

Submit to God in Christ

January 20 • Lesson 8

Bible Background • PHILIPPIANS 1:12–21

Printed Text • PHILIPPIANS 1:12–21 | Devotional Reading • 1 PETER 4:12–19

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will: ANALYZE Paul’s circumstances spreading the Gospel despite others’ responses; DECIDE to be faithful and forgive others; and REJOICE in opportunities to do God’s work in the world through Jesus Christ.

In Focus

When the year started, Brenda had been vice principal of a high school, managing 1,600 teenagers through SATs, state-mandated exams, and parental expectations. City council members pushed for better test scores, criticizing the principals and school administrators for poor results—without acknowledging those administrators worked with limited resources and money. The school board responded with greater pressure on all the schools to show changes each quarter. Brenda worked with her teachers, trying to help them keep the balance between test preparation and teaching the things tests don’t measure, such as kindness, cooperation, and judgment.

There were improvements at Brenda’s high school, but the numbers were deemed insufficient. Brenda was reassigned to a middle school as an English and social studies teacher.

“It’s not fair,” her friend Moravia said. “I can’t believe you’re not mad.” “I’m in the classroom,” Brenda said. “I’m helping kids learn. I’m teaching what they need to know so they can know how to think, how to figure out the world around them. I think that’s a good thing, for them and for me. God has put me where He wants me to be.”

Some who teach the Gospel preach from envy and rivalry, but the Word of God is stronger than the motives of the people who spread it. Can we discern the message no matter who is the messenger?

Keep in Mind

“And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News” (Philippians 1:12, NLT).

Words You Should Know

A. Magnified megaluno (Gk.) — Increased, made great, enlarged.

B. Pretense prophasis (Gk.) — An attempt to make something appear true, doing something for show.

Say It Correctly

none

KJV

KJV Philippians 1:12 But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel;

13 So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places;

14 And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

15 Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will:

16 The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds:

17 But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel.

18 What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.

19 For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

20 According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.

21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

NLT

Philippians 1:12 And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News.

13 For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ.

14 And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message without fear.

15 It's true that some are preaching out of jealousy and rivalry. But others preach about Christ with pure motives.

16 They preach because they love me, for they know I have been appointed to defend the Good News.

17 Those others do not have pure motives as they preach about Christ. They preach with selfish ambition, not sincerely, intending to make my chains more painful to me.

18 But that doesn't matter. Whether their motives are false or genuine, the message about Christ is being preached either way, so I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice.

19 For I know that as you pray for me and the Spirit of Jesus Christ helps me, this will lead to my deliverance.

20 For I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past. And I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die.

21 For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better.

The People, Places, and Times

Prison. Imprisonment during Paul’s time could take a variety of forms. At Philippi, Paul was imprisoned in the town jail under the charge of a keeper, where there was an inner, perhaps underground, chamber containing stocks (Acts 16:24). Stocks had several holes, allowing a prisoner’s legs to be forced wide apart to ensure greater security and greater pain. In Caesarea, Paul was imprisoned in Herod’s praetorium, a high-level judicial building (23:35), but when a prisoner at Rome, he was allowed to stay in his own lodging with a soldier always chained to him (28:16, 30).

Background

Philippians is a letter written by Paul during a time of imprisonment. While scholars debate the exact time and location of Paul’s writing, lessons from his imprisonment about how the Philippian community should appropriately respond to persecution and adversity in light of the Gospel is clear. In Philippians 1, we read Paul’s opening words that are surprisingly full of joy and gratitude, something one would not typically expect from an inmate. Paul grounds his unusual response to his situation in his life’s mission—the advancement of the Gospel. Imprisonment has assured Paul of this mission as he has found greater zeal to proclaim Christ. He has used his situation as an opportunity to showcase the power of the Gospel as he preaches to his fellow prisoners and even to the imperial guard! In jail chains, Paul comes to the conclusion that no matter what is happening in his life, the Gospel of Jesus Christ can be proclaimed with power and efficacy. Paul emerges with joy, from proclaiming Christ despite his circumstances, and with gratitude, for the prayers of the Philippian saints and the help of the Holy Spirit empowering him to preach with perseverance.

Describe a time when your perspective changed in a bad situation, and it made all the difference.

At-A-Glance

1. Prison Can’t Stop the Gospel (Philippians 1:12–14)
2. People Can’t Stop the Gospel (vv. 15–18)
3. The Gospel Goes Forth by Prayer (vv. 19–21)

In Depth

1. Prison Can’t Stop the Gospel (Philippians 1:12–14)

While the location and timing of Paul’s imprisonment is not clear, its purpose is. Instances of Paul’s incarceration elsewhere in Scripture (Acts 16:29–34; 21:10–14; 23:10–11; 26:21–22; 28:30–31), and from Paul’s own pen here in Philippians, express his imprisonment is explicitly for the “furtherance of the gospel” (1:12). Through Paul’s life, we see even the chains of imprisonment could not stop the Gospel from being spread through the life of a believer. The Gospel can be shared even in the most oppressive and adverse situations in life. The Gospel is not limited to a physical place, like a church, but can be effective wherever there are convicted believers and open hearts. Paul discovered that no situation could hinder the mission of his life so that he was “waxing confident...without fear” (1:14) in a situation that would suggest the opposite.

How can you spread the Gospel in your life now?

2. People Can’t Stop the Gospel (vv. 15–18)

Paul discovered nothing could stop the spread of the Gospel—not prison, and not other people with bad motives. As Paul had gained “greater boldness without fear” (1:14), so had other preachers, some of whom preached “of envy and strife” (v. 15). This group of preachers added to Paul’s suffering, but through their preaching, they also added new believers to the church. Although these preachers’ motives were bad, the results

were good. There were other preachers who preached from “goodwill” (1:15), and like their counterparts, also added new believers to the Church. Instead of focusing on motives, Paul chose to focus on mission. He trusted that God would work out His plan of salvation regardless of how it was preached or who preached. What truly mattered to Paul was that the Gospel was preached and that new believers were brought into the church.

What really matters to you such that you do not have to participate in it to fully support it?

3. The Gospel Goes Forth by Prayer (vv. 19–21)

Paul acknowledged the difficulty of maintaining his joyful perspective. He realized it was only through the Philippians’ prayers and the help of the Spirit that he could rejoice at the Gospel’s spread despite his imprisonment and other preachers’ bad motives. These things not only emboldened his preaching, but also emboldened his hope for his life. While Paul desired release from prison, he trusted that the result of the legal proceedings associated with his incarceration, whether free or chained, would result in the glory of God. He had the confidence of being in Christ. Paul came to the conclusion that living in Christ does not free one from problems, difficulties, persecution, or adversity, but Christ is the totality of the believer’s life. He was assured that his life was guaranteed in Christ and that his experiences had a greater purpose.

How does knowing “Christ is life” affect how a Christian should live?

Search the Scriptures

1. What were some positive outcomes of Paul’s imprisonment (Philippians 1:13–14)?
2. What did Paul plan to do about the people who preached Christ from envy, strife, and contention (v. 18)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. How do you find the strength to keep working when people are against you?
2. How can facing challenge or opposition sometimes help us accomplish a goal?

Liberating Lesson

Paul makes it clear that his imprisonment is purposeful. His suffering advances the spread of the Gospel, even reaching those who inflicted suffering upon him (the imperial guard). The liberating Gospel can and must be preached even when the preacher is in chains. From police brutality, to disproportionate rates of unemployment and underemployment, to many other forms and expressions of racial injustice, suffering seems to mark the everyday existence of African American life in the United States. As these injustices are sinful and cause much suffering, like Paul, we are to preach the liberating Gospel even while suffering in chains. We can resist through our suffering with the joy that comes from prayer and the Holy Spirit. We can find our hope for living through suffering with purpose because Christ has guaranteed us eternal life.

Application for Activation

Think about your life. Consider your suffering. Consider the suffering of others in your family, at your job, in your community, and in the world. Consider the suffering and imprisonment of persecuted Christians across the world. Consider how you will respond to suffering— not with a passive joy, but with a resistant joy like Paul.

What is your initial reaction to suffering in your life? What is your perspective on what you face in life and in society? Where do you see God at work in adversity? How can you glorify God in your suffering? How do you rejoice in suffering?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Philippians 1:12–21

12 But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; 13 So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; 14 And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Paul's imprisonment has yielded positive results: a) the Gospel is being made known all over the region including the official residence of the governor; b) many of the brothers are now preaching the Good News with boldness. Paul's imprisonment for preaching the Gospel was intended to stop its spread in the region, however God was using his situation to reach not only the very people who kept him in prison, but also to encourage preachers all over the region to be passionate about preaching the Gospel. Paul's testimony that he was preaching in spite of being in chains was a catalyst for free believers to be even more bold about proclaiming the name of Jesus Christ. However, Paul separates these preachers into two groups according to their motives.

15 Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: 16 The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: 17 But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel.

The first group, Paul says, preaches out of a wrong motive "of envy and strife." This group is prompted by "envy" (Gk. *phthonos*, fuh- THO-noce), meaning jealousy or ill will, and "strife" (Gk. *eris*, EH-reece), meaning rivalry, discord, or contention. They are preaching to out-preach each other, build themselves a platform, and criticize those they dislike. Paul goes on to illustrate how this group's preaching is motivated by evil (v. 16). They preach Christ out of contention, not sincerely; and not with a clean motive, but with an ulterior motive: "to add affliction to my bonds." The word "contention" is a translation of the Greek *eritheia* (eh-ree-THAY-ah), which means, in simple terms, selfishness or a desire to put oneself forward in a partisan way.

Who were these men who were preaching out of jealousy and selfish ambition with the intention of adding to Paul's burden? Paul does not seem as much concerned with these people and their evil plans as he is about the positive result of their preaching (v. 18). He does not intend to occupy himself or concern his audience's mind with much negativity. He leaves us with no answer. However, scholars have advanced a number of proposals as to who these people were. Certain preachers in Rome had attained some prominence before Paul's arrival. His presence in Rome and the spreading of his fame and the Gospel throughout the region were beginning to affect their prestige (vv. 13–14). The preachers' names seem to have been relegated to the background—not mentioned as often as before the apostle's arrival. They became envious and contentious; thus, their motive for preaching the Gospel was affected. Later in this letter, Paul exhorts the Philippians to be one in the mind of

Christ, not putting oneself forward or being selfish (2:3). Similarly, James denounces selfishness or self-promoting “in your hearts” (James 3:14).

The second group to which Paul refers preached out of pure motive—“of good will” (1:15) and “love” (v. 17). They are also motivated by the fact that Paul has been “set for the defence of the gospel” (v. 17). “Set” (Gk. *keimai*, KAY-my) here can also mean destined or appointed. The word also carries the image of a law being immutably set down. This refers either to the immediate trial he is about to face for the sake of the Gospel or his overall mission of sharing the Gospel’s “defence” (Gk. *apologia*, ah-poe-low-GEE-ah; where we get the word “apologetics”). This group was motivated out of “good will” prompted by love for Paul and the Gospel he proclaimed.

These people did not feel indignant about Paul because his fame was spreading around the region. Unlike the former group, their focus was not on themselves. They heralded Christ out of love for Him and the Gospel, and out of concern for Paul and his tribulation—a love that Paul prayed for: “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment” (1:9).

18 What then? Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.

Rather than moan about the selfishly motivated preaching of the first group or dwelling in self-pity and attracting sympathy for such un-Christian behavior toward him, Paul focused on the result of their preaching. Here he says, “What then?” or “That doesn’t matter” (NLT). It is another way of saying that what matters is the outcome of their preaching, which turned out to be positive. Whether they were preaching to hurt him is not the main concern. The most important concern is advancing the Gospel. What matters to Paul is not what the people are doing to him but rather what they are doing for the Gospel.

From here, we can learn one truth: The Lord will work out His desired purpose through the Gospel regardless of how it is preached or the motive of the preachers. To Paul, it did not matter. What mattered is that in “every way”—whether in pretense, as by those with selfish motives, or “in truth,” as by those who preach with sincere hearts to glorify the Lord—“Christ is preached.” This is true today, too. “Pretense” (Gk. *prophasis*, PRO-fah-seece), is the same word used to describe the prayers of the scribes (Mark 12:40; John 15:22): an outward show, cloak, or pretext. It is the opposite of sincerity. Regardless of others’ insincere showing in preaching, Paul expresses the great joy he finds in the accompanying furtherance of the Gospel: “I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.” He rejoices currently and will continue to rejoice because only the goal of spreading the Gospel is in mind.

19 For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

In this section, Paul expresses his confidence in the prayer of the brethren and optimism that he would be set free. This also makes him rejoice. The Greek preposition “for” (Gk. *gar*, GAR) connects the preceding statement with the assurance of his deliverance. Paul’s use of *eido* (EYE-do) means to know, to see, to perceive with the eyes or by any of the senses. It has the sense of certainty and confidence that all will turn out well for him in the end (cf. Romans 8:28). The result will be his “salvation,” or deliverance. Paul’s expressed knowledge here does not mean he had information of his possible deliverance but rather that he had personal conviction that, through the prayers of the people and the work of the Holy Spirit, he would be set free from prison. In the previous verses, Paul was rejoicing because in the present he was in chains and his imprisonment brought him opportunities to share the Gospel with the entire palace guard. But Paul continued to rejoice because of his hope for the future (v. 18).

The word “salvation” or *soteria* in the Greek (so-tay-REE-ah) has two meanings. It can refer to salvation in a spiritual sense or it can refer to Paul’s deliverance from prison, which he expected and did happen. Trusting the

faithfulness of God, coupled with the prayers of the saints and the working of the Holy Spirit, Paul is persuaded that he would be set free. Paul spoke of his release from prison through the prayers of the Philippians, indicating that Paul viewed the Christian life not as a solitary discipline but as life in community with other believers in which all were bound together. Paul exemplifies that we all need the prayers of one another.

20 According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.

Paul's confidence in Christ is the basis for his "earnest expectation and my hope." He has two convictions. The first is that whatever happens, he would not be ashamed. The Spirit will not let him down. This whole passage exudes confidence in the Lord. The Greek words for "earnest expectation" and "hope" are nearly identical in meaning. Apokaradokia (ah-poekah-rah-doe-KEE-ah) has a sense of intense anticipation, and elpis (el-PEECE) means "to expect with great confidence and faith." Paul was looking forward to his trial, which was sure to result in glorification of the Lord. Paul stated that he was not ashamed of being in prison. He was not worried about his personal reputation. In fact, he was feeling very bold. The only true shame would be if he were not trusting in God and not living in obedience to Him.

The second conviction is that he would wax bold in proclaiming the Gospel, as he had always done, but more so now. Paul was looking forward to his trial with great confidence. The end goal is clear: "Christ shall be magnified" in Paul—literally, in Paul's "body" (Gk. soma, SO-mah), in this case whether he is a survivor or martyr, which he becomes years later. The Greek word for "magnified" is megaluno (meh-ga-LOO-no), which means increased, made great, or enlarged. This was Paul's goal for his trial—to increase the greatness of the reputation of our Lord, as has always been his goal in everything he did after his encounter on the Damascus road. When he spoke of his body, he was thinking of what might be the outcome of the trial. Although Paul expected to be released, he began meditating on the other possibility—death. His body might experience physical life or bodily death, but his goal was that in either situation he would magnify the Lord. What a great testimony!

In either circumstance, he would remain faithful to the end so that Christ's name would be lifted. This is a show of courage, deeply resolute conviction, and resignation to the service of the Lord Jesus. In our lives we, too, should always seek to glorify Christ. And when troubles come our way we can trust in the Lord, knowing that if our lives have glorified Him, we can have great confidence and not be ashamed.

21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Paul's conviction and courage are demonstrated in his total resignation to whatever comes his way. The use of the phrase "for to me" is purposely put at the beginning of the sentence for emphasis to draw our attention to Paul's personal conviction regarding life and death. Paul gives new meaning to both "life" and "death." To him "living is Christ," which means, among other interpretations, "life means Christ." Paul's very existence is in Christ—whatever he does is inspired through his resolute relationship with Christ and for Him. To Paul, life would be meaningless and not worth living without Christ, to whom Paul owes his existence (Romans 14:7–9). He dedicates his whole being to Christ and His cause, to love and obey Him in everything and at all times, and to trust Him in all circumstances.

His resolution to live for Christ does not mean a life free from problems and difficulties. On the contrary, it means living for Christ and preaching the Gospel in spite of problems and difficulties: imprisonment (Philippians 1:7, 13), afflictions (4:14), suffering (1:29; 3:10), struggles (1:30), and all types of tribulation, both physical and emotional (2 Corinthians 11:23–27). Paul's life and ministry were not easy. They were characterized by unimaginable problems and sufferings, as we can see from these and other accounts of his life. On the one hand, for Paul to go on living means leading a dedicated and fruitful life for Christ; on the other hand, for Paul "to die is gain." He knows that death means an immediate experience of the presence of Christ.

Paul is so engrossed in the Gospel and in the reality of eternity that living means working and living for Christ, and dying is even more profitable since he would be with his Lord forever. This is the hope of every believer.

Here, Paul is reiterating his total resignation to the Lord. Whatever comes his way, whether death or life or release from prison, he has turned over his life and will to that of the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle's relationship to Christ was so close that he would only experience more joy, more closeness to Christ, and more fullness of praise when he went to be with Him. Yet, even here on Earth, he was living so in tune with Christ that his life was all about the Lord. The more time we spend in fellowship with Christ, reading His Word, answering it in praise and acts of obedience, the more heaven tugs at our hearts as well.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

**God Sent Me to Preserve You
(Genesis 45:1–8)**

TUESDAY

**The Spirit Rested on the Elders
(Numbers 11:24–30)**

WEDNESDAY

**Apostles Are Fools for Christ
(1 Corinthians 4:8–13)**

THURSDAY

**Sharing Life in Christ Now
(Philippians 1:22–26)**

FRIDAY

**Believing in and Suffering
for Christ (Philippians 1:27–30)**

SATURDAY

**Sharing God's Grace
(Philippians 1:3–11)**

SUNDAY

**Telling the Good News
(Philippians 1:12–21)**