

1-1-1952

Homiletics: Sermon Study on Phil. 1:12-21 For Sexagesima Sunday

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Recommended Citation

Beck, W. F. (1952) "Homiletics: Sermon Study on Phil. 1:12-21 For Sexagesima Sunday," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 23, Article 5.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol23/iss1/5>

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HOMILETICS

THE SERVICES FOR FEBRUARY

February's theme according to *Parish Activities* is "A Royal Priest — in My Personal Witnessing." The accent in the last Sunday after the Epiphany, February 3, and the Transfiguration of Our Lord is on the results of that transfiguration in the faith and life of the believer. Septuagesima Sunday, in the Epistle, stresses the need of the Christian to cling to God for help against temptation. Quinquagesima Sunday brings as its Epistle St. Paul's Psalm of love. The outstanding text on the theme of the month is the Eisenach Epistle for Sexagesima, treated below by the Rev. Wm. F. Beck, who has given his study the title, "Whether I Live or Die." (R. R. C.)

Sermon Study on Phil. 1:12-21 *For Sexagesima Sunday*

With the courtesy of a Christian gentleman, Paul has first written about the Philippians (1:3-11) and now is turning to a new subject (δέ). We would expect him to tell about himself, since there is much to tell: He has been in serious trouble (4:14) and now is in prison (1:14); he has had his first hearing in which he has defended himself (1:7). What did the judge say? What did Paul answer? But Paul tells about —

THE GOOD NEWS

12. "I want you to know, my fellow Christians, that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the Good News (13) so that the whole palace of the Governor and everyone else have found out that I am in chains for Christ."

All that Paul has to say about himself he puts into the neuter article, τὰ κατ' ἐμέ, "the recent developments in my case." (Cp. Eph. 6:21; Robertson's *Grammar*, p. 608: "It is more than a mere circumlocution for the genitive," but it later became the regular expression for it.) He will not waste a word to tell about his escapes from danger and his sufferings. To get his story, we have

to deduce it bit by bit from phrases here and there—or be in Philippi when Epaphroditus came there and told the Christians the news about their beloved Apostle (2:25-30; cp. Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7).

But while there is no news story about him, this Letter to the Philippians is so filled with Paul's life that critics who once doubted that he had written it have been silenced. He lives for the Good News, and all personal affairs are submerged in that one purpose; the term "Good News" occurs nine times in this short Letter; only in Romans does it occur oftener, that is, ten times.

The Philippians expected bad news—that Paul's chains had hurt or defeated his purpose, that the imprisonment with its delays was wasting his life away while the great harvest of men outside was uncared for. Either they had expressed such fears to him by a messenger, or Paul guessed their thoughts as he recalled their anxiety when he had been imprisoned in Philippi (Acts 16:23, 40). But matters had actually (μᾶλλον) turned out much better than they expected, and he has big news about the "Good News" (2 Sam. 18:19, 25, 27; LXX shows its linguistic significance). The trickling outlets of Paul's prison life have broadened into a stream: The truth of Christ has begun to spread and is flourishing now (ἐλήλυθεν, perfect); it is "striking forward" (προκοπή, cutting away trees and underbrush ahead of an army), progressing in spite of obstruction by men (ἐγκόπτειν, 1 Pet. 3:7; Gal. 5:7) or by Satan (1 Thess. 2:18); it makes progress in those who bring it (1 Tim. 4:15) and in those who believe it (1:25). He explains what he means by προκοπή by two actual results, introduced by ὅστε: The first in v. 13, a historic fact (γενέσθαι, aorist) in the world, is followed in v. 14 by a continuing effect (τολμᾶν, durative present) in the church.

GOD DOES MUCH WITH LITTLE

A manger holds the Son of God and a Cross the Savior of the world, God making of a "crucified under Pontius Pilate" a "forgiveness of sins" and a "holy Christian Church." A life, emptied of everything else (3:2-11), He fills with Christ. "We have this treasure in earthenware vessels to show that its extraordinary power comes from God, and not from us" (2 Cor. 4:7).

Here we see what God does with a prisoner. Others used every

trick to get free. But this one is different: His purposive soul can wear no chains, baptized as he is with the Holy Spirit and with fire, with that Spirit who has spoken in him in court (1:7; Matt. 10:19; Mark 13:11; Luke 12:11-12; 21:12-15) and is now keeping him busy with this Letter to the Philippians. Passionately earnest in the hunting for souls, he could make chains "a divine glory" (as Ignatius, writing to the church at Smyrna, XI, calls them). Other inmates would belittle the reason for their being in jail; he neither denied nor disguised it, but did everything to proclaim it. This was new. While some laughed, others believed, and all soon learned that he was no criminal. His case got "on the front page" (*φανερὸς γενέσθαι*, ingressive aorist); not by a claim of innocence, which would have been ignored, but because he was suffering as a Christian (1 Pet. 4:16), imprisoned for Christ. (For clarity repeat *δεσμίου* before *ἐν* to complete the predicate. Moulton's *Grammar* II, p. 463, says that we have here a causal use of *ἐν*.) As "a prisoner of Christ Jesus" he spoke of the mystery of Christ and built His Church (Col. 4:3; Eph. 2:21—3:1; Philemon 9). He told fellow prisoners about the bonds that cut deeper than iron links (Luke 4:18); gambling guards about the risks of eternity; gay young officers about the Captain of salvation; courtroom officials about the great Day "when the Son of Man will come in His glory" (Matt. 25:31); judges about Him who will judge the living and the dead. Of such a prisoner guards would talk, and for him visitors would spread the Good News.

The Praetorium.—Some commentators say the praetorium is Caesar's palace and by that term mean to prove that Paul was in Rome when he wrote to the Philippians. But that "praetorium" means Caesar's palace is deduced from the assumption that Paul was in Rome and cannot serve to prove the assumption.

The praetor was a general of a Roman army, whose headquarters in the camp were called the praetorium; at first it was strictly a military term. Caesar's palace was never called the praetorium. When the emperor was in his capital, he wanted himself to be regarded less as a military than as a civil ruler. When the emperor was absent from Rome, he was *in praetorio*, that is, in camp.

When a praetor was not conducting a war, he might be the governor or military commander of a province with duties and powers similar to those of a consul, or he might be a civil judge. So "praetorium," meaning the tent of a general in his camp, got

to mean the residence of a governor in a province; this is the meaning of the term everywhere else in the New Testament (Matt. 27:27; Mark 15:16; John 18:28, 28, 33; 19:9; Acts 23:35). There is plenty of evidence for this meaning outside the New Testament, and it is the natural meaning in our text.

"Praetorium" fits Ephesus at least as well as any other city. Ephesus, the metropolis of Asia Minor, replaced Pergamum as the capital of the province of Asia at a date that cannot be exactly determined. A coin of Ephesus (M'Clintock and Strong: "Ephesus"), struck near Paul's time, shows Nero's head on one side and the temple of Artemis with the word "proconsul" on the other. According to Acts 19:38 courts were held in Ephesus by a "proconsul," a term somewhat interchangeable with "praetor." Paul's "praetorium" may well be the residence of the proconsul of Asia in Ephesus.

We need not take Lightfoot too seriously when he urges that "praetorium signifies not a place, but a body of men" because it is followed by τοῖς λοιποῖς πᾶσιν (see a similar alignment in 2 Cor. 13:2). The term can well be used of a place and at the same time mean the people who are staying there. Mark says, "The whole town had come together at the door" (1:33; cp. John 4:53; Acts 18:8; 19:27).

Somewhere in the precincts of the praetorium Paul had a cell. How much freedom he had while he was in chains we do not know. Now and then he appeared before the judge for examination. But from his confinement the message had spread to everyone in the governor's residence as well as to everyone else in the city.

GOD CHANGES OBSTACLES INTO MEANS

14. "And so my chains have in the Lord encouraged most of our friends to speak the Word of God more boldly and fearlessly than ever."

These friends were Paul's ἀδελφοί, related to him by the blood of Christ and one family under God, their Father (Eph. 3:14-15). Most of them (τοὺς πλείονας, the comparative with the sense of the superlative as in 1 Cor. 10:5; 15:6) — some timid souls are excepted — spoke aloud about Christ (τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ λαλεῖν; cp. Acts 11:19), with more courage than if Paul had been free (περισσότερω).

Since ἐν κυρίῳ is nowhere else so closely joined with οἱ ἀδελφοί (see Eph. 6:21; Col. 1:2; 4:7; Philemon 16) and sounds a little tautological, it seems better to take it with πεποιθότας (cp. 2:24;

Rom. 14:14; Gal. 5:10; 2 Thess. 3:4), making the life in the Lord the sphere of confidence. In Luke 18:9 *πέποιθα* is constructed with *ἐπί*, but in 2 Cor. 10:7 and Philemon 21 with the dative as here (*τοῖς δεσμοῖς*), a dative of means, instrument, or cause. The perfect active, *πέποιθα*, generally taken as an intransitive, "I am confident," has passive meaning (Liddell & Scott; the LXX also uses *πέπηγα*, *πέπληγα*, and *διέρρηγα* as passive). Changing the passive meaning to an active construction, we could say, "My chains have given most fellow Christians confidence."

Some friends might turn away at the sight of Paul's chains. "I ask you not to let the troubles that I suffer for you discourage you," he writes to the Ephesians (3:13).

But the Word of God is not bound (2 Tim. 2:9). It can take a rope that would bind it and make it hold a sail that carries it out into the world. It can make its persecutor its Apostle and his chain a reason for its spreading. "The fiercer the world rages against the Gospel, the better the business of the Gospel succeeds," said Luther. "By their raging our enemies can do no more than promote God's work, and the longer the more effectively." (Walch IX:656; III:683.)

It all depends on how you wear your chains. Paul would say, "I am in chains for Christ." "Who is Christ?" his visitor would ask. Then the story could be told; and even the guard came nearer to listen to this unique prisoner. The more the Good News was hemmed in, the better it displayed the heroism it could inspire. How could his friends, stirred by a courage that welcomed even the sword, worry about lesser dangers, or, seeing how little his chains could touch the Apostle's winged spirit, tell the story of Jesus less cheerfully?

HE WORKS THROUGH IMPERFECT WORKERS

15. "There are also those who are moved to preach Christ by ill will and rivalry, but others by good will. 16. Those who love to preach Him know that I am appointed to defend the Good News. 17. But the others preach Christ selfishly, without a pure motive, and mean to stir up trouble for me even while I am in chains."

"There are also people" (*καί* introduces the *τινές* as people of

a different class; μέν is a weakened μήν, "it is true," *zwar*), a smaller number, who by their darker ways serve to highlight his better followers. Both groups had been stirred by Paul's chains, but this minority had reacted negatively and was a chilling element in the Church. They made the Good News a πρόφασις (v. 18); the modern equivalent for this term is rationalization, the attractive reason which we hold up before others while we hide the uglier one. We may say, "I'm too busy," when we wouldn't be bothered even if we were doing nothing. The Pharisees prayed much for a πρόφασις (Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47) while they devoured the widows' houses. The spreading of Christ's glory had become a mask under which these workers were selfish (ἐριθεία = 1) working for pay, 2) political intrigue and ambition, 3) selfishly seeking favors, Rom. 2:8). They marred their message by low motives (διά; cp. Matt. 27:18; Rom. 13:5; Eph. 2:4), by a petty spirit of resentment toward Paul. They could not, like the others, praise and quote him, because they feared for their own popularity. Their jealousy (φθόνος) started rivalry (ἔρις). They spoke of Christ in such a way as to reduce Paul's authority, push his gifts into the background, draw the eyes of people away from him, and so to outstrip him. They meant (present participle of οἶομαι; see the last meaning in Liddell & Scott) to fight, not only evil, but Paul, and so they used a squeeze play on him. His chains were hard enough to bear when we consider his calling and his dynamic personality; they hoped to make his chains gall him: As he saw their success, his bonds might seem heavier and his room narrower, and he might chafe under his inactivity and feel bitter about living in prison.

Paul does not altogether condemn these men; they were not really the enemies of Christ. Their motives were discolored and impure (οὐχ ἄγνως), especially when contrasted with the Christ whom they preached, but they were not altogether muddy. There was some good in the bad, some melody in their poorly played music.

Paul notices what is good (4:8) in his opponents in order to have that good grow in them. They loved Christ, but that love must flood them so as to overrule everything. To stimulate their love for the Savior (cp. John 21:15-17), he shows its shortcomings. If their love is right, they will like the others (οἱ μὲν ἔξ

ἀγάτης is subject; supply τὸν Χριστὸν κηρύσσοσιν, preserving the parallelism) not get jealous or act selfishly (1 Cor. 13:4-5), but grow in their understanding of what Paul's imprisonment means (εἰδότες; cp. Rom. 5:3; 6:9; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 6:8). A jealous eye could see only chains, shame, and defeat; an understanding heart, knowing that these chains were for Christ, would soften its criticism, purify its motive, show good will (εὐδοκία contrasted with φθόνος) to Paul, and help him.

Paul tells them: God has put me here (κεῖμαι, used as a perfect passive of τίθημι or ποιέω, Robertson's *Grammar*: 906; cp. Luke 2:34; 1 Thess. 3:3; 1 Tim. 1:9); He has appointed me to be a soldier at this post of duty in order to defend the truth of Christ; I am a prisoner in order to be His mouthpiece. (Κηρύσσειν, v. 15, is the announcement of a herald who goes ahead of his master, Matt. 3:1; καταγγέλλειν, v. 17, is the announcement of a newsman, Acts 17:3, 23 — but the distinction must not be stressed too much.)

PAUL'S JOY

18. "But what does it mean? Only this, that in one way or another, whether their real motive is bad or good, they preach Christ — and that makes me happy!"

What then? What is the result? Paul is like a craftsman about to split a costly stone: Considering every angle of potential cleavage (γάρ), he holds the stone (τί) for the master stroke. This case of the two kinds of workers is brought to a head for a single, clear conclusion.

Paul does not tolerate inconsistency any more than error. Yet, rising above criticism and brushing aside self-pity or annoyance, he declares that as long as Christ is preached, whatever the motive, the message is right, and he will not have it stopped. The faults of workers cannot blind him to the truth which they are telling and which had been so mighty in these men too, that they took some risks in telling it.

Christ is not limited to give success only to those who are sincere (ἀληθεία) in their motive and purpose. Being greater than our faults, He can make unworthy workmen the channels of His love, convey gold in lowly pottery, do perfect work through imperfect men. What would we do without that assurance? — The people, too, who are won do not belong to us, His faulty workers, but to

Christ, who carries the results, holy and eternal, of our defective workmanship in His own hands.

Therefore, while there is enough reason to feel sad, Paul is glad (*χαίρω* and its derivatives occur fifteen times in Philippians, more than in any other letter). Paul knew the blessings of the persecuted (Matt. 5:10-12) and the joy of suffering for Christ and for others (Col. 1:24), but here he is delighted because his chains are spreading the news of Christ. So the caged bird sings, and the prisoner triumphs (cp. D. A. Hayes, *Paul and His Epistles*, p. 421).

CONFIDENCE AND BOLDNESS

"Yes, I will continue to be happy, (19) because I know that your prayer and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ will make this turn out for the highest welfare, (20) as I eagerly hope that I shall never have to be ashamed of anything, but I will speak very boldly and glorify Christ in my body, now as always, by living or by dying, (21) since for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

'*Αλλά* starts a new sentence, because 1) it represents a break even when it is not adversative, but affirmative as here; 2) the reason introduced by *γάρ* belongs with the preceding; 3) the futures, beginning with *χαρήσομαι* (a progressive future, Burton's *Moods and Tenses*, par. 60) flow continuously. *Τούτο* seems to be the same as *τὰ κατ' ἐμέ* (12). Most commentaries have tried to tack down *σωτηρία* to something specific—success in court and release from prison (25-26), preservation of his life, victory over enemies, his own salvation (3:11), the salvation of others (2:12; Rom. 1:16)—only to emphasize that nothing specific is given in the term. "Salvation" means a victorious outcome in every way.

Paul's certainty rests, not on his own strength or zeal, but on two factors outside himself: the prayer of the Philippians, which goes up to heaven, and the Spirit's help (*ἐπιχορηγία*, without the article, general), which comes down from heaven (Bengel). The Spirit in us (Rom. 8:9-11; Gal. 4:6) helps us in our weakness (Rom. 8:26).

He is ignoring everything else in order to look intently at the goal (*ἀποκαταδοκία* is used of the watchman who looked into the dark for the first gleam of the distant beacon that would announce the capture of Troy, and in Rom. 8:19 of the groaning animal

that longs to be delivered). This is the outward posture of his inward hope, that his work will glorify Christ — expressed in passive verbs because Paul considers himself an instrument of the Spirit, who will not let him come to shame (Rom. 5:5), as his opponents wish (15-17), by his denying the Lord, or by publicly being shown to be a deluded fanatic. He will not be silenced like the ungodly (Prov. 13:5), but with a boldness (παρρησία) that rests in God (1 John 2:28; 1 Thess. 2:2), is given in answer to prayer (1:19; Eph. 6:18-19), and is born of hope (2 Cor. 3:12) he will speak fearlessly (John 7:13), clearly (John 11:14), and publicly (John 7:4; Col. 2:15).

A HAPPY DEATH

If you live only for this world, you may believe: For me to live is to be happy, to have a good job, another house, \$10,000, the pleasures of this world (3:19); or even the nobler things: studies, culture, beauty. All these purposes stop short of death. Life is a silver cord (Eccl. 12:6; here: ζῆν, continuous present) that is broken by death (ἀποθανεῖν, punctiliar aorist) with its cold stare and its decay. If it comes in the middle of life, the victim may act like a person thrown over a cliff, digging his nails into the rock and clutching at anything as he falls. For him death is a total loss, an emptied cup, a calamity, a terror, and a despair.

There have been those who did not know Christ and yet considered death an advantage. When Sophocles' Antigone sees herself surrounded by many evils, she calls death a gain (κέρδος, 460—64). In his last words Socrates tells his judges: "Now, it there is no sensation, but a sleep like the sleep of him who does not even have a dream when he sleeps, death would be a wonderful gain (κέρδος). . . . But now the time has come to leave, and we go our ways—I to die, and you to live. Which is better, God only knows." (Apology: 32, 42; cp. Hamlet's "To Be or Not to Be.") One of the most hopeful statements comes from Euripides, who was ridiculed for it by the comic poets: Τίς οἶδεν εἰ τὸ ζῆν μὲν ἔστι κατθανεῖν τὸ κατθανεῖν δὲ ζῆν κάτω νομίζεται, who knows if to live is to die, and to die, for those who are below, means to live" (quoted in Kittel under ζῆν).

Nowhere outside of Christianity do we find the joyful certainty of Paul, who by ἐμοί separates himself from those whose life is

without Christ and whose death is a loss. He has already died to himself (Gal. 2:19; 2 Cor. 4:10), to the world (Gal. 6:14), to everything (3:8), and so can lose nothing by dying. To understand what Paul meant, we must invest our whole life in Christ (τό almost = πᾶς; 1 Cor. 6:20); then our life is from, by, in, and for Christ: He is our inspiration and breath, the source, motive, and secret of our new being, the goal of all our interests and efforts. We are His slaves, living to do His will: Him we will trust, love, obey, preach, follow, and for Him we will suffer (13).

Death is a gain because Paul has Christ here and hereafter. "To live is Christ and" (καί, perhaps a Hebrew consecutive, "and therefore") "to die is gain." The articles mark the different periods of a Christian's existence, both of which by the presence of Christ transcend the dividing line of death. To live is Christ, and to die is Christ too, plus a crown (2 Tim. 4:7-8; Rev. 2:10). Death is better, as it is better to be done with sin, conflict, obstacles, to have prayers answered and hopes realized, to be beyond danger, to be completely and intimately united with Him whom we love and to live in glory with Him (Rom. 8:17; Col. 3:4).

OUTLINES

God's Ways with Us in Winning Men

A. He works wonders with us —

1. Doing much with little (12-13)
2. Changing obstacles into means (14)
3. Doing perfect work through imperfect workers (15-18a)

B. He gives us —

1. Joy (18b)
2. Confidence and boldness (19-20)
3. A happy death (21)

Glory be to Jesus!

- A. By a purer love (15-18)
- B. By telling about Jesus (12-26)
- C. By chains and death (12-14, 19-26)

W. F. BECK