

Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. ¹³ **As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.** ¹⁴ **Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.**

¹⁵ **It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill.** ¹⁶ **The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.** ¹⁷ **The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains.** ¹⁸ **The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice.** (NIV84)

Theme: Just Let it Go!

1. Don't respond to sin with a sin.
2. Know that God will take care of all things.

Do people push your buttons? Some people know you well enough to do or say certain things that irk you so much you can't help but become angry. Growing up, my brothers knew how to push my buttons. They would do certain things or say something that just got me all riled up and I tried to get back at them. And before I knew it, I was being disciplined by my parents. And when I would offer up an excuse they would usually say, "Don't let it bother you. Just let it go." There are always people who do things that will bother you. And many of those things will be sinful. There will always be people who sin against you. So how are you going to react? Are you going to let it bother you and try to get even by committing a sin, or are you going to let it go? Today we see that you should not let it bother you and to let it go. For you know that God will take care of all things.

Paul didn't exactly have an easy life spreading the gospel. He was beaten, stoned, and flogged. Numerous times he was imprisoned. In fact he was in prison when he wrote this letter. Paul was in prison in Rome because back when he was in Jerusalem he was arrested for preaching Christ. After his arrest he was put on trial numerous times.

He pleaded his case before Jewish and Romans officials. Finally, Paul had enough, and he appealed his case to Caesar. So Paul was sent to Rome. And after many months and a shipwreck, Paul finally arrived in the city of Caesar.

There in Rome Paul was under house arrest. He was allowed visitors who came to him to hear the gospel. Yet he was to remain in the house with a Roman guard watching over him for two years. During this time he not only preached, but he also wrote letters. He wrote four inspired letters during this time—one of them is our letter today—the one to the congregation in Philippi. You would think that with Paul being falsely arrested, almost killed, and being under house arrest for two years, he would be a little upset. And that he might be a little testy in this letter. Instead, Paul was full of joy and praise as he wrote this letter. Despite everything that Paul was going through he still wrote words of joy, such as, **Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!**

But there was a group of people who were trying to take Paul's joy away. For whatever reason they had something against Paul. We are not sure where they were from. We are not sure why they were jealous. Perhaps it was because Paul was an Apostle, and they were not. Or maybe that many people were following him and that many were brought to faith through him. Perhaps they were Jews, and they were upset that so many Gentiles were being brought to faith. The bottom line is that we simply don't know. But we do know they were jealous and tried to push his buttons.

And what better way to make an Apostle of Christ angry, then to preach about Christ—or so they thought. So they spread the gospel. Paul says they did it **out of envy and rivalry**. In verse 17 Paul says they, **preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains**. These people didn't really care about spreading the gospel—they weren't sincere in their faith or their efforts. They did it for selfish reasons. They did it out of hostility. They only preached to get back at Paul. They figured that when Paul heard that they were spreading the gospel and sharing God's Word with his people, he would become upset. And he was under house arrest and he couldn't do anything about it. So their whole purpose in spreading the gospel

wasn't to share the message about Christ. Rather it was to make Paul upset.

People will try to do the same thing to you. They will try to push your buttons. They will talk behind your back, spread rumors about you. They may lie straight to your face. They may act like your friend in front of you, but a bitter enemy when you are not around. They will say one thing, but do another. No doubt, they will do something that makes you angry. They may not do as you asked them to do. Or they may ask you to do something and get angry with you when you do it, or don't do it to their satisfaction. Or maybe someone will try to sabotage your work. For whatever reason, they have decided they don't like you and are going to try to make you fail.

And what is our natural reaction when something like this happens? You want to defend yourself. You want to get even. When someone spreads rumors about you, you want to talk bad about him. When someone hits you, you want to hit them back. We all suffer at the hands of those who sin against us. But you suffer more in the struggle against your own flesh. You want to respond to a sin with a sin. And part of you is jealous that they got to do something to you, but you know it's wrong.

When Jesus was on the cross he didn't try to get even with those who were killing him. Instead of seeking revenge, trying to strike back, calling a curse down upon them, Jesus prayed for them. **Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.** When Jesus let himself be nailed to a cross to pay for our sins, he didn't hold any grudges against those who were killing him. For he knew what would be accomplished through their sinful actions. He knew that he would pay for everyone's sins. And all those who believe and repent will be declared, not guilty, by God the Father. This leads you to follow Christ's example. To let it slide and not respond to sin with a sin.

But you probably still struggle against your sinful nature, just to let things slide. It's hard to let things not bother you. Or to let them go. So you pray to God for help. We pray in the 5th petition of the Lord's Prayer to "Forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." This petition takes for granted that you do forgive others when they sin against you. You look at the forgiveness you have in Christ and forgive others as you have been forgiven and as Christ has

forgiven them. Of course, this doesn't mean you can forgive someone who isn't repentant for sinning against you. But instead of getting revenge, you fight back your sinful desires. In love you point out the sin of the person who offended you. And you pray that they may repent so you can share with him the message of Christ's forgiveness.

The biggest struggle in your Christian life does not come from the way people treat you, but it comes from within. The struggle with your sinful nature to not let things bother you and to forgive those who sin against you is a daily one. But it's easier to do when you remember that Christ has forgiven all and that he will make everything turn out for your benefit.

Those who didn't like Paul tried to make him upset. They tried to make him jealous like they were jealous. Jealous that they were out among the people spreading the gospel. They were doing something he was not able to do. But Paul wasn't jealous at all. He could have been. Paul could have been jealous that he was preaching with proper motives but he was suffering and sat under house arrest, while those who had improper motives for preaching the gospel were thriving. But he wasn't. He was just glad people were spreading the gospel, even if it were for improper motives. Now don't get me wrong, Paul wasn't excusing their sin. That would have to be dealt with at another time. But for the time being, he was simply happy that the gospel was being spread. That is what Paul cared about the most. He didn't care how people heard about Christ, as long as they heard about him. Even if it was spread through improper motivations. Even if it was being shared by people who didn't do it just to spite him. At least people are hearing about Christ. And because of that, Paul rejoiced. He says in verse 18, **The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice.**

The motivation of Paul's adversaries was not right. But God used that sin for good. Through them trying to get revenge God brought many people to faith. Through the gospel that these insincere preachers spread, the Holy Spirit he also strengthened people's faith. For even though they preached the gospel for the wrong reason, the still preached the true gospel. People still heard about Christ. They heard

how he lived a perfect life. How he died and innocent death on a cross. And that on that cross that Jesus took the weight of all our sins on himself. He forgave our sins and removed them far from us. Three days later he rose from the dead. And all believers will live with him forever.

This is the message that they spread. Their motives were wrong. And thus, what they did was a sin. But God used that bad for good. His gospel is so powerful that it is effective even when people spread it with improper motives. Paul knew that. So he didn't try to get even when people preached for the wrong reason. Instead he rejoiced for were being saved.

That is what God always does. He always turns bad to good. It doesn't matter what people do to you. It doesn't matter how they sin against you. God knows what happened. And he is going to take care of it. But not only that, he is going to make that evil turn out to benefit his Church. He is always in control. So even if you are sinned against, God will bless you through it.

And so, as a Christian, you learn to let things go. You don't let it bother you when people sin against you. Not that you downplay sin or ignore it. But you don't let it bother you to the point of retaliating with a sin. For you know that God will take care of it. He knows what we are going through. And he will make it turn out for your benefit. Like Paul you don't need to get even or seek revenge. For God will make it a blessing for you.

“Just, let it go.” It's not just parents who say that to their children, But God the Father says that to his children as well. People will sin against us. But that doesn't mean we have to sin against them in retaliation. Instead, we seek to lead them to repentance, so that we may share with them the message of Christ. And even when people sin against us, we don't have to become upset. For God will take care of all things. He will make it turn out to your benefit. Out of love for Christ you fight the temptation to get even. For you know that God loves you and he will always take care of you. Amen.