

## Being Confident About the Future

Philippians 1:6

On this 88<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Calvary Baptist Church in Findlay, Ohio, it's time to remember our past, rejoice in the present and look to the future. It would be hard to think of a better passage to consider than Philippians 1:6, "**Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you [all] will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.**"

### BEING CONFIDENT

The Apostle Paul made his statement about the congregation at Philippi with great assurance because his trust was in the Lord. And his certainty about the church at Philippi applies to all other congregations as well. Yes, churches have problems, including the one in Philippi (2:3,14 strife; 3:1-4, 17-19 false teachers; 4:2-3 more strife). Paul's confidence was not in the believers, but in the Christ who indwelt those believers. As he described it to the congregation at Colosse, "**...the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.**"

### By the work of the Trinity

God the Father began this excellent work at Philippi (1:6). It was performed by Jesus Christ (1:11). The Spirit enabled the believers (1:19). We derive our confidence today from the work of the Trinity that we could express in three simple (but profound) principles:

1. God is Able
2. God's promises are powerful.
3. Failures are not finished.

As an illustration: Abraham had failed so miserably on many occasions. But according to Hebrews 11:11-19, Abraham was not honored for his failures, but for his prevailing faith in the promises of the God who is able. This is why Paul was so confident about the future; he knew that God's grace would prevail. It is confidence such as this that helps us to remember that failures aren't finished.

The people gasped as the preacher thrust his right hand into the flickering flames. Moments earlier, he had explained this unusual move. "*Forasmuch as my hand has offended, writing contrary to my heart, therefore my hand shall first be punished; for when I come to the fire,*" he declared, "*it shall first be burned.*" For us, he illustrates that fickle failures aren't finished. It was March 21, 1556. And as Thomas Cranmer finished his surprising sermon, he was tied to the stake to be burned. "Bloody Mary" had ordered his execution. What will you say, what will you pray, when you come to your last dying day?

About 1080 B.C. another fickle failure stood shackled and mocked by a sneering crowd. He prayed, "*Let me die!*" and pushed outward with all his might. Samson served the Lord for twenty years as mighty judge in Israel. Before he was born, the Lord had ordained him with a special angelic announcement. The Lord had declared Samson to be a special Nazirite from his mother's womb. This meant that he was to abstain from wine, avoid what was unclean (such as

a corpse) and never cut his hair.<sup>1</sup> Samson was endowed with supernatural strength to accomplish his God-given mission. But little by little, he ignored the Lord's commands, leading to his fickle decline. He touched a lion's corpse and drank with the enemy. And later Samson allowed a wicked woman to cut his hair. Then his enemies gathered around to attack him. Samson "awoke from his sleep, and said, 'I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!'" In a sad commentary on insensible Samson, the story goes on: "But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him."<sup>2</sup>

The enemies put out the eyes of that mighty judge of Israel and shackled him to a grindstone. Perhaps the apostle Peter thought of Samson when he later issued a startling warning about the importance of humble, obedient perseverance: "For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins."<sup>3</sup> Is it really possible for a backslidden believer to blindly forget that he or she has entered into a saving relationship with the holy God? Yes. Peter described a backslider named Lot, a resident of Sodom, in a similar manner.<sup>4</sup> And believe it or not, Lot was a believer. Like Samson his choices vexed his righteous soul.<sup>5</sup> But fickle failures aren't finished. Grinding away, the blinded judge was tormented by awful grief. "However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaven" (Judges 16:22). Perhaps the prophet Micah remembered Samson when he wrote, "Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; when I fall, I will arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me."<sup>6</sup> For you see, in spite of all Samson's foolhardy mistakes, the hair of his head began to grow again. And unbeknown to his enemies, his supernatural strength slowly returned as well. Boasting about the victory of their false gods, they brought blind Samson to entertain a crowd of about three thousand in their temple.<sup>7</sup> Calling a boy to his side, he asked to be placed between the two pillars that held up the building. Then Samson asked the Lord to let him die and used his renewed strength to bring down the building. He killed more of his nation's enemies in his death than he had in his entire lifetime. And so we can see that fickle failures aren't finished.

Thomas Cranmer, the archbishop of Canterbury, was one of the leading voices preaching the true Gospel in England. Bloody Mary, the new queen, hated him for proclaiming God's truth. With other godly leaders, Cranmer used the Scriptures to confront the heresies of the day. Since he was the leader, the forces of evil began to target him. He was sentenced to three years of hard imprisonment for his preaching. Then the enemies of the Gospel chose a different approach – offering to reward him with his freedom if he would turn his back on the Gospel. As John Foxe wrote, "When Satan finds the Christian proof against one mode of attack, he tries another; and what form is so seductive as smiles, rewards, and power, after a long, painful imprisonment?"<sup>8</sup> After wearing the weary Cranmer down his enemies deceitfully "promised him his former greatness if he would but recant, as well as the queen's favor, and this at the very time they knew that his death was determined in council."<sup>9</sup>

Thomas Cranmer made the excruciating choice to recant – to turn his back on the Gospel he preached. He signed a statement stating that he did "renounce, abhor, and detest all manner of heresies and errors of Luther and Zuinglius [Zwingli], and all other teachings which are contrary

to sound and true doctrine.”<sup>1</sup> But this was not enough for Cranmer’s enemies. They hounded him into signing five more recantations. But even that was not enough for Queen Mary. She hated Cranmer and ordered that he be burned at the stake – after he preached a message confessing his sins. And what a message he preached. Facing certain death and desiring to have a clear conscience, Cranmer confessed his sins. And the chief sin that he confessed was that he had wearily signed the statements authored by his adversaries. He concluded his preaching by saying,

*“And now I come to the great thing which so much troubles my conscience, more than any thing that ever I did or said in my whole life, and that is the setting abroad of a writing contrary to the truth, which now here I renounce and refuse, as things written with my hand contrary to the truth which I thought in my heart, and written for fear of death, and to save my life, if it might be; and that is, all such bills or papers which I have written or signed with my hand since my degradation, wherein I have written many things untrue. And forasmuch as my hand has offended, writing contrary to my heart, therefore my hand shall first be punished; for when I come to the fire, it shall first be burned.”<sup>2</sup>*

His preaching enraged the enemies of the Gospel even more. They tied him to a stake and set the brush pile below him afire. As the flames rose, he thrust his right hand into the fire and repeated, “Unworthy right hand, unworthy right hand.”

Many would say that courageous Cranmer was a more powerful witness at the end of his life than he had ever been before. And regardless of what we all face in the future, we now know that fickle failures aren’t finished.

### **But Beware of the dogs**

Thomas Cranmer faced the false teachers who tortured him. Paul expressed his confidence about the future of the church at Philippi in spite of the fact that false teachers were invading their congregation. He referred to them as dogs (3:1-4, 17-19). These were not household pets but ravening wolves. These false teachers are also present in our society, redefining sin and redefining righteousness: crafting burdens for men which cannot be borne (Matthew 23:4, Luke 11:46). Ezekiel 14 explains that these false preachers also kowtow to the whims of an idolatrous society. Beware of the dogs. Paul also gave this warning to the leaders at Ephesus (Acts 20:29).

### **BEGINNING TO END**

Acts 16:12-40 describes the tumultuous beginning of the church at Philippi. By the preaching of the gospel of Christ, the Lord opened Lydia’s heart by the river at Philippi. The Philippians jailer and his entire household trusted Christ. Paul’s words in Philippians 1:6 refer to “you” (“you all” – plural). They could all take heart in their fellowship.

The congregation of Calvary Baptist Church in Findlay, Ohio began in 1935. If the Lord wills, in twelve more years, we will celebrate our 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary! Pastor Dunham, Pastor Worden,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 244

Pastor Snavelly, Pastor Allen and I have had the wonderful privilege of laboring among you. Only eternity will reveal the impact of Calvary Baptist Church as salt and light in our community. In heaven, when we rejoice over the manifold grace of God, we will see the impact of this congregation on American Christianity and worldwide missions. And all of this began with the preaching of God's gospel of grace.

Has God begun this same work in you? Paul was confident that the same Heavenly Father who had begun this good work would perform it all the way through the Second Coming of Christ. As Jesus said, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draws him: and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44). The same Heavenly Father who draws men to Himself and begins this great work performs it all the way through to the last day. So once more, do you have this eternal life dwelling in you? God the Father sent His Son to this earth to live the righteous life that each one of should have lived. And then our loving Savior died the sinner's death that each one of us deserved. He rose again bodily from the grave so that each repentant sinner who calls upon Him will be saved. That whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (Acts 2:21; 10:13).

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<sup>1</sup> Judges 13:1-5

<sup>2</sup> Judges 16:20

<sup>3</sup> 2 Peter 1:9

<sup>4</sup> 2 Peter 2:6-9

<sup>5</sup> See Judges 16:16

<sup>6</sup> Micah 7:8

<sup>7</sup> Judges 16:28-30

<sup>8</sup> John Foxe, Fox's Book of Martyrs, Project Gutenberg, August 25, 2007, p. 241 accessed at

<https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/22400/pg22400-images.html>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.