

The Most Excellent Way, First Baptist Church, Panama City

“Overcoming Opposition”

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Part 6 - "Overcoming Opposition"

All of us have had bad days; days when you may have wished that didn't even get out of bed. Perhaps you had some inclination that things might not go too well when you embarked on one of these days. Or perhaps you had no idea that one phone call, one negative response from someone or one false accusation directed toward you would set the wheels in motion and turned what may have been your blue sky to gray. Most of us, if we are spiritually prepared, can manage a bad day and maybe even a couple of bad days back-to-back. However, what many of us have a challenge with is when bad days come to stay, and they don't come to go.

It would be safe for us to say that opposition is a part of life, and would it be safe to say that opposition is a part of the Christian life? There is no sense in pretending that we are expected to stay on a spiritual mountain for the remainder of our lives after we get saved. Although you and I have a relationship with God through His son Jesus Christ, we do sometimes face opposition.

We can describe opposition as a disapproving attitude toward something and a wish to prevent it, or action taken to show disapproval of and prevent something. It can be a lingering feeling of being stuck in a place in our lives perhaps because of the poor choices that we may have made. It can be the result of a prior failure or setback in some areas of our lives when we may have thought that we were finally gaining some ground. Opposition is something that we all face in life and especially in the Christian life. We can face opposition when it is our fault and when it is not, but the bottom line is, we can and will experience opposition.

The question then is not, will I face it? The question is, since it is true that I will face opposition, how do I manage it in a way that is helpful to me and pleasing to God? There is one sure way of finding answers and direction for opposition, the Bible. Praise God, we have Biblical examples of people who rose above grave circumstances in their lives to experience victory. People in situations where any onlooker would count them down and out, who today in the records of history may have been down but were far from out.

As we study one of these examples, we will learn that obstacles in the Christian life are a reality; the difference is how we respond to them. Some obstacles come into our lives and exit as quickly as they arrived and some park for a while until we have learned a greater lesson. We will learn that opposition can draw us closer to God, which would be one of God's objectives and what we needed all along.

In this study we will gaze into the life of the Apostle Paul and look at a few circumstances that might have made any of us give up and see how he responded to those circumstances. In doing so we will be able to take a Biblical example and apply it to our lives in order that we might overcome in times of opposition.

2 Timothy 4:6-18 - For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. 9 Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me: 10 For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia. 11 Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry. 12 And Tychicus have I sent to Ephesus. 13 The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments. 14 Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: 15 Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words. 16 At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. 17 Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. 18 And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

When we read this scripture, it would do us well to consider what the Apostle Paul was before he came to Christ. Paul was great, famous in religious circles and wealthy; he was brought up at the feet of a great teacher named Gamaliel. He was so zealous among his peers that we can be certain that he received their earnest respect. He was a man of good standing in society, and doubtless, everybody who looked at young Saul of Tarsus would have said, "He will make a great man; he has every chance in life; he has the finest education, the best of character, abundant gifts, and the general regard of the Jewish rulers; he will no doubt rise to eminence." In Acts chapter 9 we read that a guard of soldiers accompanied him when he made his way to Damascus to hunt down Christians.

But when Paul meets the Lord on the road to Damascus (**Acts 9:1-6**), everything changed with him. Following that he could honestly say, "**But what things were gain to me, those I counted**

loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him." (Philippians 3:7-9)

Then Paul begins to preach and away goes his character among his so-called Jewish associates....or at least that was their assessment of him. In Acts 22:22 they stated "Away with such a fellow from the earth, it is not fit that he should live". Paul continues in his labor for Christ and away goes his wealth, he has either scattered it among the poor or had it confiscated by his former friends. He travels from place to place with a sizable sacrifice of comfort. The wife of whom he was united with had fallen sick and died and he now preferred a life of singleness that he might give himself entirely to his work in the ministry.

By the time of our reading in his second letter to Timothy he has grown old and gray and the very men who owe their coming to Christ to his faithfulness, have forsaken him. When he first came into Rome they stood with him, but now they have all gone and the poor old man sits with nothing in the entire world to call property but an old coat and a few books, and those are miles away. Can we begin to see the occasion that he had to be discouraged? Paul emptied himself, and it is amazing to what margin of misery that he was willing to bring himself for the sake and cause of Jesus Christ.

When we consider what we have just read it might pose several questions considering Paul's circumstances. Was Paul right in all of this? Were the sacrifices that he made reasonable ones? Was the object of his worship and allegiance worthy of all this suffering and self-denial? Was he carried away by some kind of excessive fanaticism that had never required this level of surrender to begin with? Yes, Paul was right in all of this, yes, his sacrifices were reasonable, yes Jesus Christ is worthy of his suffering, and no he was not simply a fanatic without a real cause. But how many of us have truly even scratched the surface of doing the same? Or have we often been caught up by the winds and waves of opposition and stopped in our tracks only to be hindered from experiencing true surrender to Jesus Christ?

A closer look at Paul's finish and how he overcame opposition:

1. **Verses 6-8 - Paul's knowledge.** For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness,

which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

If there is one thing that we see in this text, we see the confidence that Paul had that could have only come from his relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul was now, you might say, a "tested" Christian. He had been and was being refined in the furnace of adversity and opposition. He was no longer a babe in Christ giving into the temptation to complain about the inconveniences of serving his Lord. The room he served was never too hot or too cold; his call to preach was never a burden to him when he was told it was a burden to his listeners. He never stayed when it was time to go for the Lord and he never left till the Lord told him it was time to leave. Paul made his commitment on that road to Damascus when he asked the Lord, "**what will you have me to do**" and he did it.

What Paul knew:

- **He knew he was ready. I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.**

It has been said and I would agree that a person is not ready to live until they are ready to die. The word ready means "to be prepared for something that is going to happen". Paul knew that his death was not only going to happen, but it was also going to happen soon. His preparation was not based on the way that he lived his life as it pertains to the balancing of the good and the bad that he had done in his life. It was not based on his religious achievements or titles, though they were many.

Paul's readiness was totally based on his faith in Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the cross for the forgiveness of his sins. Paul knew because he wrote about it so that we could know it as well.

Ephesians 2:8,9 - For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Paul's faith in Christ was the beginning of his life of service for Christ.

- **He knew that he fought. I have fought a good fight (contest, struggle)**

I'm not sure there is a better way to describe the Christian life than that of a fight. You might say, "That's not what I signed up for". Maybe you thought that you didn't sign up for

that but if you have not already noticed, that's what you will experience much of the time. The fight is not to be feared or make us desponded because the fight takes place in the life of every believer. It is the fight primarily between the flesh and the Spirit.

Matthew 26:41 - Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Romans 7:18 - For I know that in me that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.

Galatians 5:17 - For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

Before we get discouraged about the fight we are in we must see the way that Paul describes the fight. Paul testifies that he fought a "good fight", not a bad one. If there is a good fight to be fought, that only makes sense that there is a bad fight as well. Paul's fight was for the cause of Christ and not for his own causes. His fight was for personal holiness and godliness. His fight was to righteousness so that Christ would have first place in his life.

The Application:

- Anything that is worth having is worth fighting for.
- The battle is often about what we want vs. what God wants.
- When we surrender our desires to the will of God we can only come out on the winning side.

Psalm 37:4,5 - Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. 5 Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.

- **He knew he was a finisher. I have finished my course**

There are many things that we will be known for when we pass from this life to the next, but one of the greatest ways that you and I can be described is to be described as a finisher. Some years back a man shared with me that the only thing he had ever finished was his drugs and his prison time. What a sad commentary to a life that had the opportunity, with God's help, to get things turned around. It must have done Paul well to know that despite his

present circumstances he could look back and know that he had finished what God had started.

Philippians 1:6 - Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:

It gives us great confidence to know when Paul wrote his letter from prison in Rome, he knew that God would finish the work in him that He started, and he had been and was seeing Him do that. We read in **2 Timothy** that what he said in **Philippians 1:6** had indeed come to pass in what would be his last writing. With that said, it would never have happened if Paul had given up and given in to the opposition.

The Application:

- Opposition is a reality, but it does not have to be the reason that we do not finish.
- Opposition, like temptation, tends to come and go.
- Be careful when you are discouraged that you do not give into the temptation to quit and go back to what never worked in the past.
- **He knew he still had his faith. I have kept the faith**

Faithfulness should be an everyday thing. There are days when we are more faithful than other days but the objective as it pertains to faithfulness is consistency; and our consistency will be the expression of the object of our faith. The areas of our lives where we are consistent will make all the difference as to whether we can be described as faithful.

Paul's statement wasn't simply about how he described his consistency in the Christian life; however, we can certainly apply this truth in such a way. Paul said that he had, "kept the faith". The word kept means, "to attend to carefully or to take care of". Paul said that he kept the faith not just any faith. Paul attended to carefully and took great care of the conviction that God exists and is the creator and ruler of all things, the provider and giver of eternal salvation through Christ. And Paul not only focused on this, but he lived to proclaim and defend it throughout his life as well.

Romans 1:16 - For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

The Application:

- A great deal of opposition can be overcome by purpose.
- Our faith will never grow until we exercise the faith we have.
- The importance of knowing what we believe can never be stressed enough.

2 Timothy 1:2 - For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.

- **He knew it was not in vain. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.**

Paul lived with an objective! That objective was not simply to be a finisher, although that was part of his objective. His objective was to testify the gospel of the grace of God. He states that his reward would be based on these things that he accomplished. In other words, Paul knew what he was purposed for, and he made that what he purposed to do. His love for Christ controlled him and he was confident that his reward would follow him.

2. Vs. 9-16 Paul's circumstances. Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me: 10 For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia. 11 Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry. 12 And Tychicus have I sent to Ephesus. 13 The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments. 14 Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: 15 Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words. 16 At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge.

Paul requests that Timothy come to him as quickly as he can. Timothy was a young preacher and Paul's son in the Lord; Paul had mentored him and taught him how to live and serve in the ministry. He was not a pastor in any one place, but he attended to the prior work of the apostles and built upon the foundations they had previously laid. Paul's request was for Timothy's company and help and for this he gives several reasons.

- **Demas had forsaken him....** **For Demas hath forsaken me.** Demas had quit, and there is not a better way to describe it. He was allured by something that appeared to be a better offer than serving Christ. Paul says that he left because he **“loved this present world”**. Demas, like others have and like others will, gave up on God because something caught his eye that he should have turned from instead of turning to.

Romans 6:21 - What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.

The Application:

- Be careful when the Christian life appears to be more difficult than the old life.
- When we open ourselves up to options from the past, we are very likely to suffer the same results of those options in the future.
- **Luke remained with Paul....** **Only Luke is with me.** Paul adds the names of two more men that had left him; He mentions that Crescens went to Galatia and Titus went to Dalmatia. Paul does not mention the reasons for their departure, but we can be certain that it did not add to his comfort, but to his discomfort.

When Paul says that Luke was still with him, we might think that this would bring comfort to him and we can be certain that it did. However, when Paul asks that Timothy send Mark to him we can see that he was not requesting he be sent for his comfort but for the work of the ministry.... **“for he is profitable to me in the ministry”**.

Here we see again that for Paul to not allow himself to be discouraged by his circumstances, God enabled him to continue to focus on the ministry and purpose that He called him to. He always seemed to be able to overcome his circumstances by his unwavering sense of purpose and calling.

Philippians 4:11 - Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, *therewith* to be content.

- **Paul's request for his needs.** Paul asks Timothy to bring his coat to him that he had apparently left in Troas. We can be certain that the conditions in the prison were not in any way favorable to his comfort. Paul was in unhealthy surroundings and cold. He wanted his coat and his books. Most scholars believe that the “parchments” that he requested

that Timothy bring may have been the originals of his epistles. In all of what Paul was experiencing and his knowledge that it would only get worse he still felt the need to read and learn.

The Application:

- Paul was approaching his finish, but he wasn't finished learning. May this convict our hearts to apply ourselves to continued learning in the Christian life.
- We can be certain that Paul was learning many things by way of his experience but his strength and comfort would be greatly increased by what he would learn from "his books".
- **More opposition for Paul. Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil.** Alexander the coppersmith had done him much evil. Most scholars think that Alexander was a Christian and turned back to Judaism. Paul was in as much danger from false brethren as he was from open enemies. His response to Alexander leaves many of us with a challenge to follow in his footsteps. Paul's response to the evil that was done to him by Alexander was, **"the Lord will reward him according to his works"**. Paul knew that retaliation was not his part to play, and he left that part up to the Lord.

1 Thessalonians 5:15 - See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.

When we first read of Paul's reaction to the evil done to him by Alexander, we might think initially that Paul had the greater challenge of dealing with **"the much evil done to him"** and Alexander walked away as the winner without any price to pay. It may even appear that way when we experience being done wrong. However, Paul knew that God was much better at fighting his battles than he was.

The Application:

- When we learn this, we will never regret doing something that God has not lead us to do. There is enough opposition when dealing with being done wrong without adding to it by responding the wrong way.
- Taking things into our own hands when we have not been led by God will likely end with bigger problems than we started with.

- **Paul's total abandonment.** **At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge.** Can you think that it could get any worse than it is here? Paul says that in addition to all the outward circumstances that he had to endure, at one time he had been abandoned by everyone that knew him.

Paul had such an incredible sense of calm throughout the circumstances of his ministry life. We can be certain that he suffered more for the cause of Christ than any of us will ever come close to suffering. He testified about many of these experiences in **2 Corinthians 11:23-28**. In all of Paul's experience we can see that his faith, although challenged, was firm and sure. He had the opportunity, as we all do, to allow God to strengthen him in his challenges rather than be swallowed up by them. His response concerning those that had abandoned him was once again left in God's hands.

3. Vs. 17 & 18 Paul's confidence and Paul's victory over opposition. **Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. 18 And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.**

- **Paul's strength increased by his faith.** **Notwithstanding the Lord stood (to place beside or near) with me and strengthened me;** I cannot begin to think of anything that will provide more strength and encouragement than knowing that the Lord stands with us and in us. Paul tells Timothy that the Lord not only stood with him, but he also tells him the Lord stood with him and He strengthened him. Remember that Paul described that moment as the moment when at one time **"no man stood with him, but all men forsook him"**. If the Lord stands with us, though everyone else leaves us alone, He alone will strengthen us.

From this Biblical example we can see that for the Christian there is no such thing as literally being alone. Paul said that although all those that were once with him had abandoned him, that did not mean that he was totally alone.

Romans 8:31 - What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?

There is no sense in pretending that being alone will not sometimes cause us to feel discouraged. However, when we stand on the truth of God's word and focus our attention more on the presence of God than the absence of others, we will find that God's presence will fill the void left by everyone else's absence. Perhaps we needed to get to this place, if we've not been there before, to see that God was all we needed to begin with. Yes, we need people but if we ever get to the place where we think we need people more than we need God we are at risk of becoming co-dependent.

Hebrews 13:5 - *Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*

- **Paul's provision provided for God's purpose. That by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear:** Paul knew that God had preserved him for a reason and Paul also knew the reason was so that he could fulfill the purpose for which God had called him. When the Lord preserves us from danger it is for important work and service. In Paul's life we can see that God had preserved him before he was saved and long after he was saved in order that he might be used to bring others to Christ.

The Application:

- Whatever God has spared you from and/or walked you through, He will very often use you for.
- When God straightens out, cleans up and picks up the pieces of our broken lives it is for the purpose of being a part of doing the same for others.
- Nothing will encourage us anymore than knowing that God can use the broken places in our lives to help put the pieces together in someone else's.
- **God's deliverance in the past provided Paul's hope for his deliverance for eternity. And I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. 18 And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.**

Former deliverances should always encourage future hope. Yes, there are many things that we wish we could forget about when it comes to the past but there are also things to remember that will help us. Remember what God has delivered you from; remember the times that He has shown up in your life when you thought all hope was gone. Remember how

He has provided a way when there seemed to be no way and remember that He has a plan for your life, and He sometimes uses opposition as part of that plan!!

Our memory can serve as a hindrance, or a help, and it will be up to us which it will be. Never allow your past failures to overwhelm you. Continue to learn and stand on who you are in God because of your relationship with Jesus Christ. You are His child, and He is your Father. He is the Father of the fatherless and you have no reason to let the things of the past cast a shadow over what He has in store for your future! Cheer UP!!!

Opposition can be a breeding ground for discouragement. If the enemy, who IS our opposition can get us discouraged he will also try to make us quit. Paul gives us so many instructions that when followed serve as our encouragement. Consider the following:

Philippians 4:6 - Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

Simply said, when we are doing one thing, we won't be doing another, and it works both ways. When we are praying, we won't be so easily discouraged and when we are discouraged we are less likely to pray.

Consider the following verses when the opposition comes your way:

Jeremiah 29:11 - For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.

John 16:33 - These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

Psalm 20:7 - Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God.

Psalm 91:14-16 - Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. 15 He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. 16 With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation.