

First the text, and then an assault on “what is called narrative theory.”

(Philippians 1:12-20, NASB):

***12**Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, **13**so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, **14**and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear. **15**Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; **16**the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; **17**the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. **18**What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice.*

*Yes, and I will rejoice, **19**for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, **20**according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.*

- #1. Verse 1:12. Paul's personal circumstances became an aid to the "greater progress of the gospel." This means that divine Providence had shaped his personal circumstance. The apostle declares that his imprisonment amounted to what we might call “shaped circumstance” or “shaped experience.” Any routine observation of such experience would *not* conclude Paul's situation was any kind of personal asset. Indeed, it was not.

We well know that in this world, we can grow poorer not richer, older not younger, weaker not stronger. This man of God became less free, not more free. We see elsewhere in Scripture that this apostle had suffered personal reversals. But his circumstances were anything but a “reversal” for the Gospel.

A reversal for the man, yet an asset to the gospel? How does a believer understand this reality of circumstance? Paul, given his love of revealed truth, could answer in only one way: the price! This is the price we bear to serve the progress of the gospel. There was no other way to conceive of his hardship. No other “narrative” would do.

- #2. We learn from this that the governing condition of Paul's life was the progress of the gospel. This prisoner of the Lord was bearing up under supernaturally- set experience.

Similarly, we remember that we were baptized into Christ, into His kingdom, baptized into shaped experience. This produces our history.

From Philippians 1:12-20. THE WORD OF GOD VERSUS NARRATIVE THEORY, PART 2

- #3. The "whole praetorian guard" and "everyone else" had learned about Christ (v. 13.) Ironically, these hard men, servants of the Roman Empire, became a kind of captive audience. Providence had arranged this intersection between the gospel and the praetorian; and at this time during Paul's considerable distress in imprisonment. The Lord had pushed a truth outside of time into their minds. *Progress of the Gospel*, we must conclude, does not correspond to its acceptance. But acceptance of it begins there.
- #4. "The brethren" (v. 14) were also affected.
 - A)-- They had increased trust in the Lord.
 - B)-- They had more courage to "speak the word of God."
 - C) – And significantly, they were without "fear."

The *progress of the Gospel* is the case but it takes different forms. Imagine the Gospel progressing in the world, but NOT progressing in the Church. There must be an absolute correlation between the progress of the Gospel among the believers and that of the progress in the world. Furthermore, the progress of the Gospel is evidenced in an individual (any individual) by significant courage in the face of serious even palpable danger.

Progress of the Gospel is the precondition for controlling fear by faith. The progress of the Gospel in this the last phase of history is the primary purpose of God in the world. It must therefore dwarf all of time, dwarf our every experience, and compromise any personal sense of temporal advantage. The progress of the Gospel under these conditions cannot be subject to any narrative theory.

From Philippians 1:12-20. THE WORD OF GOD VERSUS NARRATIVE THEORY, PART 3

- #5. The Apostle's shaped experience became a symbol of correct behavior in tough situations. Paul was utterly devoted to the preaching of the Gospel. That was the "what" that was being told. He acknowledged that the motives of those who preached the "what" were of two kinds.
 - Some preached the Gospel out of "good will" (v. 15)
 - some with "envy"

- "strife" (v. 16)
- "selfish ambition" (v. 17);
- Those of proper motives knew that Paul "was appointed for the defense of the gospel" and out of "love" (v. 16)
- Others did so "to cause me distress in my imprisonment" (v. 17)

This preacher was not disturbed by those negative motives, because "Christ is proclaimed" (v. 18.) In other words, those improper motives did not change nor corrupt the truth of the Gospel. He would never have stood for any change, alteration, corruption of the Gospel Truth. Paul could "rejoice" (v. 18) because the motives of the preachers did not affect (the "what") that was proclaimed.

It is possible to corrupt the what that is preached by the "how" it is preached. But that did not happen. So it is God who is *the Driving Force* behind the progress of the Gospel (v. 19.)

Prayer and Providence. And that is the governing condition of experience and circumstance.

"I will not be put to shame in anything" (v. 20.) Paul and the brethren expected complete vindication of all biblical truth claims. This man was proud of revealed truth and risked everything for it (the "what.")

From Philippians 1:12-20. THE WORD OF GOD VERSUS NARRATIVE THEORY, PART 4

ASSAULT ON NARRATIVE THEORY:

- #1. At the academic level, the Scripture is read under the influence of narrative theory. Result: We are being sold a pack of lies!
- #2. These theorists divide Scripture into two categories:
 - A) THE "WHAT" that is being told, the text of Scripture which does not vary. It is fixed.
 - B) THE "HOW" IT CAN BE TOLD. According to the narrative theory, there are many different perspectives on Scripture. Each one is a narrative, or in the language of the theory, a "story." No single narrative or "story" is the truth, they would say; it is just one perspective among any number of others.

Effectively, then, the "how" changes or alters our understanding of the "what." Such a degenerate alteration has already occurred in the churches.

Philippians 1:12-20, however, can never grant that degenerate reading of the Gospel. Our concern is with the "what" that is being told.

Example: the issue of homosexuality. One perspective or “how” on Scripture preaches that homosexuality/same sex marriage is acceptable to God. To get to that conclusion, two things must happen.

- sexuality must be wrenched away from the language manifold of Scripture.
- a narrative or a "story" must be spun to support the conclusion.

A narrative theory generalization: “When one does not like the logical meaning of the Scripture, then one turns to some form of narrative theory!”

Isn't that what happened in Genesis 3?

From Philippians 1:12-20. THE WORD OF GOD VERSUS NARRATIVE THEORY, PART 5.

- #3. According to people called “*culture makers*,” language is a cultural practice. We are told that language shapes us, we don't shape language. Therefore, our children are to be taught or molded accordingly!

Media, actors, politicians, academics, and some educators operate on this premise. So these people manufacture narratives to influence others. We are drones to be culturally shaped, to be told how to think. That is not biblical.

- #4. Scripture presents the *organic continuum*: It starts with
 - A. The Word of God (the “what”) --->
 - B. Then, generalization from the text (a form of logic) ---> is applied to
 - c. Reason and to behavior.

#5. The Finding: The most significant product of this continuum is that it puts reasoning and behavior in their necessary forms; consequently displacing narrative theory.

Reason and behavior are, by that virtue, made discontinuous from narrative theory. Thought, speech, and behavior are thus inflected (just as some parts of speech are inflected by their proper usage.)

Believers understand that they do indeed shape language. And believers comprehend that language is to be organic to Scripture.

Scripture is not a collection of "stories." Rather, it is the supernatural means to symbolize Absolute Truth; and our language becomes the means to push the logic of Scripture into the world.

From Philippians 1:12-20. THE WORD OF GOD VERSUS NARRATIVE THEORY, PART 6.

SOME EXPANSION:

- An immediate result of the organic continuum --
 - SCRIPTURE ---> GENERALIZATION ---> REASON and BEHAVIOR
 - --is that it puts reason and behavior in their necessary forms. "Necessary," in the sense that there can be no other way.
 - Abraham did not meet this standard when he settled on the "Hagar Option" (Genesis 16). However, in Genesis 22, the patriarch's reasoning and behavior took on the necessary forms in his decision to obey the Lord and sacrifice Isaac.
 - The Israelites at Kadesh-Barnea (Numbers 13, 14) failed to put their reasoning and behavior in their necessary forms when the people refused to begin the conquest of Canaan.
 - King David, against the will of God numbered the troops (2 Samuel 24). His reasoning and behavior were not forced into their necessary forms.
- (2) Reasoning and behavior are effects of *the organic continuum*. In themselves, they are not causal.
- (3) Christian thinking and Christian behavior are true, defined categories in the world. There is nothing vague, nothing subjective about them. These ways of thinking and acting are not open to sophistry nor to philosophic measurement.
- (4) There is a "world narrative." Believers do not, cannot, "work within" that narrative. We stand in direct opposition to the world narrative.
- (5) In the maelstrom of life how do you know you made "the right decisions?" By the consequences? No! But by whether or not our reason and behavior were put into biblical necessary forms!

That is not only the right decision, it is the only decision! The power of God is deeply related to those whose thinking and behavior are put in their necessary forms.