

SHARING GOD'S GRACE

BIBLE BASIS: Philippians 1:18b-29

BIBLE TRUTH: As we remain faithful, God sustains us in all circumstances.

MEMORY VERSE: 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 (Philippians 1:27).

LESSON AIM: That your students will reflect on the personal testimony of God's grace.

TEACHER PREPARATION

MATERIALS NEEDED: Quarterly Commentary, Adult Quarterly, Adult resources—charts, worksheets, and other teaching tools, Bibles (several different versions)

OTHER MATERIALS NEEDED / TEACHER'S NOTES:

LESSON OVERVIEW

LIFE NEED FOR TODAY'S LESSON

To examine how Paul faces conflict in this Scripture text.

BIBLE LEARNING

To understand that regardless of the circumstances, Christ must be magnified.

BIBLE APPLICATION

Society may reward our self-fulfillment, but the Scripture reminds us that seeking our own selfish goals only leads to destruction.

STUDENTS' RESPONSES

Students will identify someone who can be strengthened by their testimony and actions.

LESSON SCRIPTURE

PHILIPPIANS 1:18b-29

1:18b. 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 labour: 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;

LIGHT ON THE WORD

The epistle to the Philippians is another of Paul's letters from prison. In this letter, he wrote "to all the saints in Christ Jesus" (1:1). Philippi was the first city on European soil where a Christian church was founded by the apostle on his second missionary journey (see Acts 16). Paul was accompanied by Timothy, Silas, and Luke. Luke narrates the conversion of Lydia along with ill-treatment and imprisonment of Paul and Silas, following a riot in Philippi.

On his third missionary journey, Paul again visited the church (Acts 20). An intimate relationship existed between the apostle and the church, which consisted mostly of Gentile

Christians. They were poor, but very helpful and generous. On several occasions, this small church sent gifts to Paul and contributed to the poor in Jerusalem as well (Philippians 4:15, 16; 2 Corinthians 8:17; 11:9).

TEACHING THE BIBLE LESSON

LIFE NEEDS FOR TODAY'S LESSON

AIM: That your students will learn that Christ has to be honored regardless of adverse circumstances.

INTRODUCTION

Paul Faces Conflict

The main theme in this short letter to the Philippians is joy and gratitude. The word "rejoice" (or words similar to it in meaning) appears 16 times. But the imprisonment and cruel actions done to Paul could not extinguish his joy in the Lord (see 1:18). Paul, unlike his house arrest in Acts 28, was under military custody and had been transferred to the prisoner's ward when he wrote this letter. He tells the church that regardless of his circumstances and theirs as well, the Gospel must be preached and Christ must be glorified.

BIBLE LEARNING

AIM: That your students will learn about magnifying Christ.

I. STAYING FAITHFUL IN DIFFICULT TIMES

(Philippians 1:18b20)

Overcoming obstacles can be hard. Paul faced extreme hardship, but, he remained faithful to God. Under adverse circumstances, our commitments may be challenged. When, if ever, should circumstances lead us to

compromise our commitment? As we remain faithful, God sustains us in all circumstances.

Paul Is Not Ashamed (verses 18b20)

18b-20. Whether in pretense, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, 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 was quite sure that his present circumstances in prison would ultimately turn out for his deliverance. By this, he did not necessarily mean his expected release from prison, for he was taking into account (as it appears from verse 20) the possibility of his death.

Paul only gave expression to the conviction that everything will work out for good with him. But there were two factors that must be instrumental in order that his circumstances turn out for his good and deliverance. The first was the prayers of the church, which he mentioned together with the Holy Spirit. Paul must rely on the intercession of the church, for he knew the power of prayer (see Acts 12:512). Next, the apostle mentioned "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:19). The Spirit, who dwells in Christ as the Head, is also available to the members of His body on Earth. The Spirit supports, assists, and leads believers into all truth and helps us in every situation (Romans 8:26). What a mighty God we serve!

QUESTION 1

Paul declares that whether in "pretense, or

in truth, Christ is " (Philippians 1:18b).

(Answer) preached

LIGHT ON THE WORD

Paul Is a Prisoner

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 the legs to be forced wide apart to ensure greater security and greater pain. Under such stringent and crude holdings, Paul was able to share about the joy of Christ. He was able to withstand in spite of the harsh and painful experience.

II. HONORING CHRIST EVEN IF DEATH IS PRESENT (Philippians 1:2124)

The possibility of life or death was suggested by Paul already (Philippians 1:20). Now he counterbalances the significance which his life, on one hand, and his death, on the other, would have for himself and the church. As far as he was concerned, death offered just as much advantage to him as life did—either way, dead or alive, Christ would be honored.

Paul's Thoughts About Living or Dying in Christ (verses 2124)

21-24. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.

Would the apostle prefer death or life? Or was there still a reason for him to live even in his earthly predicament? Yes, life in the flesh would have fruitful labor, or more opportunities to labor for the Lord and to produce more fruit on the earth. However, Paul does not know and cannot choose between the two. Death for him is gaining the unmediated presence of Christ, and life can offer more service to God. For Paul, it was a dilemma (verse 22).

And yet, "to abide in the flesh is more needful for you" (verse 24). Over against his personal desires, he weighs the interests of the church and the necessity of staying alive a little while longer for believers' sake. If the outcome of the trial was that Paul's physical life was spared, he was looking forward to working for the Lord. His job was, as it had been since his conversion, producing fruit for the Lord, whether this was the fruit of the Spirit or souls won to Christ (Galatians 5:23-24; John 4:36). Paul wrote that the choice of whether to remain on Earth or to go to be with the Lord was very difficult, but of course, the choice was not his to make. It was not even the choice of the earthly judges; the choice was God's.

QUESTION 2

Paul was struggling with what decision (verse 23)?

(Answer) Paul was struggling with living and working for Christ or dying so that he could be with Christ.

LIGHT ON THE WORD

Being in His Presence

In verse 22, Paul was considering what he would do in two different scenarios. In verse 23 he considered what would happen if his life was

not spared or if it was. Working for the Lord or being in His presence—which is better? Paul was so in love with the Lord that he would far rather be with Him. This is one of many scriptural references to life after death for the believer. Paul was obviously expecting to be fully conscious in the presence of the Lord.

But then he thought of his brothers and sisters in Philippi. He knew they needed him to stay here on Earth to minister to their needs. So, although the choice was not his, he realized that if he was set free, it was to serve others. This, too, should be our goal.

III. WHEN CHRIST IS HONORED, THE CHURCH BENEFITS (Philippians 1:25-26)

Paul was no longer thinking about his own fate, but acknowledged that he was sure he would be freed because he was needed to minister to the Philippians. "Shall abide" and "continue" are somewhat of a play on words. In the first, Paul was talking about remaining alive, and in the second he was talking about remaining with them after he was freed. In the following verses, Paul addressed some friction among the Philippians. He expressed that he wanted them to be unified when he returned to them.

Paul's Concern for the Philippians (verses 25-26)

25-26. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.

Paul gave two reasons for remaining with them. First, he spoke of their need for "furtherance" (KJV) or to "grow" (NLT), which in the Greek is *prokope* (*prokopAY*). Both translations spoke to the need for spiritual progress in the lives of the

Philippians. This kind of progress "referred to the quality or character of their life in Christ, and especially to their 'advancing,' moving forward" (Fee, 153).

The second reason Paul would remain with the Philippians was for their "joy of faith." The joy in the life of faith goes hand in hand with spiritual growth. Paul's presence with them would help them grow and help them experience joy. "The physical presence of ministers is necessary if communication of the gospel is to have a lasting impact on believers or to win a group of people for the Lord" (Abate, 1442). The Christian minister is to mirror the incarnation of Christ—that is, to show the people how to follow the Lord.

The KJV uses the word "rejoicing" while the NLT has the words "take pride." The English translations seem entirely different, but the Greek word *kauchema* (KOWkhaymah), can be translated "boasting" or "glorying." Boasting in the flesh was at the heart of Paul's understanding of sin (Philippians 3:3), so obviously, this was not the meaning of "take pride" in 1:26. Rather, the meaning was to put our trust in someone else and in this case it is Jesus Christ. Even in the Greek, the NLT seems a somewhat clumsy word choice, but Paul was saying that his coming to be with them would cause their glorying/boasting to overflow. All of this takes place in Jesus Christ. The Philippians would be rejoicing in Jesus and doing so because the one who taught them about Him (Paul) would be with them again. Not the gain, and his own heart's desire, but the need of the church and his God-given calling on their behalf becomes the urge that ultimately determines his expectation for the future (verse 25).

QUESTION 3

What did Paul look forward to (verse 26)?

(Answer) Paul ultimately looked forward to the people rejoicing in Jesus Christ for Paul when he visits them again.

LIGHT ON THE WORD

Everything Will Work Out for God's Glory

Paul believed that all would turn out eventually for its own good and that, in everything, Christ would be magnified, whether it was by his life or his death. Therefore, he added in full assurance to his readers, "And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith" (verse 25). To Paul, their development, progress, knowledge of Christ, and love for Him were all important.

IV. CITIZENS OF HEAVEN ON EARTH (Philippians 1:27-29)

The apostle was the bearer of the Good News and the instrument through which Christ would be magnified in their midst. He was confident that Christ would grant them the privilege of being together once again. And for that, He deserved thanks and praise!

Jesus Christ must be glorified in our lives, no matter what the circumstances may be. He has brought us from a long way and we should be glad; the African American experience contains many testimonies to God's faithfulness. God's mercy has been poured out richly on us. And, because of His promises to His people, we can be assured of ultimate victory and eternal life. To live IS Christ. Aren't you glad?

To Live as a Citizen (verses 27-29)

27-29. 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; 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. For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake;

The previous verses concerned Paul's thoughts on the outcome of his upcoming trial. Now he began concentrating solely on the Philippians. Paul's approach was exhortation to Christian living. Let's begin with an examination of the word "conversation." Language is always evolving and some of the words and grammatical constructions have changed in the last 400 years, so much so that the meanings have changed. "Conversation" is one such example. Today the word means "the informal exchange of ideas by spoken words" {New Oxford American Dictionary, 375}, but when the KJV was translated, it meant "behavior or manner of life" (Oxford Universal Dictionary, 387). This is where it helps to have a more contemporary translation or access to the original New Testament in Greek. "Conversation" is the KJV translation of *politeuomai* (*politYOOmahee*), and literally means "to live as a citizen." So this verse in context means to "live as citizens of heaven" (NLT).

Living as citizens of heaven leads to "conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ" (NLT) or "as it becometh the gospel of Christ" (KJV). This presupposes that the Gospel has an ethical content. The Gospel teaches us how to live as well as provides us with eternal life. Paul was going to send this letter via Timothy and although Paul is

intending to come see them, Timothy may report back to Paul before Paul was able to see them in person. So Paul told the Philippians that he was hoping to get a good report about them from Timothy.

In the last part of verse 27, Paul told the Philippians they should be "striving together" or fighting together for the Gospel faith. Obviously, they were facing great opposition. Paul himself was in prison because of the Gospel. Such a fight demands a united front against the forces opposed to the Gospel.

The Philippians had very real adversaries. Their city was considered a Roman colony, which meant they were considered Roman citizens. As Roman citizens they were expected to worship the emperor, but the Philippians' church was essentially a colony of heaven (Fee, 16163). Their worship and allegiance were to Christ alone. In these verses, Paul showed us that Christians are not helpless pawns of fate. Because this is the time we go home to be with Jesus, believers do not have to fear death.

This final verse told the Philippians that God had graciously given them two gifts. The gifts are favors that are freely given by God. The first gift is belief in God. Even our belief is a gift that is given to us, but additionally we have been given the privilege of suffering for Him. Paul was not talking about suffering in general, but the privilege of living in a world hostile to our Savior and resistant to the love of Christ. We gladly suffer for Him as we think of Christ in His great sufferings for us on the Cross.

QUESTION 4

Paul shared with the Philippians that they

should ___ in Christ and for Christ's sake (verse 29).

(Answer) believe, suffer

LIGHT ON THE WORD

Standing Together for God's Kingdom

Not only should our conduct be appropriate for citizens of God's kingdom, we need to stand together. We should not be fighting one another; we need to present a united front against our real enemy—Satan and his kingdom. We do not have to be afraid of his forces. When they continue to persecute us, that is the sign that they have rejected God's wonderful salvation and their final end is sure. On the other hand, we are assured that God is going to save us from the final punishment of an eternity in hell.

BIBLE APPLICATION

AIM: That your students will better understand how they can give thanks and encourage others as the Apostle Paul did in his thanks to others and his encouragement for them in Christ.

What Does It Mean to Be Alive?

What do you think it means to be alive? It means more than just breathing in air. To live means that we exhibit enthusiasm and excitement in all that we do, and that we face challenges boldly and confidently because life has much to offer.

In this week's lesson, the apostle Paul, writing from prison and expressing his thanks to the church of Philippi for their generous gift to him, tells them that the Gospel of Jesus must be proclaimed regardless of his imprisonment and possible death. No matter what the circumstances, Christ must be magnified.

STUDENTS' RESPONSES

AIM: That your students will learn that we are to help those who are in need.

Our society prizes self-fulfillment, ignoring Scripture that tells us that seeking after our own selfish goals only leads to destruction. Even Christians today have forgotten the example of Jesus who came not to be served, but to serve others (Mark 10:45). Look around you this week and notice those in great need. How can you help them? Plan a class project to help the needy in your community. Even in affluent neighborhoods, there are hidden homeless people that others have succeeded in ignoring.

PRAYER

O Lord, Help us to keep our conversation and our behavior grounded in Your Word. Help us to give thanks and help us who are struggling in difficult circumstances. Allow us to know and see the hope that You have given us and the free gifts that keep us focused in You. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

HOW TO SAY IT:

Caesarea. zehsuhREEuh.

Philippians. fihLIHPihuhnz.

PREPARE FOR NEXT SUNDAY

Read Philippians 2:113 and be prepared to discuss "Giving of Oneself."

COMMENTS / NOTES:

DAILY HOME BIBLE READINGS

MONDAY

Paul's Call to Service

(Acts 9:1016)

TUESDAY

Paul's Arrest

(Acts 21:27-36)

WEDNESDAY

Paul's Trial before the Council (Acts 22:30—
23:11)

THURSDAY

Paul's Appeal to Caesar

(Acts 25:1-12)

FRIDAY

Paul's Prayer for the Philippians

(Philippians 1:3—11)

SATURDAY

Paul's Imprisonment Spreads the Gospel

(Philippians 1:12-18a)

SUNDAY

Paul's Struggle with His Future (Philippians
1:18b-29)