**THE GOSPEL ADVANCES INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF PRISON**

***Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.*** ***13As 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 become encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly***

**Philippians 1:12-14 (NIV)**

In spite of the hostility of his enemies outside the church, and the evil designs of his detractors within, Paul is greatly encouraged by one overriding fact: Christ is being proclaimed. His very confinement, far from curtailing the ministry, has led to an extension of the gospel. Even the rivalry and misdirected zeal of his fellow-Christians in the place of his captivity cannot obscure the all-important fact that the message of Christ is being preached.

Paul’s wording in verses 12-14 reads like a reply to a specific enquiry about how he’s going in prison. ‘*Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel*’ (1:12). He tells them the outcome of recent events (‘*what has happened to me’:* literally ‘my affairs’ as in Ephesians 6:21) has ‘*served to advance the gospel*.’ The phrase Paul uses means advancement in spite of obstruction and dangers which would otherwise block the path of the traveller. The main obstacle is obviously his imprisonment in the praetorium (1:13). But the unexpected thing is that his confinement has resulted in a powerful witness for Christ where he is and a consequent triumph of the gospel in the pagan world.

*‘As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ*’ (1:13). It seems that the non-Christians who had contact with Paul became well aware that his imprisonment was neither for crime nor for politics, but with his being ‘in Christ’ (‘*for Christ’* = literally: in Christ = a follower of Christ). Because he doesn’t use the Greek preposition *hyper* (on behalf of’) and wrote *en* (in), and because of the grammatically close relationship of the phrase to ‘*my chains*,’ Paul is probably linking his experiences to participating in Christ’s sufferings (3:10). Paul’s life found its meaning ‘in Christ’ (1:2), even as he was ‘in Christ’ and lived ‘for Christ’ in the sense of making Him known to others.

The term ‘*palace guard’* (*praetorium*) came to mean the ‘governor’s palace’ and by the first century it was frequently used for the Praetorian Guard, the emperor’s own elite troops stationed in Rome. If Paul was in Rome he is almost certainly referring to this guard because there was no Praetorium (governor’s palace) there. But because the same term was used for the governor’s residence outside of Rome in a provincial capital, and in turn of the Roman troops stationed there, it is possible Paul was in prison in Ephesus (or another provincial capital). Because the Imperial guard in Rome numbered around 9,000 troops, and Paul says *‘the whole palace* *guard*’ knew of him, it makes the case for Paul to have been kept in somewhere like Ephesus with a considerably smaller palace guard. Wherever he was, Paul had made known his testimony to the guards he had constant contact with and with great effect. His testimony went beyond his guards to ‘*everyone else*,*’* to non-Christians and Christians alike, who came to hear of his imprisonment and the reason for it.

*‘**Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have become encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly’* (1:14). Paul’s actual wording reads ‘and the majority of brothers and sisters, having become confident in the Lord by my chains, have been so much more emboldened fearlessly to speak the word.’ ‘*Most of the brothers’* refers to the Christian community where Paul was imprisoned. ‘*Most’* probably means the church as a whole has been largely affected. The NIV qualifies the ‘*brothers’* by saying they are ‘*in the Lord’* but grammatically ‘*in the Lord’* qualifies their confidence. They are confident ‘*in the Lord*.’ This phrase (‘*in the Lord’*) is the ground of their confidence while his chains are the instrument (the means God has used). His chains have served to make them all the more confident ‘*in the Lord’* so as to proclaim Christ more boldly.

The actual response of the church is described by the adverbs ‘*more’* and ‘*fearlessly*.’ First of all, they had taken on an extraordinary boldness to witness for Christ as the result of their newfound confidence in the Lord brought on by Paul’s imprisonment. This probably reflects the historical situation in Rome in the early 60’s when Nero’s madness was peaking and the church there had begun to come under suspicion, as Nero’s vendetta few years later bears witness. The Christians in Rome had recoiled somewhat into a quieter evangelism. With good reason then, Paul explains to the Philippian believers that his imprisonment has resulted in their Roman brothers and sisters showing extraordinary courage in proclaiming Christ.

Secondly, their boldness has led them ‘*to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly’*’ The NIV uses *‘the* *word of God’* for Paul’s ‘the word.’ In the next verse ‘*to speak the word of God’* becomes *‘preaching* *Christ*’ (1:17). Part of Paul’s joy, then, was because his arrest had somehow helped stem fear in the believers. They were not only proclaiming Christ more, but were doing it ‘*fearlessly*.’

Without direct referencing these studies have drawn, sometimes heavily, on:

*Paul’s letter to the Philippians* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament) by Gordon Fee (William B Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1995)

*Philippians* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries) by Ralph Martin (Inter-Varsity Press, Nottingham, England, 1987)

*The Message of Philippians* (The Bible Speaks Today Series) by Alec Motyer (Inter-Varsity Press, Nottingham, England, 1984)

*The Holy Bible (New International Version)* (International Bible Society, Colorado Springs, CO., USA, 1984)

*The Prison Letters* (Paul for Everyone) by Tom Wright (SPCK, London, 2004)

*Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* by W. E. Vine (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, 1996)