

Seven of **ONE** – Spiritual Focus is Outreach

I have always found it very enlightening and challenging to think that this great epistle about spiritual focus, joy and service was written by Paul while he was chained and locked in a prison by the Roman Empire (1:7, 12-18). Prison in Paul's day would be called a violation of civil rights in our day. There were not beds, libraries, access to higher education, reading material and all of the amenities that are found in modern prisons. Ancient prisons of the Roman Empire were known for their barbarity and cruelty. If one was to be taken care of then it would have to come from without rather than within (2 Timothy 4:9-22).

What is even more astounding is that Paul reaches out, concerned about the welfare of the Philippian brethren and the false teachers they have encountered. Rather than be self-consumed and self-focused, the love of Christ and His righteousness leads Paul to want to set himself aside and teach others the way to spiritual maturity, as this entire chapter bears out, but is especially to be noted in 3:1, 17. Chapter one especially hammers this point home, where Paul says, "I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ" (Phil. 1:12-13). In chapter three he encourages them to be "lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life..." (2:15, 16). Finally, in chapter four Paul thanks the Philippians for their ministering while he was in chains, but says the greatest ministering they can do is "seek the fruit that increase to your credit" (4:17).

All of this speaks to one basic idea – evangelism. As the children of God we are all called to teach the Word of God. More specifically we are called to teach the gospel, or the death burial and resurrection of Christ and the healing effects that it has on the soul both now and eternally. This is a major part of the mission of the church. As we pointed out in an earlier lesson, Paul mentions the name of Christ ten times in chapter three alone. His past has been about Christ. His present suffering is because of Christ and his future goals and expectations were all about Christ.

Paul perceived the message of the cross as not only central to his system of belief, but central to his practice and very existence in this world. It seems that all things center on the proclamation of the message and it was forever on his lips regardless of the company he was in, whether it was the Roman guard, his fellows Jews, new converts to Christ or those who were in the process of maturing. Paul saw it always as beneficial to teach them, teach what he taught them and then teach them what he taught them again.

So serious was Paul about this mission of the church that he took several trips around his world making sure not only that the message was heard, but that it was being practiced. Most of his books, which make up nearly half of the New Testament and books designed to teach and re-teach the men and women he converted during these missionary journeys or to help mentor and encourage those who would continue his faithful work of spreading the good news.

Paul, at the end of this chapter encourages us to follow him and the example he has set, including the work he accomplished in spreading the word. He felt as if his very life depended on it and centered it on this mission. How well do we do with this.

Fortunately, we live in an age when the possibilities for outreach are endless for the person who is ready to think outside the box. Gone are the days when we can simply invite someone to come to our building to hear some “well known” evangelist and expect a huge crowd. We live a faster-paced world, like it or not and while we live closer together and can communicate more readily through various electronic means, we seem more and more disconnected as a society. Thus, methods like friendship evangelism and making contacts and Bible study outside of a traditional “church” setting have produced far greater results than traditional methods of the past. In many ways the church has transformed to fit this more intimate need. Small group study has become common place in lieu of A Sunday or Wednesday evening service.

Regardless of what the trends may be, one thing is very clear – each and every one of us must take serious the call to reach out for Christ and impact our community, state, country and the world. As the old song says, however, it is primarily our job to “brighten the corner” where we are. How well do you do with this? Rest assured, God is doing His part to make your good works here possible (Phil. 2:12, 13). Are we seizing the opportunities he gives? Are we rising to his challenges?

ONE Assignment

This week I want you to think and pray seriously about your mission that God has given you. I say your mission because God has given you talents, abilities and circumstances in which you may work. No one else can do it for you, just as no one can practice your Christianity or sin for you. By the same token no one else will stand in judgment for you and answer the question, “What did you do with the good works I prepared for you?”

So, again, you are challenged this week to reach out; to look for situation in which you can simply talk about spiritual things and open doors of opportunity. We are not asking you to go recruit people for Bible studies (unless that opportunity exists). We are simply asking you to open doors, make invitations, and encourage others to think about spiritual things. To facilitate this and act as a reminder we are giving your cards that contain an invitation and note of encouragement. Gives these out when you can and to folks in situations where you have opened doors. Carry the cards with you everywhere that you go for you never know when the situation may appear in which you can use it. Keep your eyes open and pray for God’s wisdom to act accordingly.