

Lesson Two (1:12-30)

Good News From Prison (1:12-18)

12 I want you to know, brethren, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, 13 so that it has become known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ; 14 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.

15 Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. 16 The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel; 17 the former proclaim Christ out of partisanship, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. 18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed and in that I rejoice.

V. 12 I Want You To Know, Brethren – When Paul was imprisoned, many questions must have swept over the Philippian church. Is all lost? Will Paul be forced to quit? Are we supporting a hopeless cause? So Paul wrote to them to set the record straight and to put their fears to rest.

That What Has Happened To Me – The account of what had happened to Paul is recorded in the last few chapters of Acts. Following his arrest and the false accusations of the Jews, Paul appealed to Caesar to hear his case. When he finally was taken to Rome, he was confined to a private dwelling, secured at his own expense. Although he was free to preach to all who came to him, he was kept in chains under constant guard (Eph. 6:20). During this imprisonment, he wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

Has Really Served To Advance The Gospel – Paul was in chains, but the gospel was not. In addition to the opportunities to preach and write, as noted above, the next verse tells of another unique opportunity for the gospel made possible by imprisonment.

V. 13 It Has Become Known Throughout The Whole Praetorian Guard – The praetorian guard was an elite body of 10,000 soldiers who made up the emperor's personal army. They were distinguished by special privileges and double pay. Paul was under the special guard of these soldiers as an imperial prisoner. Every hour of the day, Paul was shackled to a praetorian soldier, connected by a length of chain. Perhaps Paul could not get away from them, but neither could they get away from him! Hour after hour, until another soldier would come to relieve him, each soldier was Paul's captive audience. Soon the gospel message had spread through the entire cohort.

That My Imprisonment Is For Christ – Soon every soldier knew this was no ordinary prisoner—he was an ambassador of Jesus. Paul does not say that every praetorian soldier became a Christian, but they did all hear the gospel.

V. 14 And Most Of The Brethren Have Been Made Confident – How could the imprisonment of a fellow preacher make one feel more confident? It was Paul's attitude and continuing success that made the difference. The forces of evil were doing their worst—but Paul was still cheerful, optimistic, and preaching!

In The Lord – It must not be overlooked that their confidence was not in Paul or in themselves. Their confidence was in the Lord. The victory belonged to Him.

And Are Much More Bold To Speak The Word Of God Without Fear – It was no small thing to proclaim God's word in the world of the first century. The Roman government, with Nero as emperor, was increasingly hostile to Christianity. The Jewish leaders led an active crusade to stir up trouble against it. The common people were tolerant of practically any religion, but were totally intolerant of a religion that claimed to be the only true one.

V. 15 Some Indeed Preach Christ From Envy And Rivalry – Incredible as it may seem, some men were being motivated to preach the gospel by base motives such as envy and strife. Envy is more than simple jealousy; it is pain at the success of someone else. It does not want to equal or surpass another person's success; it wants to see that person's success ruined. Rivalry is strife, expressing open hostility. Both envy and rivalry are listed among the works of the flesh in Gal. 5:19-21.

But Others From Good Will – Those who preached the gospel out of base motivations did not prevent Paul from seeing all the rest, who preached with a heart of sincere good will.

V. 16 The Latter Do It Out Of Love – This second group, those preaching from good will, were motivated by love. In context here, this love is not only love for God, but also love for Paul himself.

Knowing That I Am Put Here For The Defense Of The Gospel – The good-hearted preachers appreciated the reason for Paul's imprisonment. They were sympathetic for both Paul and the Gospel he preached. They were concerned for the defense of the gospel which Paul would make before the emperor.

For an example of the kind of defense Paul would likely make before Caesar, see Acts 17:22-31; 22:1-21; 26:1-29; and I Cor. 15:1-11. The best defense of the gospel is the historical truth of the risen Christ.

V. 17 The Former Proclaim Christ Out Of Partisanship – Referring again to the first group, Paul named their motivation as "partisanship." This word means selfishness or personal ambition. It describes the person who will do absolutely anything to advance his own causes. Like envy and rivalry named in verse fifteen, partisanship is also a work of the flesh.

Not Sincerely, But Thinking To Afflict Me In My Imprisonment – Those who operated from impure motives somehow thought that by preaching the gospel, they would afflict Paul. They may have thought to arouse Paul's jealousy at their success, or they may have thought to stir up more government opposition to preachers.

V. 18 What Then? – If these people thought they would make Paul sick with jealousy, they greatly misjudged him. They would have found it hard to understand, but Paul preached with complete honesty and selflessness (I Thess. 2:3-6). He could only rejoice at the successful preaching of others.

Whether In Pretense Or In Truth, Christ Is Proclaimed – What really mattered was not the petty evaluation of one another's motives, but the proclaiming of the message. Paul was perfectly content to leave the matter of motives between the other preachers and their Master.

It should be noted that Paul did not condone any and every doctrinal error just so long as they preached about Jesus. The problem of doctrinal error will be confronted later, in Chapter three. In the situation of this passage, the preachers were preaching the truth, but their own motive were poor.

And In That I Rejoice – Just as Paul was undaunted by the soldiers of Rome, he was unaffected by these preachers. Notice his total selflessness. If the world was hearing the truth of the gospel, he could only rejoice.

Optimism For The Future (1:19-26)

19 Yes, and I shall rejoice. For I know that through your prayers and help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, 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 honored in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 If it is to be life in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. 24 But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so

that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

V. 19 Yes, And I Shall Rejoice – At this point, Paul turned his attention from the events of the past to the prospect for the future. As far as the eye could see down the path that lay ahead of him, the Lord was still in control and winning the victory.

Through Your Prayers And The Help Of The Spirit Of Jesus Christ – Paul was counting on two powerful resources to help him be victorious. The first was prayer offered in his behalf by the faithful Philippian church. Having faced so many perils already (II Cor. 11:23-28), he knew first hand the sustaining power of their prayers. The second resource was the help of the Holy Spirit. The word for “help” used here by Paul goes back to the Greek theater. It was customary for a wealthy patron of the arts to provide all the necessary equipment, costumes, salaries, etc. to make the production possible. It was this word for the generous provision of all necessities that Paul used in reference to the Holy Spirit’s “help.”

This Will Turn Out For My Deliverance – The word Paul used for “deliverance” may also be translated “salvation,” as in the King James Version. One translation tends to look toward a release from imprisonment, while the other looks toward a final home in heaven when he dies. In light of Paul’s statement in verse 25, he probably had reference to release from prison.

V. 20 As It Is My Eager Expectation And Hope – Paul “watched with outstretched head” in eager confidence. He did not shrink back in fear of the coming consequences.

That I Shall Not At All Be Ashamed – Paul knew that as long as he stood with Jesus, no one could put him to shame. He was also eager to see that others should not be ashamed. (See Rom. 1:16; II Tim. 1:8, 16; I Pet. 4:16).

But That With Full Courage Now As Always Christ Will Be Honored In My Body – The word for “full courage” was the term used in ancient Athens for the right of free speech which belonged to every citizen. The main thought in Paul’s mind, apparently, was that he would have the boldness to speak out for Christ before the Emperor Nero.

Whether By Life Or By Death – Paul was not taking it for granted that he would escape death. Verse 27 also mentions the possibility that he might not be released. The most important thing was that Jesus would stand by Paul in life or in death, and Paul would live or die to honor Him.

V. 21 For To Me To Live Is Christ – As Paul had written years earlier to the Galatians, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). Paul had learned the secret of discipleship, self-denial, and had let Jesus take over his life (Matt. 16:24). He had given up all his former life in order to gain Christ and be found in Him (Phil. 3:8-9). In doing this, Paul was not accomplishing the impossible; rather, he was setting an example he expected all of us to follow (Phil. 3:17).

And To Die Is Gain – Death would be gain in at least two ways. First, Christ and his kingdom would be honored by Paul’s martyrdom (v. 20). Secondly, Paul himself would have great gain by going to be with Jesus (v. 23). It is this second thought that Paul carries into the following verses.

V. 22 If It Is To Be Life In The Flesh – Life, not death, is indeed what Paul supposed the outcome would be (v. 19, 25).

Fruitful Labor For Me – Paul’s only attachment to this life was his burning desire to evangelize and teach. It was not so much in his own interest as in the interests of others (2:4) that Paul wanted to stay alive.

Yet Which I Shall Choose I Cannot Tell – More accurately, “what I shall choose I do not make known.”

V. 23 I Am Hard Pressed Between The Two – Paul was between a rock and a hard place. He faced not two dreadful consequences, but two appealing possibilities. The choice was not really Paul’s to make—and it was just as well, for Paul had a very hard time deciding.

My Desire Is To Depart And Be With Christ – Paul had a desire so strong that the word used by him here is usually translated “lust” or “craving.” The word for “depart” is a picturesque word used when a ship is untied from its mooring and sails away, or when a tent is taken down in preparation for a journey. (See II Cor. 5:1-4)

What happens to a Christian when he dies? Some passages in the New Testament seem to indicate that he “sleeps” until the second coming of Christ (I Cor. 15:51-52; I Thess. 4:14-17) and then is raised from the dead. However, a greater number of passages indicate that the departed Christian goes immediately to be with Jesus (Luke 16:19-31; 23:43; John 11:25-26; Acts 7:55-59; II Cor. 5:1-8; Phil. 1:23; Rev. 6:9-11).

For That Is Far Better – Paul knew what it was like to be in the presence of the Lord (Acts 9:3-6). He also tells of a man who was caught up to the third heaven and was privileged to see and hear things in Paradise. Presumably he was speaking of himself (II Cor. 12:1-7). This may help us understand Paul’s seemingly unnatural desire to die.

V. 24 But To Remain In The Flesh Is More Necessary On Your Account – It is striking that Paul’s only real reason for wanting to continue in this life was to help others.

V. 25 Convinced Of This, I Know That I Shall Remain – It was not a revelation from the Lord, but a logical analysis of the situation, that caused Paul to conclude that he would be allowed to go on living. What he goes on to say in verse 27 shows that this conclusion is less than absolutely sure.

For Your Progress And Joy In The Faith – Just as the gospel was advancing (*prokope*) in verse 12 through the work of Paul, so shall the Philippians progress (*prokope*) through him.

V. 26 Ample Cause To Glory In Christ Jesus – Literally, “that your reason for boasting might overflow” in Christ Jesus.

A Challenge For The Future (1:27-30)

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, 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. 29 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, 30 engaged in the same conflict which you saw and now hear to be mine.

V. 27 Let Your Manner Of Life Be Worthy Of The Gospel – Literally, the Philippians were to “live out their citizenship” in a manner worthy of the gospel. As Roman citizens of a Roman colony, they knew something about the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. This same imagery is also used in 3:20.

No Christian can live in such a way as to be worthy of the sacrifice Christ made for him. He can, however, allow his life to be shaped and directed by what he recognizes to be of supreme worth—the gospel.

Whether I Come And See You Or Am Absent – The most important thing was not whether Paul was released from prison. Paul’s logical conclusion might prove to be wrong; their united stand for Christ must prove to be steadfast.

Stand Firm In One Spirit – During this same imprisonment, Paul wrote of the Christian’s struggle against the hosts of wickedness (Eph. 6:10-20). The Christian must put on God’s armor, and having done all, must stand.

With One Mind Striving Side By Side For The Faith Of The Gospel – Paul’s emphasis on unity of purpose reaches a climax in just a few more verses (2:2). One of the most important ingredients for success in any army is unity of mind and purpose. Teamwork is required among those who would “contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

V. 28 Not Frightened In Anything By Your Opponents – Paul used the word here for a horse that is “spooked” by some small or imaginary sight and rears back in terror. Even the Roman empire should not incite them to panic.

A Clear Omen To Them Of Their Destruction – Even when they threw the Christians to the lions, the Romans could not get the best of them. The hymns of victory were a dramatic prophecy of the ultimate destruction of all who would exalt themselves against the power of God.

But Of Your Salvation, And That From God – The united unflinching stance of the Christians was a clear demonstration of their coming salvation. Do not forget, though, that salvation is not earned by a given measure of courage or earthly success. It is from God, and it is His gift (Eph. 2:8-9).

V. 29 For It Has Been Granted To You – God has given two precious privileges to the Christian. The first is obvious; the second is startling.

That You Should Not Only Believe – The capacity for faith should not be considered a human invention. It is a gift of God, available to all men (II Pet. 3:9; Rev. 22:17).

But Also Suffer For His Sake – The privilege of suffering for Jesus is a gift from God. Paul had experienced it firsthand, and he could see it coming for the Philippians. This time of testing should be received with joy (James 1:2-3; I Pet. 4:12-14).

V. 30 Engaged In The Same Conflict Which You Saw And Now Hear To Be Mine – Paul’s first visit to Philippi found him beaten and thrown in jail. Now, after many other hardships and trials (II Cor. 11:23-28), he was imprisoned again. They should not be surprised if similar things happen to them.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. How did imprisonment advance the gospel?
2. What were the evil motives of some preachers? What were they trying to do to Paul?
3. Should we be big-hearted and approve of all preaching, so long as it includes mention of Jesus?
4. Did Paul expect to be released from imprisonment?
5. What could have happened that would have caused Paul to be “ashamed”?
6. Why was Paul eager to die? Why did he also want to continue living?
7. What happens to the Christian when he dies?

8. What is the background of the words “manner of life” (v. 27)? Is it possible for our manner of life to be worthy of the gospel?
9. What two privileges has God given to Christians?
10. What was the example of suffering set by Paul? Was this typical or rare in the first century?

A.B.A. REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What New Testament book records the events that led to Paul’s imprisonment in Rome? Summarize these events.
2. Name the New Testament books written by Paul during his Roman imprisonment.
3. What was the “praetorian guard”?
4. Explain why “it was no small thing” to share the Gospel in the world of the First Century.
5. Explain the difference between “envy” and “jealousy.”
6. Contrast the differences between those who preach Christ from envy/rivalry and those who proclaim Jesus from good will/love.
7. In what ways could the preachers, who proclaimed Christ out of partisanship, possibly hope to afflict Paul during his imprisonment?
8. Explain Paul’s words, “whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed and in that I rejoice.”
9. List two powerful resources, in verse 19, that would help Paul be victorious. How can these resources also help you overcome difficult situations?
10. What is the background of the word “help” in verse 19?

11. How does the King James Version translate the word “deliverance” in verse 19?
12. What is the background of the word for “full courage” in verse 20?
13. Was Paul certain that he would escape death at the end of his imprisonment? How could Paul’s death honor Christ?
14. List two ways in which Paul’s death would be “gain.”
15. Explain the words “desire” and “depart” in verse 23.
16. List seven New Testament passages which indicate that a departed Christian goes immediately to be with Jesus.
17. According to verse 24, why did Paul want to “remain in the flesh”?
18. What is the Greek word for “progress” in verse 25?
19. What is the literal translation of “ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus”?
20. What is the literal translation of “Let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel”?
21. Explain the background of the Greek word for “frightened” in verse 28.
22. Why should the capacity to believe be considered a privilege from God?
23. How can suffering for Jesus be a privilege and gift from God?
24. How was Paul treated during his first visit to Philippi?
25. What are you personally willing to endure to proclaim the Gospel? Take a moment to ask God to give you the strength and boldness to share the Good News with others.
26. What is the most important lesson that you have learned from this section, and how can you apply this lesson in everyday life?