

# Paul's Earnest Expectation

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Paul, from a Roman prison, writes a cheerful letter to the Philippians who were worried about what had happened to him. He assures them that the bonds of his imprisonment had broken down barriers resulting in a greater progress of the gospel of Christ. The word translated “progress,” is from a Greek word which means literally, “to strike forward, cut forward a way.” It is used to describe the cutting away of trees and undergrowth in advance of an approaching army, or maybe a hunting party or a safari. Paul’s incarceration, instead of shutting doors, had opened doors for the progress of the gospel and had become well known even throughout the whole Praetorian Guard and to everyone else – 1:12-13. [NOTE: The Praetorian Guard was the Imperial Guard of Rome Instituted by Augustus and was composed of ten-thousand hand-picked troops].

Paul’s continuing to preach in prison had become an incentive for others to preach outside of prison – 1:14. Yet, Paul still had many enemies. Some were preaching Christ out of envy and strife, motivated by selfish ambition, supposing to add even deeper distress to his imprisonment – 1:15-17. The Greek word here translated “selfish ambition” in v. 17 carries with it the idea of creating rivalry while seeking to win followers for self-advancement much like a politician. Others were motivated only by good will hoping to encourage Paul the prisoner who they knew was appointed for the defense of the gospel.

How does Paul react to those who were preaching Christ out of envy and strife while trying to advance their own selfish ambition? The answer: He does not react! In verse 18, he says in effect, “So what!” Whether in pretense or in truth, Christ was being preached, and therein Paul rejoiced. He was persuaded that it all would turn out for his salvation through the prayers of the Philippians and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ – v. 19.

**LESSON:** Paul knew nothing of personal jealousy or pursuing personal vengeance. His self-forgetfulness here excites real affectionate admiration! As in the case of Alexander the coppersmith, who had done Paul much harm, he was willing to let the Lord repay these men according to their deeds – 2 Tim. 4:14.

Paul’s focus in prison was much higher than payback. In verse 20, he reveals his main focus: “...according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame.” The word, “expectation,” is a very vivid word, used only here and in Rom. 8:19. It is derived from three Greek words, apo- Kara- dokia, which mean literally, “to look away from the head.” But it really means much more than that. Expectation is the “eager, concentrated, intense look, which turns its gaze from everything else to fix it on the one object of its desire.” Illustration: A forest ranger on a tower with binoculars covers a wide range of land – until he spots a fire – then all he looks at is the fire!

But what was Paul's earnest expectation that so captured his attention? It was not worldly riches or prestige or anything that has to do with this world like so many of us! It was one thing and one thing only, viz. "that Christ would always be exalted (magnified – KJV) in his whole being, whether by life or by death."

In verse 21, the sole motivation behind Paul's earnest expectation was expressed in just one word, CHRIST! It was only from Christ that Paul derived his attitude; his ability to rejoice always; his willingness to suffer the loss of all things; his willingness to put down self-righteousness; and his realization that Christ was the source of his strength – Phil. 2:5; 3:1, 8-9; 4:13.

**APPLICATION FOR US ALL:** What is it that so captivates and holds our intense concentration in this life? Is it really Christ, or some worldly thing? What truly is our earnest expectation?