

philippians : putting the gospel first philippians 1v12-30

Philippians is all about putting the gospel – the good news of Jesus Christ and all that means – first in your life. Last time we saw the effect that had on Paul's relationship with the Philippians. This time we see what effect it had on Paul's attitude, even in some difficult circumstances...

verses 12-18

Imagine how the Philippian Christians must have been feeling, with the great apostle Paul in prison. Not only that, but while he was locked away, people had been preaching the gospel for their own selfish reasons. Surely there was good reason for them, and particularly for Paul, to despair?

Paul's has the opposite attitude. He rejoices because both situations have advanced the gospel. It's not hard to imagine Paul taking every opportunity to explain the gospel to the guards who kept him locked up, or perhaps they had been discussing the man they were holding captive. Either way, everyone knows that Paul is a Christian and in prison because of it. More than that, Paul's captivity has actually given other Christians more confidence in God and it has made them even bolder in proclaiming the gospel.

While Paul was in prison, others were preaching the gospel. Some preached from good motives, trying to help Paul out. Others had selfish motives and were preaching out of rivalry. But the content of their preaching appears to be OK, because Paul is unconcerned – he rejoices in the fact that the gospel is preached, whatever the motivation.

Paul puts the gospel first, ahead of his own freedom and his own reputation, and so he can find joy in the fact it is being preached, regardless of his situation.

verses 19-26

Paul continues to rejoice, despite his difficult circumstances. He is confident that the Spirit of Christ is at work in him, and the Philippians are praying for him, so he knows he can trust God even in his current situation. Again, his main concern is for the gospel, that the Lord Jesus will be "exalted" in his body, whether he lives or dies. He is able to say that "to live is Christ, to die is gain" – Paul's focus on the gospel means he can see the benefit either way. If he dies, he goes to be with Christ; if he lives, he will have more opportunities to preach the gospel. Paul is torn between the two choices. He knows that it is

better to be with Christ, but he knows that there are more people, including the Philippians themselves, who need him and his ministry. And he loves the Philippians so much that he is willing to postpone going to be with Christ while he serves them!

verses 27-30

Paul then advises the Philippians how they should live, whether Paul sees them again or not. He reminds them they are "citizens of heaven", an important reminder when their Roman citizenship would have been so important to them. As such, he urges them to live "in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (v27). They need to recognise that they have the same choice Paul does – they need to live here and now, but in the knowledge that their ultimate home is with Christ. And they need to live lives with the gospel at the centre.

If they live like this, Paul will know that they will have unity between them. Just as the partnership between Paul and the Philippians is based on the gospel, so the gospel will build fellowship between the Philippians themselves. They will stand firm together, and they will work together in promoting and defending the gospel, even in the face of opposition.

As the church stands firm in the face of suffering, it will convict those looking on from outside. They will see the effects of the gospel in action, and their concern for the glory of God. And this will be a sign to them of their own destruction as they realise. The Philippians will demonstrate the eternal worth of knowing Jesus by the way they stand firm in the gospel, and it will be obvious to onlookers that they don't have the same hope.

But to the Philippians the very same steadfast attitude will be a sign of their salvation. They will only be able to stand firm in the face of opposition if they are really experiencing the reality of the gospel in their lives.

This opposition and suffering is to be expected. Indeed, it has been "granted" to them on behalf of Christ. They don't just believe in Christ – they must suffer for him too. Paul knows what he is talking about. He is in prison for the sake of the gospel. And the Philippians will share in the suffering too.

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questions

Remember, these are **suggestions** – feel free to add, remove or change them!

for starters - a discussion question to get you going.

Think of a time when you had to deal with difficult or unpleasant circumstances. How did you respond?

What made you respond in that way? Where did you find comfort in that situation?

discover

Make a list of all the contrasts you can find in this passage. Are any particularly surprising or confusing?

v12-18

What is the thing that has “happened” to Paul in v12?

From what Paul says, how do you think the Philippians were feeling about this? What does Paul actually say?

What was the other worrying situation going on?

How does Paul respond?

v19-26

What is the choice facing Paul? Which would he prefer? Which does he choose?

v27-30

Where does Paul say they are citizens?

How are they to live? What does he say this will look like?

understand

What might be the reason for the contrasts Paul uses? What makes his attitude different to other people's?

v12-18

Do you find Paul's responses to his situation surprising at all?

Why does he respond in this way? What is his main priority, and how does this help him to deal with what's going on? Why does he rejoice?

v19-26

Why does Paul believe that “to live is Christ and to die is gain”? How does this work out in his life?

v27-30

What does it mean to live as a “citizen of heaven”? Why should this fact change the way the Philippians live?

What should be the basis of their unity, and why? How and why will this be a sign to both Christians and non-Christians?

respond

v12-18

How do you respond to difficult situations? How does this compare to Paul's response? If they are different, what might account for this?

v19-26

Do you believe that “to live is Christ and to die is gain”? How does/would it affect your life?

v27-30

Do you believe you are a “citizen of heaven”? What difference does it make?

How does your Christian life compare to the “life worthy of the Lord” Paul describes?

things to ponder

Imagine another Christian group set up on campus and started running events. How should you respond?

How can you make sure you live with your eyes fixed on Christ, and with the good news about him as your priority? Are there any changes you need to make, individually and as a small group?

Do you show the kind of unity Paul talks about in your small group?