

The spirit of God sabotages our intentions.

“For the flesh is lusting against the spirit, yet the spirit against the flesh.

Now these are opposing one another, lest you should be doing whatever you may want.”

—Galatians 5:17

We almost always make this verse say that the spirit keeps us from doing all the bad things we want to do. This is true. But it also keeps us from doing all the good things.

The key phrase of this passage is: “... lest you should be doing whatever you may want.” What do we want to do? Two things: fleshly things and good things. But if we could make a wish, we would want to do good continually. Oh, wouldn't we be saintly and spectacular.

“A desire to be perfect is also a lust of the flesh.”

A desire to be perfect is also a lust of the flesh. It is in our best interests to be kept weak. 2 Corinthians 4:7 explains:

Now we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the transcendence of the power may be of God and not of us.

God keeps us weak so that we might constantly acclaim His power and not our own. Remarkably, the same spirit that incites us to good works also keeps us from becoming moral super-people.

Can you learn to thank God for this, even when you are yet again failing Him? ■

Martin Zender's Clanging Gong News

“If I know all mysteries and all knowledge, but have no love, I am a clanging gong” --1 Cor. 13:1-2



Two out of three isn't bad.

God's servants do their best work bound.

You cannot do everything you want to do. You would like to be a better parent, a better employee, a better friend. It would help if you could make more money. You want to pay your bills, but you can't find a job. You wanted to get a good night's sleep last night, but worry kept you up. Money vexes your life. It seems to be a measure of your success and failure. You try to save it, but you can't. There is always another expense—always. Someone always needs something. What about *your* needs? They burn on the altar of sacrifice—again.



Still, there is more. Someone needed you yesterday, and you failed them. Today, you yelled at your children. The debilitating fatigue and accompanying impatience hit you in the late afternoon, after your son and daughter arrived home from school. You love them more than life itself; you would die for them. The last thing you want is to lose your temper at them. At 4:50 p.m., in the kitchen, it is the first thing you do. My God, what comes over you?

Later, you cry.

Each day is a struggle. This morning, reading the book of Philippians, I realize why. It is because we are bound. It is because God has limited us—horribly limited us. He has made it so that we cannot do what we want. He has sabotaged our vessels so that we cannot be the people we want to be. How we try. It is noble to try. We all try, and should. We pick up our burdens and try to budge them. Sometimes, we succeed. A miracle happens, and we are good people. Whenever this happens, we praise our Father. We ought to, because a dozen failures are coming down the pike.

I do not write from a place of depression or paranoia, but from reality and truth. I know so much about the love and sovereignty of God. He sustains the lilies of the field, and yet cares for me exceedingly more. What happens next? I promptly forget it. I forget about His care. Every day—at least

sometime during the day—I doubt Him. Every day, I fail. Then comes an entire day when I lay utter confidence at His feet. His love remains constant throughout. But still.

My Christ

Long before the soldiers arrested Him at Gethsemane, our Christ knew bonds. Philippians 2:5-11 describes this:

For let this disposition be in you, which is in Christ Jesus also, Who, being inherently in the form of God, deems it not pillaging to be equal with God, nevertheless emp-

ties Himself, taking the form of a slave, coming to be in the likeness of humanity, and, being found in fashion as a human, He humbles Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore, also, God highly exalts Him, and graces Him with the name that is above every name, that in the name of Jesus every knee should be bowing, celestial and terrestrial and subterranean, and every tongue should be acclaiming that Jesus Christ is Lord, for the glory of God, the Father.

Jesus bound Himself to become human—to become limited in the worst ways possible. The Son of God would know hunger, depression, fatigue. He would want to move at the speed of light, as He used to, but now it would take him an hour to walk from Nazareth to Cana. And He would have to stop to rest. And drink. And cry. And pray.

And *because of this*, God highly exalts Him. Because of the limiting, God unbinds Him in ways unimaginable. He is affixed to the cross, WHEREFORE God highly exalts Him. His limiting is a precursor to the salvation of all.

Oh, that we could relax and even glory in our bonds, knowing that these limitations are of divine origin, and that they *must* precede liberation. We cannot know the sweet, coming release, apart from our writhing within these confines.

There is meaning in sweet writhing. May we both strain and relax in our splendid disability. ■

PAUL'S CHAINS FURTHER THE GOSPEL.

And now, lo! I, bound in spirit, am going to Jerusalem ... the holy spirit, city by city, certifies to me, saying that bonds and afflictions are remaining for me. ... But I am not making my soul precious to myself, till I should be perfecting my career and the dispensation which I got from the Lord Jesus, to certify the evangel of the grace of God.

—Acts 20:22-24

How can “bonds,” “affliction,” and “perfection” appear in the same sentence? God’s ways are higher than ours. Here is a scene of perfection from the life of Paul:

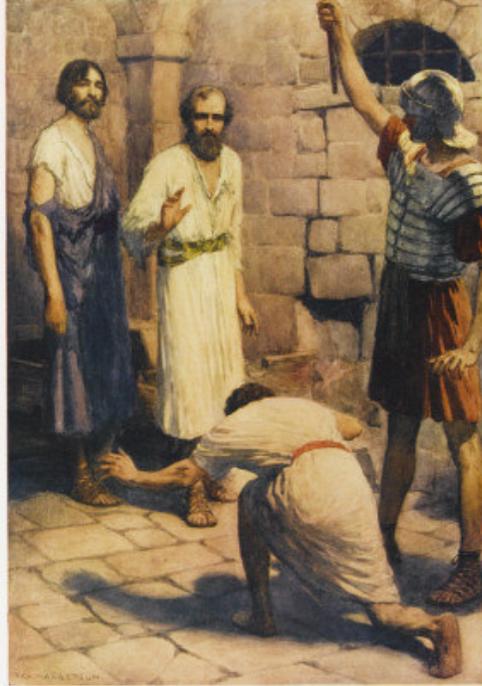
The warden casts Paul and Silas into the interior jail, and secures their feet in the stocks. Now at midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and sang hymns to God. Now the prisoners listened to them. Now suddenly a great quake occurred, so that the foundations of the prison are shaken. Now instantly all the doors were opened, and the bonds of all were slacked.

—Acts 16:24-26

An hour later, the jailor and his family heard the gospel of grace, and were saved. There is something about two jailed people singing hymns with their feet in stocks that impresses people.

Paul later wrote from Rome (Ph. 1:12-14):

Now I am intending you to know, brethren, that my affairs have rather come to be for the progress of the evangel, so that my bonds in Christ become apparent in the whole pretorium, and the majority of the brethren, having confidence



in the Lord as to my bonds, are more exceedingly daring to speak the word of God fearlessly.

Weakness with grace is a mighty power. Jesus Christ amazed Pontius Pilate by calmly speaking to him. Then, from the cross, He forgave His murderers.

I complain when the convenience store runs out of my brand of chocolate bar. Sometimes I think it would be easier to walk nobly in the face of some great trial. It’s the commonness of life that debilitates me. But then I realize: *I am in the trial of my life.* A slave of Christ, I walk unnoticed and poor through an indifferent world. My back is against the wall of the Philippi jail, and I cannot move.

What a great time to sing. ■



“We are located for this.”

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: **No one is to be swayed by these afflictions, for you yourselves are aware that we are located for this.** —1 Thess. 3:3

It would be easy for Paul’s friends to wonder why a messenger of God would have to suffer so much. Paul sure was in a lot of wrong places at the wrong times. Wasn’t he?

Not at all. Paul was actually moved, by God, to where the trouble was: swamp, ship, downtown Jerusalem, Rome—you name it. He was located *for the purpose* of affliction.

If there were not some value to be had, and some good to be wrung from the affliction, God would never have done this. He was doing it *for* Paul, not to him. It’s the same with us.

Like Paul, then, we have a golden opportunity to sing in the rain.

As long as affliction has to come—and it does—it helps to know that we do not ultimately bring it on ourselves. Whatever you are going through, God has *located* you for it. You’re not lost, and you’re not alone.

God has one hell of a GPS. ■

May as well laugh; Paul did.

I realize that we are enduring the most eon evil ever, and that we’re all a step away from death—but that’s no reason not to have a laugh, is it? Of course not. It didn’t stop Paul.

One of my favorite lines (I almost said, “one-liners”) from scripture is Paul’s memorable remark as he testifies for his life before Festus, procurator of Judea, King Agrippa II, and the king’s sister, Berenice of Cilicia.

Having just made an impassioned defense, Paul gestures toward the king and says:

King Agrippa, are you believing the prophets? I am aware that you are believing! —Acts 26:27

Agrippa said:

“Briefly are you persuading me, to make *me* a Christian!” (vs. 28)

Then Paul said:

I wish to God that not only you, but also all who are hearing me today, become such a kind as I am—outside of these bonds! (vs. 29)



“Thanks, folks. I’ll be here all week.”

Picture Paul. The king has just suggested he could almost become like the apostle, and Paul then says, “I wish everyone was in my situation.” Then he lifts his chained hands and says, “Well, except for these, of course!”

I say he brought down the house. The royalty dismissed themselves (probably to giggle), and returned to declare Paul innocent.

A spoonful of humor helps the eon go down. ■

Rants & Stuff

The Apostle Paul says we should not murmur (Philippians 2:14). Therefore, I shall rant.

Remembering Herb Dirks

HE DIED FIVE YEARS AGO, BUT I WILL NEVER FORGET HIM.

God sent Herb Dirks to the Earth via Germany before the Second World War, and he suffered during that conflict, never recovering from it. He saw people burned alive; he also took a rifle butt to his head. He was a good boy, but he stuttered and became a prisoner of war as a youth. God drew him to Himself through much pain. As our apostle says, "It is through much tribulation that we enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts



14:22).

Herb came to our Bible studies when we held them at our home. He was big and thick, like a tank, and powerful with his accent and ferocious stutter. Herb slapped you on the back with tears in his eyes and loved you like a bear. He cried so easily. He prayed for you always, and followed up by bringing you things. When my family was struggling, in he would march with a watermelon, or soda, or a bag of groceries—always crying, always pressing toward



you, forever loving you.

I remember the day I told him that I, too, had stuttered. We fellowshiped around that. He loved me for confessing it, and wept for my confession. It was Herb who told me minutes before my first public address: "Get up, speak up, shut up." He saved me that day. That was eighteen years ago now, but I recall that mantra still, whenever I approach a podium.

Herb strove to know nothing but Christ, and Him crucified. At that, he succeeded. I can't wait to hear the man speak in the coming eon. ■

Future world rulers bound and beaten

Jesus chose the twelve apostles to someday rule the earth. These twelve men will eventually each have a throne in the world capital of Jerusalem, where they will judge the twelve tribes of Israel and, by extension, all other nations. That's a pretty good gig. In Acts, chapter five, however, these future sover-

eigns are rudely herded into the chambers of the Sanhedrin. Imagine. Here they all are in the same room—some of the most famous men in history. Nations will one day tremble before them. Now, however, they are in an antechamber of the chief priest, who tells them to stop teaching. When Peter says, basically, "I'm sorry, sir, but that's impossible," the future rulers of the world are bound, beaten, and told once again to keep their mouths shut. Did they call their lawyers? Well ... no.

They, indeed, then, went from the face of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they were deemed worthy to be dishonored for the sake of the Name. —Acts 5:41-42

The next verse tell us that, "the disciples multiplied" (Acts 6:1).

As I said, God's servants do their best work bound. ■



The Sanhedrin. *Oops.*

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