**CHRISTIAN TROUBLEMAKERS**

**Pastor Mike Thompson / Fish Lake Chapel / Sept 29th, 2024**

**Philippians 1:15-18**

**READING THE TEXT**

**Philippians 1:15-18**

**15Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. 16The latter do so from love because they know that I am placed here for the defense of the gospel. 17The former proclaim Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, because they think they can cause trouble for me in my imprisonment. 18What is the result? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is being proclaimed, and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice,**

**INTRODUCTION:**

Some think of the 1st century as “the good old days.” If only we could get back to the 1st century church, we would thrive. But the same issues we face today were issues for the first church. Getting back to the early church is a myth. There are seasons of blessing and seasons of turmoil, both now and then.

Christians were the ones causing Paul problems in this text. They were not anti-Christ; they were anti-Paul. Let’s dig into the text and find out why some churches and pastors were anti-Paul.

**PREACHING THE TEXT**

PREACHING OUT OF RIVALY OR GOODWILL

Preaching Out of Rivalry:

**15Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill.**

ILLUSTRATION: When a few people left our small town church in Stanley I was displeased and made a big thing of it. I spoke against the mega church that people flocked to 20 miles away. They had snappy music and mood setting lights a flare for the drama. I do think today’s churches depend far too much on things like mood setting lights and working up congregations to a fever pitch. People often come away from church services talking about the cool worship or the amazing lighting or the guy telling some compelling story, but not enough focus is placed on teaching the word of God and letting His word come to life and transform us. Churches rely on experience and do all they can to create an event that is exciting. But what happens when people get home and there is no snappy show or music or people falling over? And what happens when there is so little emphasis on God’s word that no one can remember the sermon, but only remember the props and presentation? We can’t be our best as believers without God’s word being taught well and applied to our lives. Outside of that it is all emotions that come and go.

So, I assumed people left our small-town church to go to the mega church for the light shows and entertainment. But I did not even have enough information about that church to make such judgments. They do have some snappy contemporary elements, but they teach the word of God. I made a judgment and statement without first gathering facts. Talk about shooting yourself in the foot. The bible instructs us to have witnesses and facts gathered before we make an accusation. And I did not follow this instruction.

The reason these couples left was because their grown kids attended this church. It appealed to their taste in music and style. But did they preach the gospel? Yes, they did. So here I am railing against a gospel preaching church that united parents and children. Our numbers shrunk and theirs grew.

How dare they do not value my work and our church and our style and local ministry. Do you hear the pride in this thinking? This kind of attitude is born of jealousy and focuses on me and our people. It does not focus on God and how He is working and how he is leading people to Jesus.

In Paul’s day people envied his work and his title and his results. They forgot that he was whipped and chained and nearly drowned and betrayed. They just saw that he had followers, and they wanted followers. So, they chatted and gossiped and belittled, rather than remaining humble and grace giving and loving.

As a church it is always our focus to do the work God has given us. And it is God’s job to grow and bless and exalt what He wants.

There have been many times I have gathered with Pastors and suffered through the meetings as a few pastors bragged about all their amazing work. Rather than focus on ways to combine efforts and focus on the kingdom together there was a focus on building their brand and name, instead of building the name of Jesus in collaboration.

Preaching Out of Goodwill and Love:

**15Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill.**

ILLUSTRATION: When I was on Pastoral Staff at Woodland Hills I had many conversations about some of the doctrine held by the preaching pastor and some others. I still have problems with some of their doctrine. But one of the things we did well is to collaborate with other churches and build each other up. We were a church of 5000 but we were glad to have one of the pastors from The Church of The Open Door and an Evangelical Lutheran Church come and preach in our pulpit. We collaborated on many things and focused on the kingdom of God which is bigger than our church. Highlight God and make much of God instead of ourselves.

In Paul’s day some pastors and churches were jealous of his results. They could not wait until he faced persecution and got removed from the spotlight so they could get more attention.

Paul is placed in prison for the cause of Christ. Some churches have terrible challenges because of the cause of Christ. But we are called to celebrate with all believers and share their burdens as we are able.

Motivations for Christian Preaching (and serving)

**16The latter do so from love because they know that I am placed here for the defense of the gospel. 17The former proclaim Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, because they think they can cause trouble for me in my imprisonment.**

It seems that when Paul was out of the way in prison many people bad-talked Paul and recruited people to leave the churches Paul started and join their own. I could just hear someone say, “well if Paul was so godly he would not be in prison.”

In our Christian culture many are critical of others. We love to fault find leaders of big churches of movements. We must take aim at false teaching and call it out. But we are quick to connect dots and bad talk people even if we do not have solid evidence that they are a false teacher. “Rick Warren met with the Pope so he must be secretly Catholic or part of a global conspiracy with the anti-Christ.” It can make us feel good to bash others thinking we are better or more holy. But to bad talk another believer without real biblical cause is slander. And that is a sin. We will call out people clearly teaching false things like the word-faith heresy. I will call out people who claim to be apostles or who claim to hear from God but then teach things that are against the bible. But it doesn’t take much to hook our pride and create enemies out of people who are serving God faithfully. Rather than being bitter about people poaching his congregants in his absence Paul remains humble and sees the best in every situation. He believes God is sovereign and He trusts that God is working all things together for the good of those who love him and are called according to His purposes. Here is how Paul reacted to people bad talking him and stealing his sheep.

Celebrate Life and the Gospel (even if you don’t like the brand / church / style)

**18What is the result? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is being proclaimed, and in this I rejoice.**

So, what is Paul’s approach? He rejoices anytime Christ is being proclaimed.

ILLUSTRATION: Recently I visited a church with friends and family. I noticed they had a false teaching on tithing. In another church they had a false teaching on miracles. If you have faith God will always heal you. And your faith is sparked by having us lay hands on you and praying is a special way with a certain formula. And we can transfer the anointing to you so you can do miracles and be healed yourself. I believe that is nonsense teaching and not found anywhere in the bible. It grates on me because it hurts people in profound ways.

But these churches have seen several people come to faith in Christ because when they are not focusing on this word-faith silliness they share the gospel and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. And people have come to faith as a result. Like Paul, we can celebrate when people come to faith in Jesus, even if there are some things that are off base. So, when people ask about these churches I will say; “people are coming to faith in Christ and children are learning about the bible, I have difference of opinion on some teachings, but it’s awesome that people are getting saved over there.”

**SUMMARY / APPLICATION**

This message can inform us as we consider relating to what God is doing in other churches and in the region.

1. We can celebrate when people come to faith in Christ no matter where that happens.
2. We can collaborate with other churches and ministries as God grants to favor to do so. We can’t collaborate with everyone, but we can collaborate with some who share common core beliefs and theology.
3. We can examine our motives and our speech before we talk about other churches. Be honest about theological difference but be gracious whenever possible and don’t doubt the sincerity of others.