

Progress & Joy

Philippians 1:12-26



When Paul became a Christian (*follower of Jesus Christ*), God gave him an assignment. Paul's assignment was to proclaim the gospel (*good news of Jesus Christ*) to both Jews and non-Jews (*Acts 9:15; 22:21; 26:15-18*). Paul had done that for 25 years. But now he is "in chains" (prison) and might be sentenced to death because of those who oppose the gospel. Does this mean defeat?

Progress of the Gospel

The Christians in Philippi were concerned about Paul and his gospel ministry. How does Paul respond to their concern? Read Philippians 1:12-18a.

1. What does Paul say about his situation and the gospel? What is happening?¹ (*1:12-14*)

After talking about how most of the brothers and sisters are boldly proclaiming the gospel, Paul mentions two categories of people. Some "preach Christ" with bad motives² while others preach Christ with good motives (*1:15-17*).

2. What is Paul's attitude about this? Why does he have this attitude? (*1:18*)³

Paul says, "because [Christ is preached] I rejoice" (*1:18a*). "Yes, and I will continue to rejoice" (*1:18b*). Why will Paul continue to rejoice?



Priority of Paul

3. Read Philippians 1:18b-24. Why will Paul continue to rejoice? What is most important to Paul? (*1:20*)⁴

¹ Paul says his situation 'has actually served to advance the gospel' (*1:12*). To 'advance the gospel' means to share the message of Jesus with more people and to see more people understand and respond in faith. The Greek word translated 'advance' is the noun *prokopēn*, used again in verse 25 where it is translated 'progress.' Paul may be 'in chains' but 'God's word is not chained'! (*2 Timothy 2:9, NIV*) Paul's testimony has affected nonbelievers, including the 'palace guard,' some of whom were assigned to guard Paul during his imprisonment. And Paul's example of faithfulness and courage has influenced other believers to 'boldly speak God's message without fear' (*1:14, NLT*).

² The bad motives include envy, rivalry (competition), selfish ambition, and wanting to stir up trouble for Paul. Who are these people, and why do they want to stir up trouble for Paul? The text does not say, so various theories have been proposed. Such attitudes are inconsistent with Christian conduct, but it's still likely that they are 'Christians' who have negative attitudes toward Paul for some reason. Anyway, Paul's focus is not on their motives. See below.

³ Motives do matter, but that's not Paul's emphasis at this point. He will come back to 'selfish ambition' later (*2:3*). Paul's emphasis here is the progress of the gospel. Apparently, the people with bad motives are still 'preaching Christ,' that is, communicating the truth about Christ's death and resurrection. That's what is important to Paul.

⁴ Paul wants Christ to be exalted (highly honored, glorified) in his body, whether by life or by death. Paul wants to know Christ, reflect & honor him, and follow his path of suffering, death and resurrection to the glorious end (*3:10*).

Paul knows his situation will eventually lead to “deliverance.”⁵ And whether he lives or dies, it is his hope-filled expectation to have no shame before God, and to bring honor and glory to Christ.

4. Who will help Paul realize this expectation? (1:19)⁶



5. Read Philippians 1:21. What does Paul mean by this statement?⁷ Is this a statement that any Christian should be able to make? Explain.

Progress of the Philippians

While Paul desires to depart and be with Christ, he says it’s “more necessary” for the Philippians that he remain physically alive. Read Philippians 1:25-26.

6. What will result from Paul’s continued ministry among the Philippian Christians?⁸

7. As Christians, we may get discouraged when we face opposition or circumstances that prevent us from serving God as we wish. We might even get to the point where we say, “I would rather depart and be with Christ.” How does Paul’s example help us think differently about things?

Reflection & Application

- How would you fill in the blanks? “For me, to live is _____, and to die is _____.” What brings meaning and purpose to *your* daily life? What feelings do you have about death? Think about these questions, and think about the good news of Jesus. To those who believe in him, Jesus gives “eternal life” – life to the full, life everlasting (see John 10:9-10, 11:25-26).
- Brothers and sisters, what are *your* priorities in life? Review this lesson and ask God to show you what *you* should be doing for “the progress of the gospel” and for “progress in the faith” for other people, and yourself.

⁵ ‘deliverance’ (*sōtērian* – salvation) – Does this mean deliverance from prison or final deliverance/salvation at the end of earthly life? It’s a difficult question to answer and interpreters disagree. However, the ambiguity may be intended. Gordon Fee says it points to both his ultimate salvation *and* present vindication at his trial (Gordon Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians (NICNT)* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 132).

⁶ Paul says, ‘through your prayers and God’s provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ’ (1:19, *NIV*). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ. ‘And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ’ (*Romans* 8:9). Because of the indwelling Spirit, Christ can be exalted or glorified ‘in the believer’s body.’

⁷ The NLT translates v. 21, ‘For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better.’ To die is to ‘depart and be with Christ.’ Of course, Paul is already ‘with Christ’ because ‘Christ lives in [him]’ (*Galatians* 2:20). But Christians enter into the fullness of Christ’s presence when they physically die.

⁸ ‘for your progress and joy in the faith’ (1:25) – Paul’s ministry among them will help them grow in the faith and more deeply experience the joy of their relationship with Christ. And Paul’s being with them again will result in the Philippian Christians’ ‘boasting in Christ,’ thus bringing glory to Christ (1:26).