



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for August 1, 2010
Released on Wednesday, July 28, 2010**

"Sharing God's Grace"

Lesson Text: Philippians 1:18-29

Background Scripture: Philippians 1:1-30

Devotional Reading: Acts 9:10-16

Philippians 1:18–29

18 What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretense, 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.

22 But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labor: yet what I shall choose I wot not.

23 For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:

24 Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.

25 And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith;

26 That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.

27 Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;

28 And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God.

29 For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.

LESSON AIMS

Facts: to understand the inner conflict Paul had between his desire to die and be with Christ and his desire to remain alive and minister to God's people.

Principle: to realize that serving Christ should be a believer's greatest motive.

Application: to encourage every Christian to base his actions on a deep love for his Saviour and Lord.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Time: A.D. 61

Place: from Rome

Paul wrote the letter to the church at Philippi while he was under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:30). His death was a possibility as he anticipated his court appearance. Yet had the confidence that he would be released so that he could minister to his readers once again.

Life for Paul was bound up in Jesus Christ. His passion was to glorify Him, Whether in life or in death. This consumed Paul's life and ministry.

In addition to facing the distress of imprisonment, Paul also had to contend with opposition from some ministers (Philippians 1:14-17). While some preached Christ out of their love for the gospel, others did not. These preached the gospel but did so out of envy and rivalry (v. 15).

Paul's desire for the Philippians was that they conduct themselves in a manner befitting their heavenly citizenship. Whether he was present or absent from them, this was his expectation. Such conduct includes sharing the gospel of God's grace.

CHRIST IS THE REASON (Philippians 1:18,19)

1. What was Paul's attitude regarding the preaching of other ministers? (Philippians 1:18)

It is easy for us to understand how *Christ* could be preached from *good will* (vs. 15,16). The essence of the gospel is good news, that all men and women can be saved through faith in Christ. We should want to deliver this message to every person on this earth.

But how can Christ be proclaimed from a spirit of *envy and strife*? How can the gospel be preached *of contention*? A deeper look at the word *contention* will help us understand. This is not contention in the sense of orneriness. It suggests one who is ambitiously striving or competing for position.

Although Paul gives no names, apparently there are such men who are disparaging him in his absence. With this debasing of the preacher's role, along with personal attacks on Paul, these self-exalting preachers are trying to hurt the apostle, thinking to add to his *affliction* while he remains helpless in Rome.

Despite those who would preach out of selfish ambition, Paul says that in the end it matters only that *Christ is preached* (v. 18).

Paul is convinced, however, that the message of the gospel is more powerful than the shortcomings of the preacher. The treasure of the message of salvation is contained in earthly, human vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7). The power of persuasion in the message is not through lofty rhetoric (1 Corinthians 2:1), but in the convicting power of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7, 8). Paul's joy in this type of preaching is not forced, but sincere. He

echoes the example of Jesus, who did not allow His disciples to forbid outsiders from casting out demons in His name (Mark 9:38–40).

**2. What did Paul mean by “this shall turn to my salvation” (v. 19)?
What two factors did Paul identify as necessary for him to fulfill his highest goal?**

Paul knew that his imprisonment and the related problems he was encountering would contribute to his deliverance. His release from prison is not in view here. Rather, he was speaking about the effect the adversity that had befallen him would have on his spiritual salvation, These things contributed toward the outworking of the ultimate purpose for his salvation, which was to fulfill God’s good pleasure (2:13).

Paul identified two factors that would aid him in fulfilling his highest goal. First were the effective petitionary prayers of God's people. Second was the Holy Spirit's supply of whatever was necessary to support him. The Spirit makes intercession for believers (Rom. 8:26,27) and provides them with the necessary inner strength to accomplish God's purpose (Eph. 3:16). Paul is sustained by the *Spirit of Jesus Christ* and in the knowledge that the Philippians still care about him.

**CONFIDENT EXPECTATION (Philippians 1:20-26)
3. What was Paul’s confident “expectation” (v. 20)?**

Paul’s ministry may be limited by circumstance and physical frailty, but never by embarrassment or fear. He is never *ashamed* of the gospel (Romans 1:16) or of his calling to preach it (1 Corinthians 9:16). A characteristic description of Paul’s preaching is *boldness* (see Acts 13:46; 19:8; 28:31; Ephesians 6:19). This history of faithful and consistent preaching allows Paul to face the future with confidence. If he lives, he still has work to do. If he dies, he would enter into the Lord's presence with the testimony of having lived with unwavering faith. Our bodies are the vehicles for the outward expressions of who we are on the inside (Rom. 12:1). Paul was not indifferent about his future, but he desired passionately that Christ be glorified.

4. Paul was confident that everything that had happened to him would in some way result in his deliverance. In what ways can God use everything in our lives, both difficult and joyful?

There is comfort in knowing that God lets nothing go unused in our lives—both successes and failures. God always has something to teach us, even when we make mistakes. Sometimes it’s challenging to see this when we’re in the middle of a crisis, and perhaps we should not even expect to. It’s often only in hindsight that we are able to clearly see how God used the trial for our benefit—or for that of His kingdom. Perhaps one day we will have an increased ability to comfort others because we have gone through experiences similar to theirs.

5. How did the prospect of life or death both hold attractions for Paul? (vs. 21-24)

Verse 21 brings us to one of the grandest statements in all of Scripture: *to live is Christ, and to die is gain*. This is not rhetorical flourish. We cannot read this without knowing that Paul believes it to the core of his soul.

Paul did not know whether he should choose to live or to die and be with Christ. Life and death both held certain attractions for him. The final choice was actually not Paul's prerogative, but he discussed his situation as though he did have the option. To the extent that he had any say in this matter, what should he choose— life or death?

Paul experienced conflicting thoughts (vs. 22,23). He was "in a strait betwixt two," meaning he was being squeezed by the opposing forces of his thoughts. He was right in the middle of two alternatives that pressured him from both sides. He was in distress, as though the two opposing alternatives held him in a vise grip. To move in either direction was extremely difficult.

Paul had a personal desire to "depart" the earthly scene to be with Christ. The word he employed was sometimes used of loosening the cables of a ship from its moorings. Paul wanted to be with Christ, which is the ultimate goal of the believer's life (John 17:24; 2 Cor. 5:8). Being with Christ would be far better than remaining here. His imprisonment, persecution, and ministry hardships would be over (Rom. 8:18; 2 Tim. 4:7,8).

On the other hand, it was more important for Paul to stay on for the sake of the Philippian believers. He knew that they still needed him. Paul placed the pastoral care of those whom he served and loved above his own personal desire. This was the greater obligation for him. He was ready to forgo the glories of heavenly fellowship with Christ for a while longer. Paul was committed to continue his earthly labors for as long as it pleased God to keep him here.

6. What was Paul persuaded of regarding his immediate future? (v. 25)

Paul looks to the future with expectancy and *joy*. He looks forward to a reunion with the Philippian church and anticipates it as a great time of *rejoicing*. This change of attitude does not come because Paul receives news of his release while writing the letter. Based on an inner conviction ("having this confidence, I know..."), Paul was persuaded that the Philippian church needed his ministry. He would remain alive in order to continue with them. Upon his release, he expected to return to them in order to further their spiritual advancement and joy in their faith in Christ.

7. Paul understood that it was important for him to stay for the sake of other believers. In what ways do our priorities affect the decisions we make every day?

As we grow in the faith, we begin to think more biblically. So, as the decisions of life face us, they automatically pass through the filter of Bible-based thinking. For example, we know that Paul teaches us to look out not only for our own interests, but also for the interests of others. So, when we start making decisions that will affect other people, we give them due consideration. When we prepare our minds in this manner, we don't have to try to sort out our priorities when the big decisions face us. The hard work has already been done.

8. What is involved in the believer's spiritual advancement? (v. 26)

Spiritual growth and progress were major emphases in Paul's ministry for all the churches he founded. Spiritual advancement means progress in Christian love and in the knowledge of God's truth (Phil. 1:9). Along with these would come spiritual growth in personal righteousness (v. 11). Spiritual advancement is the ongoing, practical outworking or implementation of salvation in the believer's life (2:12).

The rejoicing of the Philippians would abound in Christ because of Paul's presence with them (Phil. 1:26). The word "rejoicing" places an emphasis on the reason for their rejoicing. Since it would be due to the Lord's sovereign grace in granting Paul's release from prison, their exultation would be in the Lord.

CONSISTENT CONDUCT (Philippians 1:27-29)

9. What is conveyed by the word "conversation" in Philippians 1:27?

Regardless of the outcome of his imprisonment, Paul desired that the Philippian believers would conduct themselves in a manner befitting the gospel. The word "conversation" means "conduct." In Roman society, the word connoted the idea of living as a responsible citizen in the community. Christians are citizens of heaven (3:20) and therefore should conduct themselves in a manner worthy of citizens of that realm. In the *King James Bible*, *conversation* implies more than words; it includes the larger concept of how one's life is lived. This must be worthy of the *gospel of Christ*, lives conducted without hypocrisy or malice.

Whether present or absent from Philippi, Paul wanted to hear a good-conduct report about the church (Phil. 1:27). He wanted to hear that they were standing fast in one spirit. They were also to stand together with "one mind," that is, with a single purpose (cf. Acts 4:32).

They needed a united stance so that they could strive for the faith they had embraced (Phil. 1:27). The word "striving" implies laboring against opposition. The struggle was for "the faith of the gospel." A mark of Christian commitment is sharing the faith of the gospel by witnessing to its truths. We are sharing God's grace, for the message of the gospel is the message of grace. Our commitment to Christ involves our standing against the attacks launched to discredit and destroy it.

The opposition of the enemies of the church was a token of their ultimate ruin (v. 28). The phrase that Paul used was "an ancient legal term for a demonstrable proof. The hostility of the opponents revealed the fact that they were unsaved and that they would receive the judgment of God because of their unbelief and unrighteous persecution of believers" (Gromacki, *Stand United in Joy*, Baker).

10. What two things should the believer see as graciously granted to him by God? (v. 29)

Paul explained that it was graciously given to the Philippians not only to believe in Christ but also to suffer for Him. Both privileges are granted to believers by God and should be acknowledged as from Him. Our salvation is by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8,9). God grants His favor to believers to suffer for the cause of Christ as well (Acts 5:41; 2 Cor. 4:10). Suffering is a means God uses in the spiritual development of believers (1 Pet. 1:6,7).

Being a believer is not always joy and happiness. If we are committed to serving the Lord, we must be ready to *suffer for his sake*. This suffering can take many forms. It can be ostracism, including painful separation from friends and family. It can be slander, the loss of one's good name through gossip and lies. It can be illness or deprivation in the course of ministry. Epaphroditus had risked his life and health to minister to Paul in Rome. It can even be physical pain, imprisonment, and/or torture by the authorities. Paul and Silas spent a night shackled in a dark cell in a Philippian jail after receiving a beating (Acts 16:22-24). All Christians will undergo various forms of suffering for Christ. This seems to be promised by Paul and by Jesus himself (see Matthew 5:11). When these times come, we must remember, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

PRACTICAL POINTS

- 1.** We should rejoice when the true gospel is preached even if we have qualms about the preacher or the method (Philippians 1:18).
- 2.** The goal of our prayers should always be that Christ is magnified (vs. 19,20).
- 3.** God's will is far more important than whether we live or die (vs. 21-24).

4. Joy comes from serving others, not ourselves (vs. 25,26).
5. The gospel of Christ must always be accompanied with Christlike behavior (v. 27).
6. When our lives are fully given to Christ, suffering for Him is a blessing (vs. 28,29).

CONCLUSION

Found Faithful

The Bible often pictures the lives of Christians in terms of a military struggle. We are soldiers in the cosmic battle being waged by servants of the Lord against the forces of evil. The ironic thing about this is that there is no gigantic battlefield for this warfare. It is a battle in the life of each individual believer.

In Ephesians, Paul develops a wonderful allegorical presentation along these lines, exhorting his readers to don the spiritual protection offered by the "whole armor of God." Paul says that the purpose of wearing this battle gear is so that when the battle is over, the soldier will be able "to stand" (Ephesians 6:13). The word picture he presents means that Paul is praying that his readers will not end up as casualties from the spiritual battles of life. At the end, they will still be standing, not among the fallen. They will have neither fled the battle nor succumbed to the enemy attacks. They will die while yet spiritually alive and kicking. They will be found faithful.

PRAYER

O God our Father, the one who is always faithful and true, may we be given clear times to serve You. May we embrace these opportunities and may we too be found faithful. We pray this in the name of the one who gives meaning to living and who promises life beyond death, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Even in the worst of times, God is faithful and desires that we continue to serve Him.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Next week's lesson is "**Serving Others**" and emphasizes the importance of humble service, and the model to emulate is Christ Himself. Study Philippians 2:1 – 3:1.

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY

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