



~ Zoom Bible Study ~

TO LIVE IS CHRIST: A STUDY IN PHILIPPIANS

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Lesson One – Philippians 1

We find three purposes for Paul's letter:

- He wanted to thank them for their partnership with him in the Gospel and their generosity to him.
- He wanted to encourage them because it appears they had become disheartened by his imprisonment.
- He wants to address the disunity among the believers and challenge them to seek unity.

Paul tells about the church in Philippi when he writes to the believers in Corinth:

2 Corinthians 8:1 – 5: And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ²In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. ⁵And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us.

From their extreme poverty they were generous to help Paul and Silas.

2 Corinthians 11:9: And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so.

Then Paul arrived in Rome as a prisoner, waiting to appear before Caesar.

Acts 28:16, 30-31: When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him. . . . For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. ³¹He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!

Paul writes to the church in Philippi, a church he founded about eleven years prior, the first church established on the continent of Europe.

Philippians 1:1 – 2:

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

ESV Translation

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.



Did you know that if you are in Christ Jesus, you are called to be a saint? What/who is a saint?

Paul writes his prayer of thanksgiving for them:

³ I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. ⁸ God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:3-8).

This man of God was a man of prayer. Prayer for Paul was a continual conversation with God. Any time during the day when he thought of these dear people, he offered up a prayer. And then Paul proceeds to tell them how much he appreciates them.

Who is it in your life that you recognize as such an important part of your life, of your spiritual growth? How often do you thank God for them? When was the last time you thanked them and told them how important they are to your spiritual life?

The Christians in Philippi had Paul's words in writing—they could hold on to them, and re-read them, and be continually encouraged. When was the last time you wrote someone a word of encouragement—wrote it to them so they could see the words in writing and re-read them as often as they liked?

Then he writes this powerful prayer for them:

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God (Philippians 1:9-11).

Do you pray for discernment?

How often do you pray prayers of dedication—this type of prayer—for yourself and for others? Is your prayer time nothing but a list of your needs or the needs of someone else?

I strongly encourage you to pray prayers of dedication regularly.

Romans 12:1 – 2: Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Going further in this first chapter of Philippians:

¹² Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. ¹³ As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. ¹⁴ And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear (Philippians 1:12-14).

Paul is basically saying his circumstance is an opportunity.

Can you and I do this—can we think this way? Is this kind of positive approach to very negative circumstances only possible to those who are super-spiritual, like the Apostle Paul? Are you going through some deep or depressing struggle

or grief now? Have you asked God to somehow—as only he can do—make it work for you to share your faith, to preach the Gospel to someone who needs Jesus?

“It has become known throughout the whole Palace Guard and to everyone else,” Paul said. What if you applied Paul’s statement to your situation?

- “It has become known throughout the whole office and to all the rest that my work is for Christ.”
- *Or* “It has become known throughout the whole school and to all the rest that my education is for Christ.”
- *Or* “It has become known throughout the whole hospital and to all the rest that my illness is for Christ.”
- *Or* “It has become known throughout my entire family. . .”

Paul continues:

¹⁵ It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. ¹⁶ The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. ¹⁸ But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice (Philippians 1:15-18a).

The truly surprising thing here is Paul’s overriding desire to have the Gospel preached, even if it comes from wrong people with wrong motives. He rejoices that Christ is preached, period!

But what about those who are preaching Christ out of selfish ambition, trying to stir up trouble for Paul while he is in chains? Can they really be preaching the Gospel? Their motives are all wrong. Can the Gospel truly be preached and have positive effect if it is preached from people who have wrong motives?

We see another time when Paul calls down a curse on bad preaching:

Galatians 1:8: But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse!

In one case Paul calls down a curse on those preaching the gospel and in the other case he rejoices that Christ is being preached. What is the difference?

Motivation: why do you do what you do?

1 Corinthians 4:5: Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.

The power of God’s Word can bring people to repentance because they heard the true message of the Gospel and believed it for salvation.

Hebrews 4:12: For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

The impurity and insincerity of the “preachers” does not dilute the power of the Gospel. God will judge the motives of those hypocritical preachers, and he will judge ours as well. We have to constantly check our motives and make sure we’re in that first group Paul talks about—those who preach Christ out of love.

Continuing in Philippians 1:

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice,¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.²⁰ I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me (Philippians 1:18b-26).

This is truly one of the most astounding statements made by the Apostle Paul: *For me to live is Christ*. Can you say that with Paul, and do you understand what it means?

If you had to complete this sentence, how would you honestly finish it:

For me to live is _____ - fill in the blank.

To be able to honestly say with the Apostle, "For me to live is Christ," we have to learn what it means and then make that our goal.

- "To live is Christ" means that Christ is our focus, our goal, and our chief desire. Christ is the center point of our mind, heart, body and soul.
- "To live is Christ" means that we imitate the example of Christ.
- "To live is Christ" means that we pursue the knowledge of Christ. We want to know Christ better and better each day.
- "To live is Christ" means that we are willing to give up anything that prevents us from knowing and serving Christ.

This is our goal, but we must grow in this goal in our spiritual journey. "To live is Christ" is a process that is never fully realized this side of heaven, but it should be growing.

Paul makes it clear that the way we exalt Christ is through our bodies.

Romans 12:1: Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

1 Corinthians 6:19 – 20: Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

Philippians 1:27-30:

²⁷ Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel ²⁸ without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. ²⁹ For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, ³⁰ since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

What does it mean to conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel?

Psalm 69:6: Lord, the LORD Almighty, may those who hope in you not be disgraced because of me; God of Israel, may those who seek you not be put to shame because of me.

To conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel means to never bring dishonor to the name of Jesus. To live a life beyond reproach:

1 Peter 3:15 - 16: But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

To walk worthy of the Gospel means that people will have to make up things about you in order to slander or harm you. It means **your life is squeaky clean, like Daniel's.**

Daniel 6:4: At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent.

Then Paul gives a totally different view of suffering, to count it joy when you truly suffer for Jesus.

As we study through this short book of Philippians, we will address this question again and again. Can we say with Paul, "For me to live is Christ"? What does that look like in your life?