

| **Philippians** |
Week 2 Scripture Guide | Philippians 1:12-18

Biblical Content

Compared to other Greco-Roman letters circulating at the time, the structure of Paul's letter functions as a "friendship letter."¹ And like many friendship letters, Paul goes at length in this next section talking about his current state of affairs with the transitional phrase in v.12 "Γινώσκειν δὲ ὑμᾶς βούλομαι, ἀδελφοί," literally: But it's my desire you all should know, brothers.²

As Paul explains his current situation, two particular themes mentioned in this section were previously alluded to in the prayer-thanksgiving portion in 1:1-11. For one, we see Paul's rejoicing in v.18 (χαίρω) connecting us back to the joy he has in v.4 (χαρᾶς). Two, we see him speak of his imprisonment not as an obstacle in the way of the Gospel but as another opportunity to tell others (vv.13-14), linking us back to the same hope-filled outlook he has while in prison in v.7. Looking ahead in the text, Paul will tie the progress of the gospel in v.12 (προκοπε) with the progress of their faith in v.25 (προκοπήν). With the repetition of these words and themes, we begin to see more clearly the overall tone and emphasis of the letter: joy, thankfulness, and leveraging the current situation to bend towards the advancement of the gospel.³

But how exactly is the gospel advancing despite Paul's imprisonment? He unpacks further in vv.13-18: the gospel is going forth both inside the prison (v.13) and outside the prison (v.14). It's as though the theme of God's work in v.6 is further zoomed out as we see God at work outside the church of Philippi.

Furthermore, what does Paul mean in v.13 when he says all the imperial guard knows about his imprisonment for Christ?⁴ While under house arrest in Rome, guards would rotate every four hours and chain themselves up to Paul in order to prevent his escape. In what feels like a comedic twist, even though Paul is in prison for telling others about Jesus, he sees this as yet another opportunity to tell someone about Jesus. Verse 13 tells us, basically, that at this point in his imprisonment every guard who's watched him has been told about the good news of Jesus. Did any of these guards become followers of Jesus? While we're not told explicitly, Paul seems to allude to this at the very end of the letter in 4:22 when he says, "All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household." This sort of boldness Paul has to share the gospel has driven his friends who have visited him in prison to also be bold in their witnessing.

¹ Unlike the other Pauline epistles, this is one of the rare letters where Paul doesn't have a stern rebuke or correction to give.

² "Whenever Paul wrote, "I want you to know," he introduced something important (cf. 2 Cor. 13:6; 2 Tim. 3:1)" NET Bible Commentary - <https://netbible.org/bible/Philippians+1>

³ "Here is Paul's obvious concern. He wants them not to be anxious about him, because his circumstances, rather than being a "hindrance" (prokopē) to the gospel, as they might well believe, have in fact led to its "advance" (prokopē). "To advance the gospel" has been his lifelong passion; he has thus ordered his life so that nothing will hinder, and everything advance, the message about Christ." Fee, Gordon.

⁴ "ὥστε τοὺς δεσμούς μου φανεροὺς ἐν Χριστῷ γενέσθαι ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ πραιτωρίῳ καὶ τοῖς λοιποῖς πάσιν" literally: so that my imprisonment is manifest in Christ has been known in all the praetorium and all the rest." The "praetorium" (in which many translations render as "imperial" or "palace guard") was considered the elite of the Roman guards. "There were originally ten thousand of these picked soldiers, concentrated in Rome by Tiberius. They had double pay and special privileges and became so powerful that emperors had to court their favour. Paul had contact with one after another of these soldiers." Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*.

Verses 15-18 is a subparagraph of v.14 further elaborating on the gospel advancement outside his prison. One question that arises is, who exactly are these opponents Paul refers to in v.15? While scholars have speculated, we have no conclusive answer but we can deduce two things based on the text and infer another. First, these teachers described as being full of envy (φθόνον) and rivalry (ἔριν), we see these descriptors used elsewhere in Paul's letters as people who act according to the flesh, not the Spirit in Galatians 5:20-21 and Romans 1:29. Second, because Paul does not rebuke these teachers, we cannot lump them in with the false teachers he rebukes elsewhere in his letters (for example the Judaizers in Galatians 2). While they act out of fleshly motives, they appear to have correct doctrine. We can infer because of Paul's imprisonment in Rome and that his visitors are more than likely those from the Roman house church, that these teachers are located in Rome. Regardless though, Paul sees this not as a threat. The Gospel is about Jesus, not about Paul, he is simply a slave/servant (δοῦλος)⁵ who was commissioned to spread the name of Jesus (Acts 9:15-16). If the message is going out, even if it's because of selfish motives, then that's a win in Paul's mind.⁶

Connection and Application

Verses 12-18 further unpack a major theme brought up in 1:6 - God will complete what He set out to do, not just in the lives of believers but in His mission as well. Paul's confidence is grounded in this - that he's able to see every circumstance as yet another opportunity for God's kingdom to spread. His imprisonment is not an interruption to the mission, but an opportunity to leverage it for the mission. Paul refuses to waste his imprisonment and his suffering. This sort of perspective goes against our Western consumeristic, comfort-driven view of Christianity. When life gets hard, the tendency is to blame God, question Him or to shut down. And yet Hebrews 12:7-11 reminds us, "It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?...For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." In other words, for the Christian, we see hard things as a chance to know Jesus more and to make Him known. This is Paul's perspective and through God's Spirit we can have this same perspective as well. Or as theologian Warren Wiersbe says, ". . . when you have the single mind, you look upon your circumstances as God-given opportunities for the furtherance of the Gospel, and you rejoice at *what God is going to do* instead of complaining about *what God did not do*."

⁵ "Undoubtedly the background for the concept of being the Lord's slave or servant is to be found in the Old Testament scriptures. For a Jew this concept did not connote drudgery, but honor and privilege. It was used of national Israel at times (Isa 43:10), but was especially associated with famous OT personalities, including such great men as Moses (Josh 14:7), David (Ps 89:3; cf. 2 Sam 7:5, 8) and Elijah (2 Kgs 10:10); all these men were "servants (or slaves) of the Lord." NET Bible Commentary, <https://netbible.org/bible/Philippians+1>

⁶ "The idiom *ti gar*, translated, "What then?" in the NASB, means, "What does it matter?" (NIV). While motivation is important, it is even more important that the gospel gets proclaimed. Paul believed that it was better for people with impure motives to preach Christ than that they not preach Him at all." NET Bible Commentary. <https://netbible.org/bible/Philippians+1>