

Session #2: Philippians 1:12-2:11



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St. Paul's Chains Progress the Gospel 1:12-26

There is so much one could take from the work of St. Paul. His words alone could fill a lifetime of reflection, but often what I find extremely motivating is St. Paul's attitudes. Bad can be seen as good depending on the perspective we take. Example: as we study this section notice that St. Paul is very aware that he has enemies with the Christian community who are taking advantage of his

imprisonment, some to the point of hoping they create greater suffering for St. Paul. His response? If the word of God is being preached and heard, regardless of their motives, he is happy to bear the burden.

1:12 *my situation...to advance the gospel*

Right from the beginning we have St. Paul challenging his readers to see things in the light of faith. His situation could and would be viewed by most as embarrassing in or demoralizing, even scandalous. St. Paul, unable to do anything about his circumstances chooses to see the good, that it has caused people to talk and allows an opening for conversation and preaching of the gospel. Example is the recent arrest of the teacher in Louisiana. Her unfortunate circumstances are bringing to light, and into discussion not only the poor pay public teachers receive in Louisiana but throughout our country.

1:13 *throughout the whole praetorium*

There are two possibilities regarding this reference to the "praetorium". Praetorium was the name given to the General's tent within a Roman encampment. The General's war counsel would meet there to discuss strategy. Later, built within Rome itself was a compound to house those soldiers whose job it was to guard the Emperor and key prisoners of Rome. There were nine thousand of these individuals house together. This compound was called the Praetorium. We know from the Acts of the Apostles (23:35) that St. Paul had been placed under arrest in Herod's praetorium in Caesarea, and most likely was under the praetorium guard in Rome. St. Paul could be referring to those men who were Praetorium guards or to the community that housed within the Praetorium itself. It is interesting to note that when Jesus was arrested in Jerusalem, he was held in the praetorium until his crucifixion (Matthew 27:27; Mark 15:16; John 18:28, 33, 19:9).

well known in Christ

This phrase identifies just who in the praetorium guard is spreading the news – those men who are Christian believers. But idle gossip would hardly advance the gospel. Scholars believe that the joy St. Paul feels is not in the gossip but in the discussion around why the message of salvation found in Jesus Christ would be considered so dangerous that those preaching it must be arrested and many killed.

1:14 *dare more than ever to proclaim the word fearlessly*

It always fascinates me how evil, in an effort to silence good makes the courage in the hearts of the good that much more fearless. St. Paul has been "silenced" (in a way. House arrest does not stop him from writing and teaching.). This emboldens the "brothers" meaning all Christians to open their mouths to proclaim the Good News.

1:15 *some preach Christ from envy or rivalry*

From the beginning of time jealousy, pride and resentment has set men's hearts against one another. Read the story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-16). St. Paul is aware that there are those who motivated to do the good out of poor reasons. But, he recognizes that whatever the reasons, the Word of God is being proclaimed and in that he takes comfort. It is probable that

these individuals are hoping that their work will cause greater trouble for St. Paul or will make St. Paul jealous, but he rejoices, not in their motivations but in their work. *What difference does it make, as long as in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is being proclaimed?* (Phil 1:18) St. Paul ran into these kinds of problems many times throughout his ministry (Galatians 2:1-14; Acts 15:1-5; Romans 3:8; 6:1-15). All that ever mattered to St. Paul, whether to his advantage or not, was that the message of Jesus Christ was being proclaimed and received.

1:17 *thinking to afflict me* Speaks to the previous verses (15-16). St. Paul is aware that some preaching is motivated out of a desire to make his situation worse. It is important to recognize that those preaching from poor motivation does not mean they are false teachers, otherwise St. Paul would never rejoice. Even today we must separate the broken humanity of some from their good works. Just because someone is not “perfect” does not invalidate the good that they do.

1:18 *And in that I rejoice.* In our introduction we spoke of one of the major themes of this letter is the joy should be the defining attitude of Christian living, and that in this document we will read the word “joy” five times in this letter and “rejoice” eleven times. While there were probably very few Christian Jews in the community, those there may have recognized this attitude of joy in the face of difficulty coming from the book of Job, specifically Job 13:16. *In the text in question, Job rebukes his friends because they have presumed to speak for God. Job, however, is convinced that they do not understand God’s ways and that God, somehow, will vindicate him and bring him “deliverance” or “salvation.” In applying this text to himself, Paul appears to be saying that he “knows” what will happen to him.* (New Collegeville Bible Commentary by Vincent M. Smiles)

1:19 *will result in deliverance for me* Scholars believe the connection to Job continues into verse 19 as St. Paul speaks of his own release from prison echoes that of Job’s trust that God will find him innocent despite the false charges. Then again, St. Paul may be writing in knowing that regardless of what the Roman courts find, God will uphold St. Paul’s continuous faithfulness to the Gospel. Much of this confidence comes from the fact that St. Paul knows that the community in Philippi continuously supports him *through your prayers and support.*

the Spirit of Jesus Christ The Spirit that St. Paul speaks of here is the Holy Spirit. With the Trinity all belong to one another. While we most often speak of the Spirit of God, the Spirit of the Father meaning the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of Jesus Christ is the one same Spirit

1:21 *life is Christ, and to die is gain* There is no statement within St. Paul’s letter’s that better defines one of the key foundational concepts to his life. St. Paul has placed himself completely at the hands of the Lord. In life every breath he takes, everything he does is motivated on spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ as Lord and savior. Should he die at the hands of the Romans or whomever, his hope that it will give honor to God but he knows it will bring him face to face with his savior.

The cryptic phrase “life is Christ” indicates that his relationship with Christ has so changed him that his concept of life itself has changed. For him, living means being in relationship with the risen Lord, a relationship that death does not terminate but only changes. Indeed, biologically death has become something positive, the door to being “with Christ”. Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture by Dennis Hamm, SJ

1:22 *I do not know which I shall choose* A better translation for “choose” would be prefer, *which I prefer.* Continuing with the words written previously St. Paul speaks to that should he live or should he be put to death, both mean Christ as the focus and destination.

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1:23 *depart and be with Christ* While St. Paul would do nothing to hasten his death, his greatest joy and desire was to finally spend all of eternity with Christ in heaven. Should he be martyred for faith that would guarantee this hope.

1:24 *is more necessary for your benefit* After all this rumination St. Paul realizes should he depart this earth he would no longer be able to teach, support and mentor those who are still seeking to grow in faith. So his thoughts and prayers turn back to earth so that he may ...*continue in the service of all... for your progress and joy in the faith (1:25)*.

1:26 *boasting in Christ* We can think of the idea of “boasting” as a prideful thing. St. Paul speaks to here not of pride and self-aggrandizing but of the truthful recognizing of the great and good work that God is doing in the lives of those who open themselves up to Him. What happens in any and all successful Churches is not about the individual’s cleverness but is the work of God. We read in 1 Corinthians 1:31: *Whoever boasts, should boast in the Lord.*

my coming to you again St. Paul’s hope is, should he be vindicated and released, he would return to Philippi to visit his old friends.

Point of Reflection: We are in the midst of the Hollywood award season as well as preparing for the Super bowl and Winter Olympics, all of which is not only celebrating accomplishments but focusing on individual talents. We have spoken before about the counter cultural nature of living in Gospel values, living as a Christian. These last few verses remind us of that counter cultural spirit. Rather than have people focus on what “we have done”, in faith we are called to recognize that if we do anything good it is only because we have cooperated with the good of God that lives within us. Let us boast but only in what God has done for us.

Steadfastness in Faith 1:27-2:4

As we move into this next section St. Paul changes his tone to one of instruction challenging them to more deeply commit themselves to living out their new life in Christ. St. Paul’s wish is whether he can come to visit or not, he wants to hear that the community in Philippi are standing “in one spirit” (1:27). As we look at this section we once again are confounded with St. Paul’s “skill” at writing long and complex sentences.

1:27 *conduct yourselves in a way worthy of the gospel* The word “conduct” is translated in some bibles to read: “be citizens”. Some scholars suggest this gives a better interpretation of St. Paul’s intention in these verses. Remembering that there is a large sub culture of Roman citizens within the city of Philippi. These Romans, although living outside of Italy, they were fiercely proud of their citizenship. As an example, having married into a Polish family, my now ex-husband’s family had to flee Poland during the war and while refugees here in the U.S. they remained in so many ways more Polish than American by choice. St. Paul is building on this sense of intense pride in one’s citizenship to call believers to hold onto that same sense but not as citizens of this world but of heaven who are defined by the gospel.

1:28 *by your opponents* Scholars are uncertain as to who these “opponents” are. Some suggest they are some of the Roman veterans who remain fiercely loyal to Caesar and therefore in opposition to the Christian Community who honored Jesus as their Lord. Others suggest it might be the pagans of the community to mock the Christians in their beliefs.

1:29 *suffer for his sake* Suffering, while never welcomed, should be recognized for the gift it is. Not only can suffering purify us from our own selfishness and vices but it can make us sharers in the redemptive work of Christ by making us sharers in his suffering. Suffering can also be a powerful witness when we don’t allow it to consume us but rather strengthen us as believers who bear witness to the gospel.

Scripture depicts suffering as a privilege because of those reasons just stated. And therefore, we are challenged to embrace suffering in our lives as an opportunity. (Romans 8:17; 1 Peter 4:12-14)

1:30 *same struggle you saw in me and now hear about me* The “struggle” the Christians of Philippi saw and now hear is St. Paul’s imprisonment. Remember that on his missionary trip that he established the community in Philippi he was also put into prison (Acts 16). They saw the imprisonment in Philippi and are hearing about his present imprisonment in Rome.

2:1 *If there is any* In reading this verse in Greek we would have four “if” clauses:

- *If there is any encouragement in Christ,*
- *if there is any solace in love,*
- *if there is any participation in the Spirit,*
- *if there is any compassion and mercy*

In taking this verse alone one might think that St. Paul is chastising or concerned for the community in Philippi, but we have already read of his gratitude for their faith in chapter 1:3-8. What St. Paul is doing is pointing to the trinitarian foundation of their shared life in Christ – encouragement is Christ, solace in love (from the Father) and participation in the Spirit.

2:2 *complete my joy* This community has grown in faith and is a source of joy for St. Paul. Now he calls them to continue that growth in four ways

1. *being of the same mind* →
2. *thinking one thing* →

3. *With the same love* →
4. *United in heart* →

2:3 *Do nothing out of selfishness or vainglory* We spoke earlier of St. Paul’s awareness that some were preaching the Gospel in hopes of getting him further into trouble. They were doing the right thing but for the wrong reason. We are challenged here to recognize that even though it happens it is not the true way of walking in the light of faith. All Christians must be aware of their bad or negative actions but just as aware of their motives in doing good. We should always be in a process of purifying ourselves. We can never be perfect but we should never stop trying to perfect ourselves.

The Hymn for Christ 2:5-11

What we study in these verses is the famous *Carmen Christi* or Christ hymn. Whether St. Paul wrote it scholars do not know and continue to debate but all agree this poem or hymn was most probably used in the early church’s prayers and worship. The lines of this poem or song set forth Christ as the model of Christian living and meant to inspire us to become servants to one another.

2:5 *Have among yourselves the same attitude* St. Paul just discussed and is about to offer in the hymn that follows as instruction as to the attitude and outlook we as Christians should take on daily. What follows in the hymn is the story of the basic story of Jesus Christ. You want a

We could understand this to mean everyone thinking the same thing or having the same opinions, but this is not St. Paul’s meaning. St. Paul is speaking here of doctrinal unity meaning to teach the same thing

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brief synopsis of the Gospels? Study verses 6-11.

2:6 *though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped.*

Jesus was fully God and fully human. There are two very different interpretations of this verse.

1. Some scholars put forth that what the author intended was to reference the eternal Son choosing to become incarnate, who choose to become human.
2. There is an equal number of scholars who offer that this verse speaks to the fact that Jesus, in his human form, refused to yield in the desert to the devil when he offered the temptation of becoming godlike. The same temptation that Adam and Eve gave into and thereby loosing paradise.

The discussion focuses on the interpretation of words. First there is the Greek word *harpagmon* which we read as *something to be grasped*. There are those who translate *harpagmon* to mean *not yet possessed* but understood as something to be stolen. The flip side of the argument is that the word *harpagmon* as meaning something that one already possesses. Most scholars tend to go with the second translation. Either way for our conversation it is important to understand that to be in union with humanity Jesus, as the Son of God, while possessing the nature and abilities of God, lived within his humanity being completely obedient to God. Think of it in terms of a human being becoming an ant so as to save an ant colony. At any point Jesus could have changed the outcome simply by taking on completely His Godly nature. But out of love and respect for humanities free will, he didn't and ended up dying because of our evil nature.

2:7 *Rather, he emptied himself*

What we read here sounds very familiar and in many ways mirrors what the author writes in the gospel of John (1:14). It also parallels what St. Paul writes in Romans (8:3) of God *sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh*. St. Paul goes on to write: *taking the form of a slave*. For God to become human is bad enough but to put oneself in one of the more humiliating circumstances, one that has little power, is difficult to conceive. But scholars suggest that what St. Paul is pointing to is not Jesus' humiliation but at His great love of humanity that he would go to such extremes all in order to save us from ourselves in sin.

2:8 *death on a cross*

the ultimate humiliation and indignity. Crucifixion was the most awful and shameful form of death that the Romans could come up with. It was saved for non-Roman citizens who had committed crimes against Rome and most often reserved for slaves and insurrectionists.

2:9 *Therefore God has highly exalted him*

In the human Jesus' obedience to God, God in turn raised Jesus from the dead, put Him on the throne of heaven sitting at God's right side and robed Jesus' humanity in divine glory. St. Paul is offering that this is the reward that awaits all followers who humble themselves as Jesus did in obedience to God.

2:10 *that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow*

St. Paul is making a link from the prophet Isaiah who foretold of the Messiah and Jesus. Here St. Paul is referring to Isaiah 45:23:

*By myself I have sworn,
from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness
a word that shall not return:
'To me every knee shall bow,
every tongue shall swear.'*

God through Isaiah swore that all people, to the end of the earth would come to believe and acknowledge that Jesus is Lord and bow before him. St. Paul is putting Jesus, for those 1st Century Christians, in the center of this prophecy. He is saying Jesus is the one that Isaiah proclaimed that all *in heaven and on earth and under the earth* will proclaim Jesus as Lord and savior. These last three are the three principle realms of the earth as

understood by ancient Israel. So, not only the angels and all creature on the earth but those demons below will also end up paying homage to God through Jesus Christ.

2:11 and every tongue confess This is what we are to expect on that last day of Judgement. It is not just a physical response but the words of our mouths will proclaim Jesus as Lord of all.

Reflection Questions:

- 1.** Have you ever shared or practiced your faith based out of wrong motives?
- 2.** Do you live as to honor God with your life? Identify specific ways, or choices you make to do so.
- 3.** We all have something that we want to “hang onto” in life, something that we would be most afraid of being asked to “empty ourselves” from. Why might God ask that of someone? If He asked it of you what would be your response?

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Christian Death: 1010-1011

Dying in Christ Jesus: 1005

Father and Son revealed by the Holy Spirit: 243-248

Good Works verses Grace: 2006-2011

Incarnation: 461-463

Jesus as Lord: 446-455

Life in Christ: 1691-1698

Meaning of Christian Death: 1010-1011

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- **Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: Philippians, Colossians and Philemon** by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch
- **Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture: Philippians, Colossians and Philemon**, by Dennis Hamm, SJ