

Philippians: Rejoicing in the Advancement of the Gospel  
“Some Practical Implications of Trusting the God Who Knows What He Is Doing.”  
Philippians 1:12–30  
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We're in Philippians 1 as we continue our study. This is God's holy and inerrant Word. Philippians 1:12-13 says [12] *I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, [13] so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.* Let's pray.

Prayer:

Lord God, we thank You for the means of grace and so we ask for Your Holy Spirit to come now because we have all the fullness of who You are within us and the promise that You have made to us that if we love You, You will come to us and make Your home within us. We ask then that You would bear fruit in us, that we would see with this blessed perspective that You whom we trust, know what You're doing in all things. We thank You, in Jesus, Name, Amen.

When I was growing up, one of the consistent Saturday night traditions we had, I'm warning you we were pretty high brow, was watching Hee Haw. My dad loved it and secretly there were things about it that I liked. From time to time, Archie Campbell and Roy Clark would do a skit that was a variation of an old vaudeville bit and it went something like this; ‘It was a beautiful day yesterday so I went out and took a long walk. That's good. No, that's bad. Why? Well, I wasn't looking where I was going, and I fell into an open well. Oh, that's bad. No, that's good. Well, why? There was a big bag full of gold coins at the bottom of that well. That was good. No, that was bad. Why? Well, I had no way to get out of the well, you see. Well, I guess that was bad. No, that was good. Why? Well, I yelled really loud, and a guy came by and threw me a rope, so I was able to get out of the well with a bag of coins. Well, that was really good. No, that was really bad. Why? The guy was an IRS agent. What's bad is good is bad is good.

It's kind of cornball, and it borders on the absurd. which, in a more highbrow setting, is exactly what Leonard Bernstein sought to communicate when he adapted Voltaire's *Candide* as an opera in the 1950s. In his mind, the idea of a God who ordains every little thing that happens so that what's bad for one person is good for another is ridiculous. It's meaningless. It's absurd. Bernstein, of course, would reject that idea that there's a God who has ultimate control over all things and at the end of the opera, he offers this credo in place of that; ‘we're neither pure nor wise nor good. We'll do the best we know. We'll build our house and chop our wood and make our garden grow and make our garden grow.’ Somehow, we're supposed to rest in existential peace from this bleakness, which is essentially just this; “Life is meaningless. All we have in this world is manual labor, and we have nothing to look forward to.” Ironically, Bernstein says that after preaching all opera, that it's ridiculous to think that there's a sovereign God. He says “That sucks the joy out of life and empties it of all meaning” and that's what he offers in its place.

One person who sees it completely differently is the Apostle Paul. His view of sovereignty is not the coldness or bare fate of a sadistic divine dictator who just likes to jerk people around. His view of God's awesome sovereignty is that it is a means of peace. It's a means of assurance and blessing because it's the means by which He demonstrates his unflinching covenant love, His covenant faithfulness to His people to fulfill his precious promises to them. In fact, one of the keys to rejoicing is our ability to rest in a contented trust that God knows what He's doing. That contented trust comes from being able to gain the perspective that a true

understanding of God's sovereign grace gives us. So, knowing this is true, then we must rejoice in the blessed perspective of God's sovereign grace. We do that so that we might see that God's work is ever advancing, always advancing.

Here Paul is in prison and is there for preaching the Gospel. Paul had a captive audience for the Gospel. One of the things that characterized his incarceration was not that he was in a dank cell, but that he was chained between Roman guards, sometimes two, but at least one. Whenever they had to move him from place to place, he would be chained between them and one of the things that would happen as he received people, he was able to have friends come and visit him. That's how he had his material needs met. He would be able to talk with those who visited him and so those guards would be sitting there and hearing the Gospel and reports of churches, as Paul would speak freely. I don't doubt that at some point, Paul in fact, sitting there might even engage the guards in questions, wondering what they believe, talking about the Lord.

Paul is basically telling us in Philippians 1:12-13 that God's work is ever advancing, even in difficult situations. Definitely his imprisonment was a difficult situation. There's no question about that. In fact, perhaps the people at the church at Philippi thought maybe Paul's ministry was threatened and their existence as a church was threatened but he is saying, no. What you may see as a setback is actually an advance. It's not only that this situation was an advancement of the Gospel but others were emboldened to share their faith, which is what Paul says in Philippians 1:14; *[14] And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.*

I love the fact that he even calls his change the change of Christ that shows the sovereign power of God. Christ put me in prison so the Gospel would advance. Now that is a complete mind changer for those who might think otherwise but what I love is how he gets granular here. It isn't just this broad sense that that God is sovereign over situations. Paul says God is sovereign over people, and we need to see that God's work is advancing not only in difficult situations, but also in spite of difficult people.

Philippians 1:15-17 says *[15] Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. [16] The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. [17] The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.* There are two groups of preachers here. Paul says the latter are true gospel preachers because they preach from goodwill out of love, not just for the Lord, but love for Paul. It may very well be that these were men who were stirred by Paul's faithful example to go into ministry, which is no surprise. How often is it the case here at this church that people have heard pastors and missionaries and have been stirred to go into the ministry out of honor for them and their love for the Lord? That could be exactly what Paul is referring to but the latter category of preachers, he says, preach from rivalry out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, but thinking to afflict Paul in his imprisonment.

This is an interesting set of circumstances. He uses the word rivalry. These are men who have claimed Christ as a means of their own gain, promoting themselves and their ministries. We see these people in II Corinthians, where Paul calls them sarcastically, the Super Apostles. They make much of their own ministry and they make much of how many followers they have over and opposed to Paul. To cause him affliction, I think they are, of course, flaunting their ministry, irking Paul in prison. 'You're there, locked up and look at us. Our ministry is thriving.' I have no doubt that the advancement of their ministry included compromise on the truth or else they would be persecuted like him. Ultimately, they are insincere but what Paul says in verse 18 is amazing.

Philippians 1:18 says *[18] What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.* That's just fascinating. Now, don't hear what Paul is not saying. He is not endorsing their ministry. He's not saying, 'well, they preach Jesus so therefore everything's just fine.' Somewhere in their proclamation, the Gospel becomes clear. You can turn on the TV or listen to health and wealth preachers, and I guarantee you somewhere in there, accidentally, perhaps in their part, but sovereignly on God's part, you'll hear the Gospel and the Gospel is true, and in that Christ is proclaimed. It does not legitimize their ministry. They are false teachers with insincere motives. In one sense, Paul is saying, 'God has the last laugh.' Even in their ill intent, people are hearing Christ proclaimed and in that I rejoice.

The practical upshot, is God's absolute sovereignty is over all things which includes difficult situations, difficult people, our lives – they're filled with both. Seriously, probably you and I are one of the difficult people that someone else has to deal with. There are difficult people everywhere but Paul's point, is that even those situations and people in the awesome mystery of God's infinite wisdom and sovereign power are part of God's design. Think of Joseph's words to his brothers in Genesis 50:20 which says *[20] As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.*

I believe we kind of think that God really is like a big heavenly MacGyver, from the old TV show. MacGyver would have a toothpick, a paper clip and some ammonia and say "Yeah, we can make a bomb. We'll be out of here in no time." We think God looks at the bad things that happen and says, "I have something here I can work with. I can rest good out of it." As we see in this situation and in these people, that is not who our God is. We love a God who loves us and He has demonstrated that love by showing it in the most wicked crime that has ever been created – the murder of Christ. What they meant for evil, surely Satan meant for evil, God meant for our salvation. Even for the salvation of some who had cried out "crucify Him." God is sovereign. He knows what He's doing, and our trust in His sovereign grace gives us that perspective to know that in spite of those things, He is advancing His Kingdom.

It also allows us to see that life in Christ is always a win-win reality. The next few verses in Philippians are pretty powerful. Philippians 1:18b-25 says *[18b] Yes, and I will rejoice, [19] for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, [20] as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. [21] For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. [22] If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. [23] I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. [24] But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. [25] Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith.*

Verses 18, the last part of verse 18, following, he says, I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not at all be ashamed, but that with full courage.

Before we dig in a little deeper, I think we should say what Paul isn't saying here. Paul isn't gilding death. When you gild something, you cover it with a coating of bronze or gold to make it look more attractive or look more valuable. Some of you ladies may have gotten a gilded rose in gold. I remember some of my relatives would gild baby shoes. I always thought that was kind of creepy. They end up looking better than they really are. So, you make it attractive with a cover. They're just worn-out shoes, but they're gold shoes. Paul is not putting a coating over death to make it something that it's not. Christians are often guilty of gilding death. Saying things

like; 'death is just a natural part of life. Death is just a threshold from this world to the next.' Scripture makes it clear that death is not a natural part of life, and we know that all too well. It's an evil intruder. It's an enemy but in Jesus' death on the cross and in His resurrection from the tomb, Jesus dealt death its death blow. When Jesus returns, He will cast it finally and forever into the abyss.

I Corinthians 15:26 says [26] *The last enemy to be destroyed is death.* It will be no more. Yes, death is indeed a threshold, but for the Christian, it's not a threshold that is a trip hazard because our Lord Himself carries us, as it were, over that threshold because He has defeated death. So Paul's not making death into something good when it actually isn't but he is showing the sovereignty of God over it and how it gives him a perspective that no matter what God does with him, he's the one who wins. Whether we serve Him by faith now or face to face, Paul says very powerfully in Philippians 1:21, *For to me to live is Christ.* It's clear that Paul believes he will be released from prison from what he says in Philippians 1:20 because he expects to be delivered by their prayers so that he will serve now here.

Paul says in Philippians 1:22, *If I'm to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me.* Then in Philippians 1:25 he says, *To remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith so that in me you may have ample cause as to glory in Christ Jesus.* I think what's so powerful about this is that Paul clearly does feel like that he wins when he departs with Christ or stays here. It's like he can't decide. He says, 'I'm hard pressed.' He's convinced he's going to stay but it isn't resignation. He's not like George Bailey in the movie *It's A Wonderful Life* who keeps delaying or ultimately foregoing his own desires for college or travel just so he can be a good, faithful son. That's not Paul. Paul's perspective is, "If He wants me to stay, I win or if He wants me to go, I win because I will worship Him face to face." When Paul talks about to die is to gain and then says 'which I shall choose, I cannot tell. I'm hard pressed between the two for my desire is to part and be with Christ. That is far better,' I think he's basically saying to live and die is Christ is gain. It's a win either way. Paul then says, 'Lord, I can't decide. You choose.' That's a contented trust in the sovereign grace of God.

Several years after we began our ministry in Pensacola, I noticed a woman I didn't recognize before the service one Sunday, sitting near the back. She looked like she was maybe trying to hide or be inconspicuous. You know what pastors do when they see that they walk right up. I introduced myself. I learned that Frieda was married, but by herself because her husband, Tom, was done with church. For much of his adult life, Tom, Frieda and their three boys who are now all out of the home on their own, had attended of a fundamentalist Baptist church in Pensacola, which was well known for its strict dress code and its hyper Armenian teaching. They hated the reformed faith. After many years of graceless preaching, loveless condemnation of everyone who resisted that teaching, which included their three boys, Tom finally had enough. He said to Frieda, "I love the Lord, but I'm done with church" but Frieda went for a little while longer by herself and then eventually she stopped. Some years later, their oldest son, Tommy, discovered the doctrines of grace, and he began attending a PCA church in Atlanta. As he rediscovered the Gospel, he encouraged his mom by saying, "You need to go find a church that preaches grace like this. It's like nothing I've ever heard and there's a church near you. It's called McElwain." She was hesitant to go to a Presbyterian Calvinist church so she was nervous but Tommy's excitement was so clear, so powerful, and his love for the Lord was obvious, and it compelled her and she finally visited. That was when I saw her that Sunday morning.

Frieda kept coming and she, too, fell in love with the grace of God afresh. At first, Tom couldn't believe it, but he couldn't deny the new demeanor, the excitement, the love that she had for the Lord so he decided to visit. The first time I saw Tom, he scared me. He had piercing eyes, bushy eyebrows and a steely face that said basically, 'change my mind.' Thankfully, I know I can't do anything because that's up to the Holy Spirit. So, I preached the Word, reached out to him, visited them, got to know them a little bit, invited them to a Thursday morning Bible study, and the Holy Spirit did it all. It didn't take long before Tom himself was taken by the beauty of the doctrines of grace. He fell hard for the Puritan devotional, the Valley of Vision, and he read it several times, just eating it up, saying, "Where has this stuff been all my life? Never heard something so rich, so beautiful." Tom was one of the most delightful, insightful, joyfully forceful men I had ever met. He had so many regrets over what happened to them as they raised their sons, wished he could take it back, but the Lord gave him peace that He had sovereignly ordained for things to happen as they had, and that now Tom, his older son, Tommy and Frieda, had discovered what grace was really all about. Tom knew the other two boys he could safely leave to the Lord. He had a real trust that God knew what He was doing.

Late December of 2006, my grandmother fell ill while we were visiting South Carolina family during Christmas. She passed away shortly after New Year's Day, and because we were staying for her funeral, I was unable to make a hospital visit in which Tom was scheduled to have heart surgery. So, I called him the night before his surgery to pray with him, and I asked him, "How are you?" Now, as heart surgery goes, it was an open-heart surgery but all surgeries are significant. The knee surgery and the heart is really significant and though it was probably going to be an end for a few days and then home kind of thing, I still wanted to pray for the skill of the surgeons and for his comfort. Tom said to me, "Rob, I'm sitting here in my hospital room. I feel great. I have my Bible and my Valley of Vision, and I can truly tell you that as I see it, no matter what happens, I'm in a win-win situation and I love it." So, we prayed. There were unexpected complications from Tom's surgery, and on January 5, 2007, he went to be with Jesus. He won. What a testimony – to live is Christ to die is gain. Tom had that new trust in God that he knew what He was doing, and he knew he couldn't lose. That's our God. He knows what He is doing no matter what we are in.

Finally, we must rejoice in the blessed perspective of God's sovereign grace, because it leads us to see that our true citizenship is in heaven. Philippians 1:27 says [27] *Only let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the Gospel.* Our translation here doesn't really give the true impact of this sentence/verse. The word translated 'only' infers a singular urgency. It could be translated, 'but this,' or 'just this,' sort of an above all else thing. When Paul says "This is the one thing I want you to know" it infers urgency.

The second part of Philippians 1:27 has a critical word that the Philippians would have understood. This translation says 'manner of life' which isn't a great translation. The actual translation means 'act out your citizenship.' It can literally be translated, 'Do your obligation to the city.' It comes from the word *polish* in the Greek – political metropolitan, and it's a verb form that basically says, 'Do your duty as a citizen.' The Philippians would have immediately gotten the point, which is a point that Paul makes directly in Philippians 3:20 with the noun. Philippians 3:20 says [20] ***But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.***

The reason why this would have been something that caught the Philippians is because they lived in Philippi, which is a Roman colony, and its citizens were Roman citizens. They were granted a special citizenship because of that. One commentator says, "Philippi was distinct from other cities in Macedonia and that it was made to be a model Roman city. In a colony one would find Roman customs, Roman architecture, Roman dress, and the prevailing language was Latin. It was, in a word, a fragment of Rome. If you were to walk into the city, you would have the feeling of entering an Italian suburb of Rome, even though it was nearly a thousand miles distant." So as Philippians, they had Roman duties as citizens of Rome. Those commitments included honoring the Emperor as divine lord and upholding and promoting the status quo, not rocking the boat, keeping the cultural waters smooth. Don't cause any trouble.

Both of these civic commitments stood in the way of faithful Christian living. Paul, a decade earlier, as seen in Act 16, had openly violated these. One, he taught that there is only one Lord Jesus Christ, who deserved honor and worship and his deliverance of the slave girl in Acts 16 from whom the demon was cast, whose owners used her for fortune telling, it so disturbed them that they caused a riot which was laid to blame at Paul, led to his arrest, his beating and imprisonment. That's called upsetting the status quo. He was released then from prison and escorted out of town but Paul struggles with Rome and continued. Now he's in jail waiting for his appeal to Caesar to come to fruition.

So, if then the Philippians are engaged, as it says in Philippians 1:30, the same conflict as Paul has done, we don't know the details, it is likely a cultural conflict. Yes, they are Roman citizens, but God in His sovereign grace, made them and saved them to be citizens of heaven. So Paul says, 'in your place in that city, your true citizenship is from heaven so act like it. Let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or in my absence, I may hear of you, that you are standing firm **in one spirit** with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel' (Philippians 1:27). We need to understand that we are citizens of heaven so that we stand, as he says here 'in the one spirit.'

Notice that Philippians 1:27 says 'one spirit' and not the spirit. Some take Paul's point to the Philippians to be an exhortation to stand in the solidary and unity of mutual agreement. When we come together, we're of the same mind and we might say 'we're all of the same spirit.' Paul tells them in Philippians 2:2 to be of the same mind, very similar but most scholars believe that the context best supports not the oneness of human minds in agreement, which he does go on to say immediately afterwards, but the unity of the Spirit which God gives us all in our union with Christ. In I Corinthians 12:13 Paul uses the exact same phrase twice, and it's clear that he means the Holy Spirit.

I Corinthians 12:13 says [13] *For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.* Clearly, he means the Holy Spirit and so I believe he means that here in Philippians 1 with believers standing firm in the one Spirit of God is a mark of their true citizenship and since Philippians 1:30 indicates that the context is a conflict, a conflict like Paul's, we may safely conclude that what they are doing is having to assert their citizenship over against earthly citizenship. 'Standing firm in the one spirit' means they are to be unified in the truth that the Spirit reveals, unified in the truth of the Gospel, unified in the truth of solid doctrine, unified in the truth of Godly behavior as a witness to those who opposed them that they submit to a higher authority. Now, it doesn't say that they're to be disturbing the status quo or to act like jerks, but very naturally acting out their true citizenship will bring attention to them. So, it is necessary then that they soldier as one soul.

Paul goes on in Philippians 1:27b-28a to say ‘[27b] with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, [28a] and not frightened in anything by your opponents.’ Again, with one mind, striving side by side could be rendered differently. Literally, it's one soul and it indicates a shoulder-to-shoulder reality as one soul shoulder to shoulder in the fight is how it could be translated. That last part of the phrase pictures soldiers in hand-to-hand combat – shoulder to shoulder against the foe. Now, in such a close setting in which the necessity of fighting together as one man makes the difference between life and death, the most dangerous thing that can happen is for the soldiers to lose focus, or worse, to start fighting each other instead of the enemy. Paul says, ‘I want you to stand in the one spirit and soldier side by side in the Gospel.’

In the short 17 months I've served as the church revitalization pastor here, I wish I could tell you that I rarely talk to pastors or church leaders that have been weakened, sometimes horribly, because the members in leadership turned and fought each other instead of standing as one soul shoulder to shoulder in the fight – to fight their real enemy, the devil. What's incredibly amazing to me is it's an easy scheme on Satan's part. Think about it. Get Christians to do your own work for you. Have them fight one another – judging each other's motives, making preference in music or preaching style a primary issue, judging the new pastor against the old pastor, refusing to believe the best about a brother or sister, insisting to believe the worst, turning good ideas into Biblical mandates and being flat, unwilling to forgive. That's a list that I've heard in the last month.

Churches are under fire, friendly fire. The greatest threat to church is standing firm in the spirit against opposition is not because of that battle that they have with progressivism, wokeism, nationalism, shallow theology – it's when members will not stand as one soul, shoulder to shoulder in the fight against our true enemy. It is indeed true that a church can experience a legitimate division over a true sin or heresy issue. Unity can be an idol. It's important to recognize that. We are not to be unified and Paul is not telling them to be unified at all costs at any price. They're to be united in the Spirit, who is the Spirit of truth and who leads us in repentance and faith. So it's not just unity, no matter what. It's unity in the truth.

Philippi was at church that obviously had difficulties. Philippians 4:2-3 says [2] *I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.* [3] *Yes, I ask you also, true companion help these women, **who have labored side by side with me in the gospel** together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.* Here Paul singles out two women, and I think it's interesting to them he doesn't tell them to agree with one another but he wants them to agree in the Lord. If this were a heresy issue, he would have called it out instead, he says, ‘Would you act like Christians?’ These two women labored with Paul side by side and now they're face to face at each other. It's a dishonor to the Lord and a shame to the church. Now, to agree in the Lord is critical because our real opposition is not us. It's someone else. It's the devil and the way he masses those under his power to oppress and oppose. So Paul says we have to soldier as one soul so that we may be unshaken by opposition.

Philippians 1:28 says [28] *and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.* It's an amazing thing to consider for ‘not frightened’ here is from a word that describes when a horse is startled in battle or threatened. We've seen a spooked horse, so it can mean un-spooked. He goes on to say that that non spookiness is a mark of the Holy Spirit in you. Perhaps what he means to say in saying that it's a sign to their oppressors that their destruction is sure, is that in the face of that

which would cause anyone rationally to cringe they stand firm – boldly the way martyrs ultimately did.

Commentator Dennis Johnson says, “Paul bolsters their courage with a stirring pep talk, saying, in effect, ‘Yes, you have opponents, so do I, but I assure you that you do not need to be intimidated by anything that your opponent’s throw at you, figuratively or literally. American Christians on the whole are such wimps. We whimper over inconveniences and complain when we are slightly disrespected, forgetting that our brothers and sisters throughout history and across the globe, even today, experience far greater suffering for the faith on an ongoing basis. Since Paul called his Philippians friends to stand fast and fiercely surely cry Spirit says to us, ‘No sniveling, no quivering, no cringing. Look your enemies in the eye and tell them calmly, Do your worst to my body, but you will not win the real battle. I will not succumb to fear.’”

It's easy to read that and even get stirred by it but what's going to happen when we are really standing face to face to such opposition? Jesus Himself said, “Don't worry about what you're going to say. It will be given to you” (Mark 13:11). If we believe that this God who loved us and gave Himself for us, forgave our sins, gave us righteousness, gave us His Spirit, the glorious power that allows us to stand in the face of that kind of opposition without fear no matter what, if we have that God as our God, we may trust Him because He knows what He is doing which is why Paul is able to say what he says in the next two verses.

Philippians 1:29-30 says [29] *For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in Him but also suffer for His sake, [30] engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.* God sovereignly took the Philippians who were dead in their sin, granted them to repent of their sin and believe in Christ for eternal life. Then He granted them the honor of being unafraid of suffering for Christ, just as Paul was suffering. As Peter, James and John suffered when they rejoice in their being released by the Sanhedrin that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ. Just as Jesus Himself said “They should leap for joy, for so also the prophets before them suffered persecution” (Luke 6:23).

In II Timothy 3:12, we have a promise from God that says, [12] *Indeed, all who desire to live a Godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.* We don't see that on a Christian calendar in any bookstore anywhere, do we? C.S. Lewis was once asked, “Why do the righteous suffer?” and he said, ‘Why not? They're the only ones who can take it.’ The only reason the righteous can take it is because they are able to rejoice and rest contentedly in full confidence as they trust a God who loves them and knows what He is doing in their lives and in the world.

As I heard a recent sermon on God’s sovereignty it drew me in as this awesome picture that exploded in my finite mind truth that we will never fully comprehend, but that we can in truth. Isaiah 46:9b says [9b] *for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me.* God calls things that haven't happened into existence. God knows the end from the beginning, not because He looks down some quarter of time, but because He planned it. I marveled at God's goodness, realizing that by His providence He had ordained that we as a congregation would receive deep dives into this important truth that God is sovereign.

Looking at Paul and what the Philippians face and what you and I are living right here, right now. there's hardly anything better we could do right now than to realize these three critical points on the sovereignty of God given by Randy Pope in his sermon here on September 24, 2023. Number one, God is sovereign, therefore, no relationship or life circumstance is the result of chance. They are all God authored. Amazing. Number two, God authored relationships in life circumstances can be undesirable and painful ones which may or may not be the result of one's own bad choices or sinful behavior but God is still sovereign over them, and He isn't MacGyver-



ing them into something good. He has ordained them. Blessed be the name of the Lord. Three, for the believer undesirable and painful relationships in life circumstances always work together for good and provide opportunities to honor God.

There's no other alternative. Even if we decide we don't want to do it, He will do it because He cannot deny Himself. I want you to see three verses from the hymn *Whate'er My God Ordains is Right*.

*Whate'er my God ordains is right:  
Holy His will abideth;  
I will be still whate'er He does,  
And follow where He guideth:  
He is my God; Though dark my road,  
He holds me that I shall not fall:  
Wherefore to Him I leave it all.*

*Whate'er my God ordains is right:  
He never will deceive me;  
He leads me by the proper path;  
I know He will not leave me:  
I take, content, what He hath sent;  
His hand can turn my griefs away,  
And patiently I wait His day.*

*Whate'er my God ordains is right:  
Here shall my stand be taken;  
Though sorrow, need, or death be mine,  
Yet I am not forsaken;  
My Father's care is round me there;  
He holds me that I shall not fall:  
And so to Him I leave it all. Let's pray.*

Prayer:

Lord God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – awesome, infinite, eternal, unchangeable. In Your sovereign grace, You have condescended. We can never fully know who You really are in that awesome reality but we can know what You have revealed to us and we can know that You indeed are in this world achieving Your purpose. We can trust You because You will not merely bring it to a good end. It will be a glorious eternity. So to You we leave it all and may Jesus be praised in our lives as we trust You, I pray in His Name, Amen.