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Read Philippians 1:12–18 in your favorite translation. I will print the NET–2 translation.

12 I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that my situation has actually turned out to advance the gospel: 13 The whole imperial guard and everyone else knows that I am in prison for the sake of Christ, 14 and most of the brothers and sisters, having confidence in the Lord because of my imprisonment, now more than ever dare to speak the word fearlessly.

15 Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. 16 The latter do so from love because they know that I am placed here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former proclaim Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, because they think they can cause trouble for me in my imprisonment. 18 What is the result? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is being proclaimed, and in this I rejoice.

COMMENTS:

The Greek word which is translated by the NET–2 as “brothers and sisters” is the word adelphós. We find it in the name of an American city, Philadelphia a compound name from two Greek words: adelphós and philéō so this city is known as the city of brotherly love.

Adelphós generally denotes a fellowship of life based on identity of origin, e.g., members of the same family (Matt. 1:2; Luke 3:1, 19; 6:14); members of the same tribe, countrymen, and so forth (Acts 3:22; 7:23; Rom. 9:3). One of the same nature, a fellow man was regarded as a brother (Matt. 5:22–24, 47).

Adelphós also came to designate a fellowship of love equivalent to or bringing with it a community of life (Matt. 12:50; Mark 3:35; 10:29, 30; Acts 12:17). In this manner Jesus speaks of His brethren (Matt. 25:40; 28:10; John 20:17; Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:11, 17). The members of the same Christian community are called brothers (John 21:23; Acts 9:30; Rom. 16:14; 1 Cor. 7:12).

While adelphótēs is used in the NT and by ecclesiastical writers, it is not used by Classical Greek writers who used philadelphía to denote only the love of siblings to each other. In Christianity adelphótēs is a brotherhood or sisterhood which has been made possible by Jesus Christ.

Since all believers are given the new birth, it is by virtue of that spiritual birth that men and women are truly brothers and sisters. We demonstrate the love of God by how well we love and care for our earthly family, but also our church family.

The Hebr. word ’āch encompassed more distant relatives (Gen. 14:16; 29:12, 15); therefore, some argue that this ought to be taken into consideration where brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus are referred to (Matt. 12:46, 47; 13:55; Mark 3:31, 32; 6:3; Luke 8:19, 20; John 2:12; Acts 1:14).

The only passage where the brothers of Jesus are not conjoined with his mother is John 7:3, 5, 10. The conjoined mention of the mother of Jesus appears to imply that these children had the same mother. Thus they are blood brothers and sisters of Jesus, not cousins.

The reason the Roman Catholics consider these references to cousins is because of their teaching that Mary remained a virgin throughout her life. There is nothing in the Bible to suggest this. Matthew 1:24–25 indicates the opposite. It tells us Joseph knew her not (a common way for the Bible to refer to a sexual relationship) until she had given birth to a son.

They didn't have the custom of using inclusive language in the patriarchal society at the time the Bible was written. However, we know women were very much a part of the church established by Jesus Christ. In fact, Acts tell us that the congregation in Philippi met in the house of Lydia, the seller of purple (Royal) cloth.

Since Paul is addressing the congregation here he obviously is including both males and females. Sometimes it is impossible to know if was intended to be inclusive and then it is best to just translate it as "brothers."

What Paul wants them to understand most is that his incarceration has not hindered the spread of the Gospel. Just the opposite God has used it to advance the spread in two ways. First, the whole imperial guard and everyone else (particularly in Rome) knew he was imprisoned for the sake of Jesus.

Second, many of the other Christians who saw Paul stand up to the Roman power became more bold and dared to speak God's Word fearlessly. Now he becomes a model to use in Luther's explanation of the Eighth Commandment. As I learned it as a child, "I was to put the best construction on everything." [Modern Version] "explain everything in the kindest possible way."

I heard recently of one who said to someone who identified himself as a Lutheran: You're the people who preach what an old dead man says rather than the Bible. If that were true, we should be ashamed, but I don't believe it is a true statement. We quote Luther when he agrees with the Bible, if he doesn't we reject his words (i.e. about Jews, which we condemned at a convention.)

Paul tells us something about how we should look at others who are also preaching Christ. He says some preach out of love, while other preach him out of envy or rivalry trying to pain Paul in prison. Yet he says, I'm just glad Christ is being preached.

REFLECTION QUESTION: If we see a church of another denomination which truly preaches Christ starts up in your neighborhood do you rejoice because Christ is being preached or do you view them as enemies who might steal members from our congregation. If a non-Christian religious group moves into your neighborhood does it spur you and your congregation to do more to share the gospel with those who do not yet know Christ. Don't curse them or attack them. Try to love them into the kingdom of God.