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The Furtherance of the Gospel

~by Don Wright

During Paul's second missionary journey, a man from Macedonia appeared to him in a vision asking him to come over to Macedonia and help them (Acts 16:9). Paul, realizing that this was a call from God to preach the gospel in Macedonia, did not hesitate to answer the call. The first place Paul preached in Macedonia was the city of Philippi. By the power of God and His saving gospel, Paul was able to convert some souls to Christ, and the local church at Philippi was established. The relationship that Paul maintained with the Philippians was perhaps the best one he had with a local church. He thought of them as his joy and crown (Philippians 4:1), and they were always in his heart (Philippians 1:7). Theirs was a relationship that epitomized Christianity.

About ten years after establishing the local church at Philippi, Paul wrote them a letter while under house arrest at Rome. The letter was one of his most positive ones as he copiously praises them for their faithfulness to God and kindness to him. He shares his appreciation for their partnership in the gospel (1:5), and thanks them for their financial support which they had given him from the beginning (4:15-19). Paul doesn't reveal any bitterness concerning the imprisoned condition he finds himself in, but, instead, assures the brethren that the things which were happening to him have resulted in the furtherance of the gospel (1:12).

To Paul the furtherance of the gospel was always paramount. His mission in life was to promote the gospel of Christ, even at his own peril. Paul demonstrated this in three ways.

1. He put Christ first (vers. 12-21). Paul was aware of those who preached the gospel with impure motives (1:16). Nevertheless, as long as the gospel was preached and was being spread abroad, he was willing to endure the affliction. Why? Because to Paul, Christ and the gospel came first. Thus, as long as the gospel was being furthered, Paul rejoiced (1:18). Even if events turned tragic because of the preaching of the gospel, and Paul would lose his life, the most important thing to him was the magnification of Christ (1:20). Wherever Paul went, whatever situation Paul found himself in, the gospel was always furthered because Jesus was always the center of his life (1:21).

2. He put others second (vers. 22-26). Paul seemed to live by one simple rule: Christ first, brethren second. His prayer life was a demonstration of how much he loved his brethren. Early on, in the first chapter of Philippians, Paul indicates that he prayed for the saints at Philippi on a regular basis (vers. 4, 9). Why did Paul pray for brethren so often? Outside of the fact that Paul had a strong belief in the power of prayer, he prayed for brethren so often because they were always on his mind. Paul's unquenchable desire to help his brethren make it to heaven is seen in that, given the choice, he would stay here on earth to help his brethren, rather than to go to be with Christ, which, of course, is where he really wanted to be (vers. 23-24). The well-being of brethren was more important to Paul than his own happiness. In this Paul shared the mind of Christ (2:1-5). This insatiable desire to help others is also the mind-set that reveals Paul's natural propensity to preach the gospel. Wherever Paul went, he took the gospel with him, and thus, the gospel of Christ was furthered. We should all take note of Paul's pattern of living. The furtherance of the gospel of Christ will only take place when Christians love Christ first, and those who need him second.

3. He put himself last. Jesus first, Others second, Yourself last leads to true joy. This epitomized the life of Paul. This is why he could rejoice in times of persecution and be content in whatever condition he found himself (4:11). How different was Paul from the majority of people in our society today, as well as, many members of the body of Christ. Personal pleasure and one's own happiness seems to be the obsession of the average person in our communities today. There is little doubt that this is one reason there is so much depression and general unhappiness in the world today. You

see, perfect happiness and tranquility is almost impossible to hang on to. There are just too many ups and downs in life to rely on one's physical condition for true peace of mind. The truth is, life is filled with problems. Job once said, "Man that is born of woman is of few days, and full of trouble" (Job 14:1). This is just the way of the world. For Paul, this truth was okay because his personal happiness was not first, or even second, on his list of concerns. Paul found happiness somewhere else. Paul found joy in serving Jesus first and others second. Only after that would he bother himself with his own wants and desires. And what was the end of such thinking? It was the furtherance of the gospel.

How Are Your Eyes?

Michael Baker

How are your eyes? The average American gets an eye exam every 2 years. Most people would probably say their eyesight is the most valuable of their senses. We have all kinds of techniques today that are able to improve our vision. But how recently have you checked your spiritual eyesight? Jesus says that just because we can see physically, it does not mean we are able to see. In Matthew 13:15 He quotes the prophet Isaiah saying, "their eyes have closed." He says His disciples were blessed because they saw with their eyes and heard with their ears in verse 16. Jesus will call us blessed as well if we use our spiritual eyesight to discern His teachings. What are some spiritual eye problems we see in the Bible?

Some people in the Bible had eyes which were spiritually blind. Jesus condemns the Pharisees in Matthew 15:14 saying that they were "blind leaders of the blind." By their decision to reject Jesus' teachings and abide under the Old Law and their own traditions, they became hypocrites, leading those astray who follow them. In 2 Corinthians 4:4 Paul says there were some in the church whose unbelief had blinded them. By turning to another "god of this age", they had veiled the gospel to them-selves. We become spiritually blind by turning to our own ways and rejecting the light of the gospel which could give us sight. In John 1:9, we see Jesus described as the "true light" and He "came to His own, and His own, did not receive Him." in verse 11. The Jews of that time, who had been waiting hundreds of years for their Messiah, were spiritually blind and unable to recognize the Son of God in their presence.

There are also some in the Bible whose eyes were spiritually out of focus. In 2 Corinthians 4:18 we see Paul's encouraging words not to lose hope due to their physical sufferings. He says, "we do not look at the things which are seen..." but, our eyes must be fixed upon the unseen. The trials we deal with in our physical state can be discouraging, but they cannot be allowed to let us take our eyes off the prize of Heaven. The things we see and endure physically in this life are temporary. "We have a building from God" as 2 Corinthians 5:1 reveals, showing that this body is not our permanent residence. There is something far better ahead if we keep our eyes spiritually in check.

We also see some folks whose eyes were shortsighted. In 2 Peter 1:9, we see that the one who fails to grow spiritually is shortsighted. Peter lists off ways that we need to be growing as Christians. If we are not remembering our sins are forgiven, and what a wonderful blessing that is, we are shortsighted and are not going to Heaven. When we are not looking spiritually, we'll miss out on opportunities. Jesus describes the harvest time in John 4:35. Those who are not looking for opportunities spiritually are those who say "there are still four months and then comes the harvest." Jesus says we need to be like those who lift up their spiritual eyes and look for spiritual opportunities.

Our eyes are very important and make the majority of our lives easier. The same is true for our spiritual eyes. If we are facing eye problems spiritually, they cannot be cured by corrective lenses. Look to Jesus to cure spiritual blindness. Focus on Heaven to bring our eyes into focus. Continue to grow spiritually to not be shortsighted. Let us apply these to our lives so we can have healthy eyes.