

## When Living Means Christ: The Way Forward (Philippians 1:12-25)

Most of us reading this article know by now that we have little or no control over our circumstances, but we do have a choice concerning our response to them. Paul's circumstances in Philippians included imprisonment - "chains" (see 1:12-13). Such "chains" could represent for us any set of limiting or restrictive circumstances—things that seem to take us backwards, or, keep us from progressing in our faith. We may even call them hardships.

Yet Paul did not see his "chains" as keeping him or the gospel of Christ from going forward. By not focusing on the circumstances, but rather focusing on the Lord of the circumstances, Paul came to a different conclusion. It's as though he would say to us that our inability to live as God intends may not be due to our circumstances as much as it is due to our refusal to acknowledge the Lord of the circumstances. In the whirl of events, the pressure belongs to the Heavenly Potter. In the heat of the moment, the fires are from the Sovereign Refiner. In the barren stretches, the pruning is from the Divine Vinedresser.

In fact, Paul suggests his very circumstances are the way forward, not backward (1:12). They are "pioneering" us and the gospel into new territory. They are "appointments" (1:16), not accidents, for exalting and magnifying Christ. They may be pressing us into deeper places of Christ's supply (1:21). They may be encouraging brothers and sisters, witnessing to the lost (1:13-14). When living means Christ, our heart's desire is to proclaim and magnify Him (1:18,20). The secret to contentment is neither in abounding in our circumstances or in being abased by them, it is in abiding in Christ (4:11,12,13).

To make use of our chains, to abide in Christ in the hardships, we must choose to endure them (II Tim 4:5; I Cor 10:13). They are of temporary nature for those of us who abide in eternity. (Ps 30:5; 23:4) The Enduring One reigns in us (Heb 12:2-3). He is adequate for this. We must also choose to embrace them. We see them from our Father's hand (II Tim 1:8 - "His prisoner"; Jo 18:11- "My Father's cup.") This is God for me - neither Caesar nor the devil is in charge - our God gets the final word. This "thorn", this "harvest", this "cross"... these "chains"... are never without purpose or profit. Finally, we must choose to exalt God in them. We may lift our "chains" as a "sacrifice of praise" (Heb 13:15). They are our call to worship... to rejoice (again, I say rejoice) (4:4).

In enduring, embracing, and exalting God in all life's events, we enter into the way forward (3:13,14). Our lives become living apologetics to the reality of God (1:16 - "defense" = "apologia"). We are changed. And a changed life is the strongest apologetic there is to the reality of God in our world.



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## BITS & PIECES

Most of you who know me know I don't pay much attention to the "Hallmark Calendar of Faith." You know, ordering our lives around the seasonal holiday themes that seek to keep our economy moving forward. Moms and dads need to be honored every day, sweet-hearts treated with love regularly, our veterans consistently saluted, thanksgiving given in all things all the time... every day is Easter Sunday for God's children, for goodness sake!

Then there's Christmas - the season of giving and receiving gifts. Mostly, things that come from stores given and received by people who (mostly) don't need anything that come from stores! It's a bit hard to get too excited about that (unless you have a fully restored 40 - 50 year old Porsche or Jaguar you need to "repent" of - and I will be glad to try... for you sake, of course!)

All that to say this - we are so grateful for your year round gift giving to OIC and to us. Your gifts of support, your notes of encouragement, your cards of thanks, your words of knowledge, and, mostly, your gifts of yourselves!

You are a year round Christmas gift to us. Because Christ is your "reason", we experience a Christmas season that lasts all year. Thank you and Merry Christmas!

**DECEMBER**

8 Ocala Study **\*\* NOTE CHANGE\*\***  
 1,8,15,22 CCF  
 10 Alachua Study

**JANUARY**

17-19 San Antonio, TX (210-478-0618)  
 24-26 Leesburg, FL (352-431-3935)

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