mean people; God can use them to spread the gospel, even if they aren't even saved themselves; and (3) Death; for a true Christian, it is the grim means of shedding our disease-riddled bodies for immortal ones, in which we will enjoy a bright, glorious, eternal life with Jesus Christ forever.