



THE LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS – STUDY GUIDE

LESSON 4 PERSONAL NEWS ABOUT HIS IMPRISONMENT

CHAPTER 1:12-26

Paul assures his readers that even though he is in prison, the situation has been turned to advantage for the Lord: the Gospel is being preached. Admittedly, some brethren are preaching from wrong motives, glad to put themselves forward while Paul is restricted. But never mind, the preaching is the thing! Paul is not concerned about personal importance but about Christ being advanced. With trial before the Roman emperor ahead, he reflects on the advantages of life or death. He has no fear of death: the next moment will be his resurrection and being with Christ! Life will bring the possibility of being able to see his beloved Philippians again.

12, 13: I want you to know, brethren, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ:

The praetorian or palace guard was the band of soldiers who were the personal bodyguard of the emperor. Some of them were assigned to guard Paul during his imprisonment.

In Acts 28:30-31 we are told that Paul spent two years in Rome, in a house he hired himself. He was under 'house arrest'. He was chained to a soldier so that he could not escape but was able to have visitors and to write and send letters. Some of his brethren and sisters in Philippi were worried that his imprisonment meant that he stopped preaching. He wrote to tell them that this was not so. His imprisonment had given him a whole new audience to talk to; his enthusiasm for the Gospel was so great that he preached to these soldiers who took turns to guard him. They then took his message back to the guardhouse so that their fellow soldiers heard about this strange prisoner who was so excited about the Gospel, even though he faced trial, and perhaps death.

This is a great example to us. Whatever problems we face, we can always talk about the Bible and God's message of Salvation to those around us. In fact the more difficult our circumstances, the more people will be impressed with what we say when they see that our minds are not filled with our problems, but with a desire to witness for Christ, whatever is happening to us. This is a great way in which we can show our faith.

14-17: and most of the brethren have been made confident in the Lord because of my imprisonment, and are much more bold to speak the word of God without fear. Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defence of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of partisanship, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment:

Paul's example and enthusiasm had encouraged others to preach as well. If we do not want to tell people about our faith or are ashamed of it, then our brethren and sisters will feel like that also. But if we stand up for what we believe, then we can help them to have courage to preach alongside us. The best way to get others involved with us in the work of preaching the Gospel is by our own personal example.

However some were jealous of him and of his ability and influence. We see this today. Sometimes older men are jealous of younger ones. They see them as threats to their own position and try to cause trouble for them. It is important that we do not preach through ambition to hold an important place in our ecclesia. God has promised a great reward to all those who believe and are baptised into His Son, every one of them will have a place in his Kingdom. How foolish we are when we quarrel with each other about who is more important in the church now.

18: What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in that I rejoice:

Again, the personal example of Paul is very important for us. When he was faced with jealousy, he did not stop his work to quarrel or argue with the brethren who did this. He did not try to stop them in their work. He

was happy that they were preaching the Gospel and rejoiced in it. He was a man who humbled himself for Christ and was only interested in the Kingdom of God.

19: Yes, and I shall rejoice. For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance:

Some think deliverance here means deliverance from imprisonment. It is hard to see how preaching will achieve that. He goes on to mention the further support of the prayers of the Philippians (which he presumably learnt about from Epaphroditus). Who do we pray for on a regular basis?

All things work together for good

In addition he says "the help of the spirit of Jesus Christ" helps him. It has always been a source of strength to those suffering for the sake of the Gospel to know that their Lord suffered also. The meek disposition of Jesus, who "for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame", was an inspiration to Paul. He knew also that Jesus had said he was "a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the gentiles, and kings, and the sons of Israel: for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name" (Acts 9:15,16). For men of faith "in everything God works together for good". Whatever their circumstances, they "consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:28,18).

Paul writes that the combination of preaching in Rome, prayers in Philippi and the "fellowship of the Lord's sufferings" (3:10) - that is the sense of sharing the experiences of Christ and being strengthened by showing the same disposition as his Lord - all this "shall turn to my salvation".

20: as it is my eager expectation and hope that I shall not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honoured in my body, whether by life or by death.

His hope is that whatever the future holds, be it the death sentence or release, he will boldly witness for Christ, Christ will be honoured by his words and actions. Is this the hope and expectation of every one of us?

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

The very centre of his being, the driving force of all his activity is Christ. And should death come, what is that but a short sleep and then the joy of being with Christ?

Nothing could be further from Paul's thoughts, of course, than the pagan idea of heaven-going. He knew full well that death meant the cutting off of life: "For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who can give thee thanks" (Psalm 6:5). But for those baptised into Christ, who then "walk in newness of life", there is the belief that having "died with Christ", in baptism there is the prospect of new life: "If we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him" (Romans 6:2-9). That hope of resurrection is to be fulfilled at the coming of Christ (see Philippians 3:11,20,21; 1 Corinthians 15:20-58; 2 Timothy 4:8; 1 John 3:2). If he died, all his sufferings would cease. His next conscious moment would be at the Resurrection when he awoke to be called to be with Jesus.

We see then how death can be gain to Paul. And what gain! To see an end of all his sufferings, his hardships, his trials, to see a world in which pain is removed, handicaps eliminated, the earth's resources all managed for the benefit of its inhabitants and ultimately no more death.

What a hope this is, made sure by the promises of God and the resurrection of Christ! (Genesis 22:15-18; 2 Samuel 7:12-17; Isaiah 35; Daniel 1 2:2,3; 1 Corinthians 1 5:20-28; Revelation 20:4; 21:3,4).

22,23: If it is to be life in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better:

No wonder Paul was hard-pressed as to whether life or death was best. Life would mean more work or fruitful labour for him. Death would be like sleep. The next waking moment would be the resurrection morning.

24-26: But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

But characteristically Paul thinks not of himself first. However attractive the release of death, release to life will, he is convinced, open up the possibility of journeying to see the Philippians again, to further their joy and their faith. What a joyful reunion that would be!

STAND UP FOR THE TRUTH 1:27-30

Paul urges the Philippians to be true citizens of the Kingdom of God. Whatever the cost to them in persecution from enemies of the Gospel, they must stand together for the Truth.

27: Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel:

The Greek word Paul uses, which the RSV translates as 'manner of life', literally means citizenship. Remember that Philippi was a Roman colony and very proud of its civic arrangements (Acts 16:12,21). Paul's choice of words reminds the brethren and sisters that they are not concerned with the politics of earth but the citizenship of heaven (see 3:20). God's servants are "strangers and pilgrims" for the time being, looking forward to "a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10, 13-16).

Christadelphians are a truly international community. They do not vote for any political party in any country or fight for any government anywhere. There is no risk of one brother fighting against another brother in any war and brethren and sisters cannot be refused entry to a country because they are involved in politics. However, in all other respects they obey the laws of their country. They take care to be subject to the authorities and obey the laws, so long as these are not in conflict with the higher laws of God (Romans 13:1-7; John 18:36; Acts 5:29).

Paul emphasises that as citizens of God's kingdom, the way we live must be a true reflection of the teaching of the One whom God has anointed as its king. "stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel". The picture is of an army that stands its ground when under attack. In battle its soldiers fight together, with a common aim, as comrades supporting each other.

28: and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear omen to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God:

Don't be frightened by your opponents. Your steadfastness will be proof of their certain destruction but also proof of your salvation.

29,30: For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict which you saw and now hear to be mine.

How vividly the Philippians would have remembered the beating Paul and Silas received in their city and the way they were flung into the prison and fastened in the stocks. The Jailor later washed their wounds, immediately before he washed away his own sins in baptism (Acts 16:22,23). No doubt the new brethren received insults following their baptisms into Christ. Perhaps the Jailor had to leave his job if the authorities took seriously the view expressed in Thessalonica: "they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus" (Acts 17:7). It was quite untrue to say that they were not law-abiding. In fact their standards in this respect were now likely to be higher. But Christianity was viewed as a subversive religion, with revolutionary implications.

Bold for Christ

Today it is not at all easy in some countries to stand for the Truth. Many brethren and sisters have to live out their beliefs in the face of considerable pressures of one kind or another. Even in those countries where there

has been a strong Christian tradition of some kind, what is taught as Christianity bears little relationship to the Bible and is often more concerned with social aims. The Christian view of family life is no longer generally accepted.

For most people economic and material prosperity now are far more important than citizenship of the Kingdom of God. In seeking to understand the true nature of the Gospel taught by Christ and the apostles, we shall have to live with scorn and derision, for we are very unfashionable. We are considered narrow-minded for not going along with the majority. We may be persecuted because of our faith before Jesus returns. Paul's message to the Philippians to stand by the faith they had learnt from the Word of God and to trust that God's grace was sufficient to sustain them. Wherever we live, this message is for us too.

Questions

1. Even though Paul was in prison, the Gospel was still preached. What were the two ways in which this happened?
2. When should we preach the Gospel, is there anything in our lives which should stop us doing this?
3. Think about your reasons for preaching.
 - a) What are the right reasons?
 - b) What are the wrong reasons?
4. What did Paul mean when he said he wanted to depart and to be with Christ?
5. List all the reasons why you want to be with Christ in his kingdom. Is there anything important to you in this life which might prevent this? What is it?
6. From the passages listed in this lesson and also from 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 list the events which will happen when Jesus returns.
7. In what way should the life of a true Christian be different from those who do not believe in Christ?
8. Paul writes that belief in Christ will bring suffering.
9. What were Paul's sufferings in Philippi?
10. How did Jesus suffer?
11. In what ways can a disciple suffer today?