

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES Sunday School- August 1, 2010

Unifying Topic: SHARING GOD'S GRACE

Lesson Text

I. Rejoicing In Obstacles (Philippians 1:18-19)

II. Christ Will Be Exalted (Philippians 1:20-26)

III. Living Worthy Of God (Philippians 1:27-29)

The Main Thought: 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, KJV).

Unifying Principle: 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.

Lesson Aim: To teach students how to serve Christ in spite of difficult situations.

Life aim: To teach believers never to compromise but stay true to their faith.

1:18 What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.

1:19 For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

1:20 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.

1:21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

1:22 But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not.

1:23 For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:

1:24 Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.

1:25 And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith;

1:26 That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.

1:27 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;

1:28 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.

1:29 For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake;

HISTORY:

Paul and his companions founded the church at Philippi on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:11-40). This was the first church established on the European continent. Paul was in a Roman prison at the time he writes this letter to thank them for their gift and to encourage them in their faith.

1:1-2 Salutation

Paul begins his epistle in a most unusual greeting to a church. He does not refer to himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ. However, it's followed with the customary expression of grace and peace.

1:3-11 Thanksgiving and Prayer

It is followed by thanksgiving and prayer. He was not in their presence, just the memory of their time together. And there sitting in prison, he remembers their love, their care, and their support. The church at Philippi had been a source of great joy to Paul by virtue of their fellowship with him in the proclamation of the gospel. Confident that God will complete the work He began in them, Paul prays that their spiritual growth will continue. His prayer for them was that their love abound in knowledge and all discernment; that they approve the things that are excellent; that they be sincere and without offense till Christ returns; and that they be filled with the fruit of righteousness which was made possible by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God.

1:12-17 The Situation in Rome

Paul's circumstances at Rome have actually been for the furtherance of the gospel. Imprisonment has actually created opportunities to spread the gospel. Even opposition has provided an opportunity for Christ to be preached; for even among the palace guards it is evident his chains are in Christ. His example has emboldened others to speak without fear. The lesson for us is this: we must never let circumstances get us down— •persecution •accident •loss of loved one •imprisonment •age •rejection •divorce—never let them defeat our testimony and witness for Christ, no matter what they are.

There were preachers who were true followers of Christ. They were not the Judaizers, the false preachers who

sometimes followed and opposed Paul. These were genuine preachers who were ministers in and around the metropolis of Rome. Instead of supporting him, they were speaking out against him, hoping to silence his influence and to get rid of him. Sadly, anything we do religiously can be perverted from God-service to self-service. However, not all preachers throughout Rome opposed Paul. Some were preaching out of love, and they were encouraging their members to show their love for Paul by visiting and supporting him in his ministry of proclaiming Christ.

LESSON:

Philippians 1:18-19 Rejoicing In Obstacles

1:18-19 "Pretense" means an excuse, a pretext, that which is put forward to hide the true state of things. It has the idea of an ulterior motive. Even if motives or ministry are not what they should be, someone may still find out the message of Christ through that ministry, and come to Him. It is not the preacher who saves us, but Christ. So also today, though we may have doubts about a certain ministry, we can be glad that the name of Christ is being heard. Paul rose above petty jealousy and animosity. The important thing is that Christ is preached! He would do what he could to encourage right motives and valid ministry, but his greatest joy was for people to hear of Christ and be saved. Does the work have to be credited to us or totally meet our approval before we can take joy in it? Paul lived for Christ and the gospel. In the shadow of the cross Jesus talked about joy (Jh.15:11). Paul rejoiced because Christ was being openly proclaimed; not because of the wrong motive of some, but in spite of the wrong motives. He possessed the assurance of a happy ending—salvation.

Philippians 1:20-26 Christ Will Be Exalted

1:20 **For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, —** The point is this: Paul is sure God will save and deliver him from their criticism and opposition. He is sure of God's help and deliverance because of two things:

1. First, there was the prayer of those who supported him—both those in Rome and those around the world who were praying for him daily. Paul knew how the Philippians loved him and that he could depend on their intercession of prayer for him. Paul believed prayer made a difference.
2. Second, the supply of the Holy Spirit would empower him to be delivered. There is no way the Roman officers could take the indwelling Holy Spirit from Paul. God's Spirit empowers us to do what we could not do in our own strength. Therefore, Paul knew the reasons and he knew he would be delivered.
 - a. The Holy Spirit was given to be our compassion (Jh.14:16)
 - b. The Holy Spirit was given to counsel us (Jh.14:26)
 - c. The Holy Spirit was given to give courage for witnessing no matter the circumstances (Jh.15:26-27)
 - d. The Holy Spirit was given to put conviction in our lives and ministry (Jh.16:7-8)
 - e. The Holy Spirit was given to share the deep things of God with us (1Corth.2:9-10)
 - f. The Holy Spirit was given to pray and intercede for us and to help us pray (Rom.8:26)
 - g. The Holy Spirit was given to bear his fruit in us (Gal.5:22-23)
 - h. The Holy Spirit was given to fill us and put a song of joy in our hearts despite circumstances (Eph.5:18-19)
 - i. The Holy Spirit was given to give assurance that we are children and heirs of God (Rom.8:16-17)

Talking about obstacles! He was in prison facing a capital crime with his deliverance looking almost hopeless and death was staring him in the face. Paul believed God is so great that he can overrule any circumstance, however painful, to bring about good. If Paul had to go to execution, he knew the Spirit would enable him to die in the same Spirit in which Jesus accepted the cross. If Paul was to suffer longer in prison and then be released, Paul knew the Spirit would sustain him and give him what he needed to say at his hearing.

If a man has ever lived a life of commitment to our Lord Jesus Christ, it was Paul. He is confident that no matter what happens, Christ will be magnified. Note the word "earnest expectation" (apokaradokian). It means to gaze into the distance with the head erect and outstretched just like a watchman on a tower. Paul did not dread his hearing and possible sentence, as most of us would have. He had been told from the time of this conversion that he would suffer for Christ and testify before Gentile rulers (Acts 9:15, 16).

- There will be some believers who will suffer loss and look like a burned out building. And there will be some believers who will be ashamed. This is what Paul meant: "he did not want to be ashamed" when he stood before Christ. He loved Christ with all his heart, for Christ had done so much for him.
- "But that with all boldness" - "Boldness" means freedom in speaking, fearless, confidence, cheerful courage, and assurance. The absence of fear in speaking boldly was Paul's privilege as a slave of Jesus Christ. Paul's whole purpose in life was to speak out boldly about Christ and to become more like him.

- Therefore, his one expectation and hope was for "Christ to be magnified in his body." He wanted Christ to be honored both in his life and in his death. If you're not ready to die, then you're not ready to live. Once you know your eternal purpose, then you're free to serve—develop your life to what really counts without fear of dying.

1:21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

What exalts Christ makes us happy!

1. First, "to me to live is Christ" What did he mean by this? He meant at least five things.
 - a. He presented his body as a living sacrifice to Jesus Christ.
 - b. He struggled to yield the parts of his body—every member of his body—to Christ as a tool for righteousness.
 - c. He struggled to control his mind—to control every thought and to focus every thought upon Jesus Christ and the great virtues of life.
 - d. He committed himself to work for love and justice within all of society.
 - e. He gave his life—every moment of it—to reach and minister to as many people as possible during his journey upon earth.
2. This brings us to the second point of Paul. He declares that "to die is gain." He knew that everything on earth was aging and passing away including man himself. Therefore, Paul reached out for a Savior, a Person who could save him and give him an eternal world that would never age or pass away.

The natural mind wonders and questions how a person in his right mind could ever want to go ahead and die. The reason is simply answered: the genuine believer does not die; he never tastes death. He is transferred into the presence of Christ. Immediately—quicker than the blinking of an eye—the believer is transported into the perfect world of God which is, heaven. The believer is perfected—never again to experience pain, suffering, sin, corruption, infirmity, weakness, deformity, disappointment, fear, loss, or death. The promises of God to the believer are phenomenal; they just explode the human mind. It is for this reason that the believer can declare: "to die is gain."

¹If for me to live is Christ, then to die is gain, but...

- If for me to live is money, then to die is to leave it all behind
- If for me to live is fame, then to die is to be forgotten
- If for me to live is pleasure, then to die is to miss all the fun
- If for me to live is ambition, then to die is to become insignificant
- If for me to live is possessions, then to die is to have them all rust and fade away

Alexander MacLaren describes how death can be a gain.

1. We lose everything we don't need – the world, the flesh, and the devil. We lose our trials, troubles, tears and fears.
2. We keep everything that matters – our personality, our identity, our fruit.
3. We gain what we never had before – heaven, rewards, the presence of God, fellowship with other believers.

1:22 But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. Paul speaks of life in the flesh, his physical body to be the fruit of his labor—souls being saved and lives being changed. Paul knew that the only reason to remain in this world was to bring souls to Christ and build up believers to do the same. The word "**wot**" or "**know**" (Gr gnōrizō) has two distinctive meanings: transitive, to make known; intransitive, to know, to become acquainted with, to discover. Paul was in a dilemma concerning which to choose between life and death.

1:23 "For I am in a strait betwixt two." The expression means to hold together, compress, constrain. Paul was hard-pressed. He was hemmed in on both sides; there is a desire to depart; there is a necessity to abide, a very strong reason for either choice. He is being pulled in both directions. The word "**depart**" (anulusai) has a twofold meaning that speaks to the believer's heart. Paul says that he is caught between two great desires.

- One "desire is to live a life of fruitful service" for the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The other "desire is to depart "and go on to be with Christ which is far better.

1:23b ...having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ;— The Greek word translated "**desire**" (epithumia) is most often used of a sinful lust. But occasionally it expresses a strong unfulfilled desire for something right and good.

1:23c "Which is far better"; Labor for Christ is sweet, but rest with Christ will be sweeter. Whitfield said, "I am often weary in the work, but never weary of it." Paul was ready to go and willing to wait. Life has its attractions; death has its advantages. Paul desires to live and labor, preferring Christ's purpose.

1:24 Nevertheless to abide in the flesh... Paul yielded his personal desire to be with the Lord for the necessity for the building of the church. Paul was an unselfish man.

¹ http://www.pontiacbible.org/index.php?/sermons/more/you_win_either_way/
<http://www.pitwm.net//pitwm-sunday-school.html>

1:25 And having this confidence... Paul was convinced that he would "remain" (meno) and "continue or come alongside" (parameno) --a play on words. He would remain for the purpose of aiding the Philippians' spiritual "progress and joy in the faith." Their faith in Christ would increase, thus leading to an increase in their joy.

1:26 "That your rejoicing may be more abundant..." The word "rejoicing" (Gr kauchēma) is exultation, that of which one glories or can glory; a matter or ground of glorying; reason for boasting. The word does not mean the act of glorying. The point is this: as Paul lived on fruitfully, their joy and confidence would overflow because of Christ working in him, not because of anything he himself did by his own ability.

Philippians 1:27-29 Living Worthy Of God

Standing Together

1:27 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;— The Philippian church was a great church, and Paul wanted it to remain great. Keep conducting yourselves as Christians should. Therefore, he reviewed with them the marks of citizens of a great Christian church.

1. The first mark of a great church is "Christian conduct" or "heavenly citizenship." The word "conversation" or "conduct" (politeuesthe) is significant. More accurately it means how they should walk day by day.
2. The second mark of a great church is "honoring the gospel." The word "becometh" or "worthy" (axios) means to fit, correspond, be suitable, be worthy. If we are to profess the gospel, we are to live worthy of the gospel.
3. The third mark of a great church is "standing fast."
 - a. The church must stand fast in unity: in one spirit, with one mind.
 - i. "One spirit" means that all the members of a church must be born again by the Spirit of Christ. They must all be committed to the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - ii. "One mind" means that all members must be set upon the same purpose. They must all be focused upon the purpose of Jesus Christ.

The point is this: the world—its people, families, and nations—may be split and divided, arguing and differing, fussing and feuding, fighting, and divorcing, warring and killing, seeking and grasping; but the church is not to live that way. The church is to be unified; it is to be one in spirit and one in mind; one in heart and one in purpose.

- b. The church must stand fast in "striving together" for the faith of the gospel. The word "striving together" (sunathlountes) is the word taken from an athlete contest. It is the picture of a team working and struggling together against strong opposition. The church—every member of it—is to strive for the faith of the gospel: strive, work, struggle, push, exert all the energy possible; everyone cooperating together, not a single person letting up or turning aside or walking off the field. The opposition is difficult; therefore, the faith of the gospel needs every member working and struggling together.

Surviving To The End

1:28 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. The Philippians did encounter opposition to their faith in Christ and their evangelism of the gospel. When we stand and when we strive it's easy to get afraid when people come after us. Paul doesn't want us to be alarmed or jumpy when we face opposition. Actually, if people are not opposing you because of the gospel then there's something wrong.

4. The fourth mark of a great church is "courage and fearlessness." Being a Christian believer in a corrupt world is hard. People oppose our stand for Christ and righteousness. It may be next door, in the office, at school, or a hundred other places—the Christian believer is sometimes...

●avoided ●ridiculed ●mocked ●isolated ●neglected ●overlooked ●questioned ●mistreated
●slandered ●persecuted ●martyred ●ignored ●by-passed ●imprisoned ●abused ●cursed

Note the exhortation: we are not to be terrified by our adversaries. There are four reasons why:

1. Persecution is a sign that the persecutors are doomed.
2. Persecution is a sign of salvation for us.
3. Persecution is a privilege, not a terror.

Suffering For Christ

1:29 For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake;— The apostles considered it a special gift from God, a high privilege, to be allowed to suffer for Christ's sake, even as Christ had suffered for the lost. The Christian's privileges are to believe on Christ and to suffer for Him, and always in that order. God confers upon us the high honor of suffering with Christ and for Christ. Christ suffered to provide

salvation. A glorious reward awaits all who suffer. When we suffer because we faithfully represent Christ, we know that our message and example are having an effect; and that God considers us worthy to represent Him. Suffering has these additional benefits:

1. It takes our eyes off of earthly comforts.
2. It weeds out superficial believers.
3. It strengthens the faith of those who endure.
4. It serves as an example to others who may follow us.

Suffering for our faith doesn't mean we have done something wrong, in fact, the opposite is often true—it verifies that we have been faithful. The suffering is seen as that which was, "given in the behalf of Christ." There is no greater passage that describes this reality more clearly than, John 15:12-21.

SUMMARY:

He knew that some were preaching to build their own reputations, but he was glad the gospel was being preached, but, like Paul, we should be glad if God uses their message. He's sitting in prison and saying what does it matter, whether pretense or truth, Christ is preached, and he rejoices. For in the outcome of all of this, he knew that it would turn to his salvation through the Philippians prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ (**1:18-19**).

Paul didn't want to ever do anything that would cause him to be ashamed, but he would speak boldly for Christ even in the trial he was going through; for Christ was going to be magnified in life or in his death. It would both be to his gain. ²Paul's main purpose in living was to glorify Christ and yet he knew that if he was martyred he would also glorify Him through his testimony. His personal desire was to depart and be with the Lord. This he knew would be better for him as it would mean his release from persecutions and other hardships he suffered. However he knew that the Philippians needed him and the Lord had more work for him to do. Paul had confidence that he would remain and continue to work for the progress and joy of the Philippians faith. He wanted to cause their rejoicing to be more abundant in Christ by his coming to them again (**1:20-26**).

Paul wanted them to keep conducting themselves as Christians should—stand fast in the spirit with one mind, striving together on the faith of the gospel. They were not to be afraid by anything of their opposers, which is their clear sign of the opposers destruction, but for the Philippians, it is their salvation from God, for the privilege has been given to the them in behalf of Christ not only to believe but also to suffer for Christ's sake. This is not just any suffering, but that which comes in standing for Jesus Christ (**1:27-29**).

APPLICATION:

How is your service here on earth? Is it committed service to others and to Jesus? It makes a difference how you serve. Is Christ exalted? Paul himself was beaten to the point of death, put in jail there in Philippi, and writing from prison while still undergoing these kinds of hardships. Do we forget to rejoice, when we have been given the opportunity to share in God's grace, knowing we will overcome the obstacle accounted unto us?

² <http://www.family-times.net/commentary/the-christian-life-is-a-battleground/>
<http://www.pitwm.net//pitwm-sunday-school.html>