



This Week in the Word

Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. Ps 119:89.



Submit to God in Christ **Study Scripture: Philippians 1:12-21**

Lesson 8, January 19, 2019

Key Verse

I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.

Philippians 1:12

INTRODUCTION

Few can see much if any good in trials, hardship and pain and even when positive results come from these experiences, most would still wish the good had come by some other means. The Bible clearly teaches that the life in Christ will very likely lead to testings, trials and difficulties and with this one constant, God's will, will be done. (Gen. 50:20). Of course this clear biblical teaching is contrary to what we hear from the false 'health and wealth' teachers that occupy too many pulpits.

As we study passage is in this letter to the Philippians we should first remember that this is considered by scholars and by the early church to be the tenderest and most delightful letter that Paul ever wrote. Written from his prison cell the sections of the letter were overflowing expressions of praise, confidence, and rejoicing as the Apostle Paul recalls his visit to Philippi and the foundation of the church and then the great reputation this church had developed.

This letter of Philippians is first concerned with relationships and so Paul talks in depth about the feelings that he had for the Philippians and the kind of love that he hopes they will develop, namely, a deep love for each other as they became a model of love for all to see.

It is first to be noted that this Book of Philippians exudes a tremendous fondness of Jesus and it boasts the highest percentage of verses in any book of the Bible that refers to Christ. One writer gives us some interesting statistics:

“33.654% of these verses talk about Jesus. It's the only book we are over a third of the verses reference Christ. Philemon is next at 32%. This first chapter is even more fond of Christ. It has the largest number of references to Christ for any chapter of the Bible. 2.799% of the words of this chapter are the word Christ. 1 Corinthians 1 is a close second at 2.686 references. Do you get the point? Christ is really important to the book of Philippians. Christ is our connection. Christ is our brother who connects us to the same father. There is no family without the work of Christ”.

The availability of Jesus Christ for coping with the problems of life is the theme. The Church in Philippi as well as all our modern churches need to understand that though they are often beset with doctrines and behaviors of various kinds which lead to them not getting along with each other with the resulting divisions in the church created by sundry persons, this disunity is not in accord with the Christian faith.

The Apostle speaks of a new king in town and it means that Jesus Christ is Lord. The gospel of Jesus Christ which is also the gospel of the kingdom means salvation for those who welcome Him and judgment for those who do not.

So Paul speaks of the believers' special connection with Christ and a special connection of love between those who bring, teach, and advance the gospel. So we are looking at the privilege of being “in Christ”, having a new relationship in Christ, having the grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, having a new perspective in Christ and having a bigger vision of fellowship common among the followers of Christ.

So the Apostle focuses on the need of every human being to love and be loved. He calls for this kind of extravagant feelings among one another so that there would be power in the partnership among all believers so that the gospel of Christ would be advanced. Then there would be the abundant life and the desire for loving others more and more abundantly. This of course would enable us to see what is best, be able to look at the problems and disasters in the life of others, and with this extraordinary, supernatural love, believers would be enabled to act to correct any bad situation, and to be pure and blameless until the day of Christ.

This letter to and prayers of the Apostle for the brethren should cut **down** to our very heart so that we would begin to reject our selfishness and pride and live in a manner worthy of the gospel. In this model of love the Apostle Paul prescribes that we develop and have what one writer describes as “a tenacious togetherness”.

So as we study and consider the situation of the imprisonment of the Apostle which did not stop him from thanking God, loving others no matter what they tried to do to him, and encouraging the brethren to do the same as he did let us think deeply about our perspective on suffering and even imprisonment.

Do we really desire Christ and therefore honor Him in everything that we do?

How do we regard the importance of the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Is our desire for advancing the gospel more important than what people think of us and what we think of ourselves and what we think we deserve?

What kind of “fruitful labor” do you look forward to?

Has the importance of the manifestation of the knowledge of God in your life seen as necessary to

bring others to Christ?

Do you really think you're living and showing that you believe that to live is Christ?

If you're not thinking the way the Apostle Paul did this Lesson Study is for you. It is time that you make whatever adjustment to your life and thought as is necessary.

Consider first therefore who Jesus Christ is. We are told ***“The Word became flesh”*** which means that it was at the incarnation that the Word became flesh and entered into a new form of existence. The Word existed from eternity past. The Word was God. The Word was with the Father. He made all things. He has been appointed our Savior and Redeemer.

Romans 1:3-4 sets out for us the importance of the twofold nature of our Lord and so as Paul greets the Roman Church and bringing greetings from the Father he says there:

“Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was born of the seed of David according to the flesh and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.

Through whom we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name,

among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ”.

So the Apostle Paul is directing the brethren to Jesus Christ our Lord. To him Jesus Christ is all. And It is for Him that believers must live.

The Apostle Paul is committed to the work of Christ and had for some time longed and planned to visit the church in Rome but the circumstances of his arrival and stay in Rome were very different from what he had hoped for even though the prophets had warned him that trials and trouble awaited him.

(Rom. 1:8-15; 15:14-33). He was planning an official apostolic visit to the church in the capital of the empire. However Paul's circumstances turned dramatically with his arrest in Jerusalem, (Acts 21), which ironically was for his protection. He spent the next two years in some form of detention in Caesarea before being dispatched to Rome to appear before Caesar.

After a very eventful journey from Caesarea, the Apostle arrived in Rome as a prisoner and remained under 'house arrest', (Acts 27 -28). He was chained 24 hours a day to elite members of Caesar's Praetorian Guard, so there was clearly no way to escape. This was seemingly a dramatic setback to Paul's plan to spread the gospel in Rome and other points west.

For some in Rome and elsewhere this development must have raised questions about Paul and about his qualifications for ministry. Were some embarrassed by the fact that Paul was a prisoner, waiting to stand trial before Caesar? Were some tempted to keep a low profile so far as proclaiming the gospel was concerned? Did some conclude that Paul's imprisonment was a serious blow to the advance of the gospel? Our text in Paul's Epistle to the Philippians laid such fears to rest. Indeed, his circumstances did not hinder the spread of the gospel but rather, his circumstances served to advance the cause of Christ. As a matter of fact, Paul witnessed to his captive audience of elite Roman soldiers who were chained to him, and so the gospel spread among Caesar's household and among the very best of the Roman soldiers. He certainly used every opportunity to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Do we do that?

Paul's letter to the Philippians was written to Christians in Philippi, a city in Macedonia (northern Greece). Paul founded that church during his second missionary journey (Acts 16:11–40). The letter was written while he was a prisoner (Philippians 1:7, 12–14). Some scholars have suggested other possible places and times in Paul's life, but it remains most likely that Paul wrote Philippians while under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:16–31), awaiting trial before Emperor Nero. During this time (A.D. 60-62) he also wrote Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon, the other 'Prison Epistles'.

Paul was obviously very close to the Philippian church; there was mutual love and they shared a passion for the gospel. It was maybe four years since Paul was last in Philippi and the church was anxious about the fate of the Apostle, concern for one of their members Epaphroditus who was sent to Rome with a 'gift for Paul and as well the welfare of the gospel. Thus it seems Paul wrote this epistle to reassure the Philippians that Epaphroditus had recovered from a serious illness and was about to return to Philippi. Secondly, he used the occasion to express thanks for the gift they had sent him (4:10-14). The Apostle urged unity in the church and pointed to humility as the vehicle for its accomplishment. Our Text concerns the next issue, the welfare of the gospel.

While the word joy will seldom be associated with prison, it appears no less than six times in this letter. Of all Paul's epistles, Philippians is the most consistently positive and personal and stresses the importance of living joyfully in spite of circumstances.

Joy of course is the fruit of the Spirit and sin should be the only thing that dampens the believer's joy. Paul's passion and mission was the spread of the gospel. Surprisingly, his incarceration rather than preventing the spread of the gospel had opened new avenues. Christians can take heart from this knowing that when we are committed to doing God's will, even setbacks can be the means through which God accomplishes His purpose in us.

THE TEXT

Verses 1 – 11. Paul opened his letter with a standard greeting identifying the writer, recipients and expressing a wish. His great affection for his readers is immediately expressed and notably he mentions their *fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now*.

As was his custom he prayed for the Philippians and with 'joy', being confident of God's continued sanctifying work among them, which was evident to him and other believers. By praying Paul acknowledged the importance of asking God to work (James 4:2).

Note that God has ordained prayer as a vehicle whereby He works in the world. Scripture is unmistakably clear that prayer does effect objective change. We like Paul should make use of this great privilege.

Paul prayed that his readers would be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ and that they would approve excellent things and that their love would abound even more. Self-sacrificing love (Gr. *agape*) should be the motive behind partnership in the gospel.

The Philippians had already given evidence of possessing the love that God alone can produce (1 Cor. 13:1-3; Gal. 5:22) in their dealings with the Apostle. We note that Paul qualified 'love' as resting on real knowledge and all discernment. It should arise from an intelligent appraisal of reality. It should also rest on spiritual sensitivity to truth as God has revealed it in His Word and not on mere sentimentality. God's revelation and His Spirit were to guide their actions.

The Apostle's prayer expressed three thoughts that define true Christian fellowship in these verses: I have you in my mind (Phil. 1:3-6), I have you in my heart (Phil. 1:7-8), I have you in my prayers (Phil. 1:9-11).

Verse 12. ...*I would ye should understand...* (I want you to know) introduced something important (2 Cor. 13:6; 2 Tim. 3:1). Here Paul begins to provide an appraisal of the current state of his ministry; a subject of great interest to the Philippians. Reports of his imprisonment had doubtlessly caused dismay among the Philippians and others who had come to faith in Christ Jesus from Paul's preaching. Certain questions were sure to have arisen in people's minds: Has God abandoned Paul? Has Paul been unfaithful to God? Is Jesus Christ really Lord as opposed to Caesar what was called Lord? Who was the most powerful Lord and who would always win in the battle for the minds of men?

Paul's answer is more than just a face-saving strategy. It is more than just making the best of a bad circumstance or looking for the silver lining in a dark cloud. Paul interpreted his circumstances according to *the gospel* of Jesus. As God brought His salvation to the world in the suffering and death of Jesus, so now He extended His salvation into the world through the suffering of Paul. The good news of God goes forward by the same means that it came into existence: by faithful, lowly, self-sacrifice for others.

Much to the contrary of what was to be expected under the circumstances and unmistakably the work of God, rather than the gospel being shackled with Paul's incarceration, it was advancing in a surprisingly new field. This is therefore the key to living victoriously and joyfully in the middle of the normal difficulties of life.

... *the furtherance*... was a military term for the advance of troops through rough terrain by means of advance scouts removing barriers ([I Tim. 4:15](#)).

Verse 13. Paul could already point to tangible expressions of the gospel's advance. As a prisoner of the Roman emperor, Paul was guarded day and night by members of the Praetorian Guard, an elite military unit entrusted with the safety of the emperor and other high imperial officials. These highly trained, loyal soldiers were a potent expression of Rome's power and prestige. This was the last place one would expect the gospel of Jesus to spread, the story of a man whom Rome crucified as a rebel.

Yet this was the very result of Paul's imprisonment. As the Roman centurion at the cross confessed Jesus' divine supremacy (Mark 15:39), so now Rome's most celebrated soldiery heard the same declaration from a lowly prisoner in their custody. He did not say in this letter that he had been rewarded by many conversions but it was clear that he believed that the spread of the gospel would do its work once people became aware of Jesus.

... *bonds in Christ are manifest*... it is interesting that Paul says his *bonds* are known throughout *the palace*. He thereby emphasized that the message of Christ was being made known through the life of the messenger. For Paul, the messenger and the message are inseparable.

... *the palace, and in all other places*... In this context it refers to a body of soldiers, not a place, because of the use of the phrase, "and all the rest," which apparently refers to persons. The *everyone else* group included unsaved members of the Jewish community (Acts 28:17-29), some Gentiles (Philemon 10), and Paul's fellow Christians. Paul evidently was communicating with many people even though he was a prisoner.

The fact that Paul would speak before Gentile kings was revealed to Ananias in [Acts 9:15](#). God accomplished His stated purpose for Paul's ministry, but in a way that Paul apparently did not foresee.

This same truth is evident in believers' lives. We are not controlled by luck, chance, or fate. God uses even the things that seem demeaning and negative in a marvelous way for His honor and glory ([Rom. 8:28-29](#)).

Verse 14. ... *brethren in the Lord* ... here Paul explained how the situation had impacted other believers in Rome. Once fearful, they are now *much more bold to speak the word* of God despite dangers and opposition. Paul's courage renewed their own, as they rediscovered what it meant to follow the Christ who suffered on their behalf.

... *waxing confident* ... His example of aggressive witness had inspired the Roman Christians to be more outspoken in sharing the gospel. Rather than taking a lower profile because their leader was in chains, most of the local believers felt inspired by Paul's courage. They were standing up boldly for Christ and the gospel.

It is significant to note that one's demeanor, attitude and actions during times of stress and pressure are often a source of great encouragement to other Christians (Job, Jeremiah, Paul). Remember therefore that every believer is to live in such a way that they are an inspiration to others.

As Paul's chains were the means of spreading God's message to the imperial guards, any circumstance in the cause of Christ could be an opportunity for evangelism. Who would have thought the gospel could penetrate patrician Rome through a mere prisoner!

But note that the Gospel will always walk forward unhindered. Caesar and all other rulers can claim the title of King and Lord, but they cannot by imprisonment of the small and the invisible as well as the great preachers and teachers of the word prevent the gospel from marching forward and penetrating everywhere. Believers work with the promise ringing in their ears that the gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout all the world before the end comes.

Verses 15-16. ... *Christ even of envy and strife* ... there are some sad realities in the ministry and Paul would have his readers see the whole picture. Not every Christian's boldness stemmed from pure motives. Some were motivated by selfish desires. They apparently envied Paul's prominence

and wanted the notoriety for themselves, or they saw Paul as an obstacle to their own ambitions. Paul's arrival in Rome seemed to have caused some of the self-seeking opportunists in the Roman church some distress. Attention would have shifted from them to him. Nevertheless with him in confinement they had an opportunity to regain the spotlight by becoming more active and outspoken.

... *supposing to add affliction* ... evidently some of them thought that their prominence would distress Paul, as his prominence distressed them, but Paul was much less selfish than they were.

Ironically those who preached from *envy and strife* were acting with motives that contradicted the very message they preach. They preached the selfless *Christ*, but for selfish reasons. Paul highlighted these opponents to warn the Philippian Christians. The envy and strife in their congregation likely stemmed from similar motives of selfishness, (2:1-11).

One may wonder about the identity of these jealous Christian preachers. It seems obvious that they were truly preaching Jesus (vs. 11-18). Some believe they were the established Christian leaders (Jewish and Gentile) who were eclipsed by Paul's intellect and spiritual presence at his coming to Rome. This sounds much like 'our day' jealousy, rivalry, and partisanship which too often characterize the church of Jesus Christ, instead of the love and acceptance which are demanded in [I Cor. 13](#); [Rom. 14](#); [Gal. 5:26](#).

Verse 17. ... *the other of love*... on the other hand there were those who had a sincere desire to reach the lost and meet a need created by Paul's imprisonment. They desired the best for Paul and wanted to follow his bold example.

There was no contradiction between motive and message with this group. Their respect for Paul was based on Paul's own faithfulness to his message. They knew that his suffering was for the sake of Christ who suffered for them.

They realized that Paul's imprisonment and trial at Rome was not an accident, but was the predetermined plan of God ([Acts 9:15](#)). Jesus' life was also "appointed" ([Luke 22:22](#); [Acts 2:23](#); [3:18](#); [4:28](#)).

... *set*... (appointed) was a military term for a soldier on watch. It is used metaphorically of one's being appointed to a task ([Luke 2:34](#)). Paul's imprisonment and trial at Rome was not an accident, but was the predetermined plan of God ([Acts 9:15](#)). Jesus' life was also 'appointed' ([Luke 22:22](#); [Acts 2:23](#); [3:18](#); [4:28](#)). It is helpful and challenging to see our lives in this same perspective.

... *the defense* ... (Greek= apologia) from which we get the English word 'apology' and means 'a legal defense'.

Paul's steadfast faithfulness in hardship brought a victory for the gospel. True faith in the true gospel creates a love that hardship can challenge but never fully overcome.

Verse 18. ... *notwithstanding, every way*... certainly Paul had every right to condemn those who opposed him, we may think. But consider Christ's response to His own enemies. Falsely accused, He made no defense (Mark 14:60-62; 15:2-5). Subjected to torture, He prayed for His enemies (Luke 23:34). Mockingly invited to use His kingly power by which He had saved others to save

Himself, He stayed on the cross to the end (Mark 15:29–32). Paul's response to his rivals reflects Jesus' selfless sacrifice.

... *Christ is preached*... Paul was unconcerned to restore his reputation or maintain his standing. For him, Christ was everything. The fact that Christ was being preached, even if it meant shame for Paul, was evidence that the gospel was advancing. Those who preached with impure hearts will doubtlessly stand in judgment before the God who examines the heart. But until that day, the gospel will go forward even in cases of insincere preaching.

... *And I therein* ... points to the reason Paul could *rejoice*. That reason is not his circumstances as such, but the fact that Christ was preached regardless. That reality made Paul's situation tolerable to him.

... *and will rejoice*... the greatness of Paul's heart can be seen in the fact that he rejoiced that Christ was being preached even if the proclaimer had poor motives. The power is in the Word, not in the proclaimer!

It is very important to note that both the plan to imprison Paul and the plan to disrespect him backfired. The reason for this was that both plans were designed to contain the Gospel.

We therefore learn that any attempt of any sort and from any source to restrict the spread of the gospel will fail. The kings of the earth and their followers will always unite against the Lord and against His Anointed, but we know that the Father will always laugh at them and hold them in derision. They might think that by imprisoning the believers they are winning all but in fact they are simply heaping coals of fire on their heads. They will never win. When they kill the believer they are really putting them to be with Jesus which is far better than being placed to live in luxury in the Palace.

Verse 19. Paul now explains why his joy in Christ will continue even in the most extreme circumstances. This was no theoretical exercise for the Apostle. He was in Roman custody awaiting trial before the emperor. The outcome of the trial could mean his death. His readers knew this grim reality all too well. Yet Paul spoke with complete confidence that the outcome of his trial will be *salvation*.

... *this*... likely a reference to the things he just recounted in verses 12-18.

... *salvation*... One writer comments on the term as follows: **“What deliverance did he have in mind, physical deliverance from imprisonment or some spiritual deliverance? Later in this epistle Paul said he anticipated release from prison (1:25; 2:24). However the verses that follow this one (v. 19) point to his thinking of the completion of salvation that he had referred to previously (v. 6). Earlier he had spoken of the completion of the Philippians' salvation. Here he spoke of the end of his own (Job 13:16, 18). The Greek word translated "deliverance" is *soteria*, the standard rendering of which is "salvation." Probably Paul meant that his prison experiences and the consequent furtherance of the gospel were all part of God's completion of the good work that He had begun in him.”**

Another view is that *salvation* here is to be understood in the Old Testament sense of physical deliverance. It was often used in contexts that relate to trials ([Mark 13:11](#); [Luke 12:11-12](#)). Paul felt he was going to be released

... *through your prayer*... further, that salvation will come because of the Philippian prayers and likewise through what God's Holy Spirit, *the Spirit of Jesus Christ*, would *supply*. Paul had complete confidence that the victorious power of God at work in his ministry would continue to bring victory.

Paul is viewing salvation at this point from the perspective of the gospel.

Verse 20. ... *in nothing I shall be ashamed*... Paul did not want to feel ashamed when he stood before the Lord at His judgment seat (1 John 2:28). Moreover he was confident that with the prayer support of the Philippians and the Holy Spirit's enablement he would not be a disappointment.

.... *But that with all boldness* ... nevertheless he felt the need for courage. After all, he still had to stand before Caesar and undergo a Roman trial. His greatest desire, however, was that he would continue to exalt Jesus Christ whether that meant that he lived or died. Thus he will glorify Christ whether in a *life* of continued ministry or in a *death* that reflects Christ's own selfless faithfulness. Focused on Christ, Paul can express joy in even the most extreme circumstances.

Verse 21. This brief verse is certainly one of the best known, best loved, and most widely memorized verses in the Bible. It brings Paul's discussion of his circumstances to a rousing climax. Its simplicity belies the challenging ideas it presents.

... *to live is Christ*... Paul's present existence reflected Christ's life, as a life of self-giving service for others. Jesus explained to His disciples this implication from His death: their purpose, like their master, was to serve all (Mark 10:41–45). Paul described his life as labor for bearing fruit (Philippians 1:22), serving the Philippian and others (1:24, 25). Living, for Paul or for any follower of Jesus, *is Christ* in that it is focused on rendering to others the joyous, selfless service that Jesus rendered to us.

... *to die is gain*... while death is often feared even among Christians, Paul was able to see the reality that even if the Emperor's verdict were death, he would be better off than if he continued to live. It would mean that he would go into the presence of his Lord and be free forever from sin, suffering, and sorrow. Furthermore he would have glorified God by persevering faithfully to the end of his life. The Christian can take a radically different view of death than the unbeliever who has no hope, as Paul did (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

One writer notes: "**Paul's hope for the future, centered as it was in Jesus, kept him from making too much of his current circumstances. This hope enabled him to reassess his circumstances, not by suppressing his emotions, evident throughout this letter, but by relating them to God's sovereignty and to Jesus' centrality in life.**"

CONCLUSION

Paul found a way to serve others even as a prisoner. He knew that even in the bleakest circumstance, God provided a means for him to glorify Christ in self-giving.

How do your circumstances present opportunities for you to serve selflessly? How has the faithful God delivered that joy to you before? Are you ready to discover how He will do so again?

The Study Text presents Paul as a positive model for all believers. Rather than valuing his own comfort, reputation, and freedom above all else, he put the advancement of God's plan first. He discerned what was best (v. 10). He could maintain a truly joyful attitude even in unpleasant circumstances because he derived was pure and blameless .

So.

Do you have a passion for the person of Jesus Christ and for the gospel message that He has brought? One writer asks:

"If you have a favorite artiste or athlete, you might want him or her to be recognized. If you personally know him or her, you might want all the more for such recognition. And if you believe that such recognition would actively be life-changing for the people who recognized your favorite person, then you might even become something of an evangelist for that person.

**Are you passionate about the exaltation of Christ in this way? Writer John Eldredge thinks not. He worries that Christ isn't being exalted by his contemporary followers because they really don't want anything very exciting....
Ouch!"**

Christ was to be exalted in his body, says the Apostle. If your body exalting Christ? Is there 'fruitful labor' from you?

Remember that to live is to know and gain Christ and to die is to die and know and gain Christ.

What is your desire?

The Psalmist Asaph writes in Psalm 73:25

"Whom have I in heaven but you?

And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you".

So we go to the famous soliloquy:

"To be, or not to be: that is the question".

We will only like the Apostle Paul encourage you to live and to desire Christ. A passion for Christ will lead to a passion for others. You should want to help others in their misery.

Submit to God in Christ

So be honest and pursue Christ. Do that and watch what He does. It will be good for you to be called a man or a woman after the Lord's own heart.