

p 27 WEEK 4: WHETHER IN LIFE OR DEATH, CHRIST WILL BE MAGNIFIED

Philippians 1:19–30

The Place of the Passage

Having assured the concerned Philippians that his imprisonment has turned out for the good of the gospel (1:12–18), Paul continues with still another section under the heading “I want you to know ...” (v. 12). He was likely aware of questions the Philippians had been entertaining and praying about (v. 19): e.g., Will Paul’s imprisonment end in freedom or in execution? Will they see him again? How should they pray for him? Paul’s response (vv. 19–26) to those kinds of questions has been variously understood, but it is clear that he meant to give comfort, encouragement, and also subtle correction. The chapter closes by exhorting the Philippians to stand firm and united (vv. 27–30), themes which he expounds in chapter 2.

p 28 The Big Picture

Paul seeks to assuage the Philippians’ concerns for his well-being, not with a simple assurance that his circumstances will turn out fine, but by demonstrating his own trust in God and by calling them to the same level of trust.

Reflection and Discussion

Read through the full passage for this study, Philippians 1:19–30. Then prayerfully consider and answer the following questions. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 2281–2282, or visit www.esvbible.org.)

As noted above, verses 19–26 have been variously interpreted and are difficult to understand. At times Paul seems to say that he knows that his imprisonment will not end in death but in freedom, and that he will return to Philippi. Other times he seems quite unsure about his fate. Identify the verses and language in each of those two categories.

An important clue in understanding these difficult verses is to know that in verse 19 Paul alludes to Job 13:13–18 (especially v. 16). Read Job 13:13–18 and note any parallels you see with Philippians 1:19–26.

Paul’s confidence for “deliverance” (v. 19) mirrors Job’s confidence in “salvation” (Job 13:16). Should we assume that Paul and Job are thinking of the same kind of deliverance/salvation? If

so, what kind of deliverance/salvation do they have [p 29](#) in mind? Temporary or eternal? (Hint: note the similar language in Paul's final letter recorded in Scripture; 2 Tim. 4:18.)

What, precisely, does Paul say is his "eager expectation and hope" (v. 20)?

Notice that the final words of verse 20 become the major themes of verses 21–24. What is the relationship between verse 20 and the few verses that follow? Put another way, what is Paul doing in verses 21–24 that he hasn't done in verse 20? (See p. 2281 of the *ESV Study Bible* for help.)

If verses 19–20 express Paul's confidence in his eternal salvation, and if verses 21–23 clarify that death is no threat to that saving hope, how should we understand Paul's confidence that he will "remain and continue" in verses 24–26? What might he be reassuring them of or clarifying for them in verses 24–26?

In verses 25–26, Paul sounds quite certain of his release from prison and his return to Philippi. But read on in chapter 1. Is the apparent certainty of verses 25–26 confirmed or qualified? Which verse tells us this?

[p 30](#) Paul clearly feels torn between living and dying, between the ongoing needs of the church and the glory of Christ in heaven (vv. 22–24). But which of the two possibilities would he prefer, all things considered? What language does Paul use about his preferred outcome?

Paul speaks of death in optimistic terms (vv. 21–23). That path is "gain" and "far better." Paul doesn't explicitly tell us why in this passage; he merely assumes the reasons. From what you know of the Bible, what are some ways in which dying is "gain" for the believer?

Likewise, in what ways is dying *far* from "gain" for those outside of Christ?

The alternative to death—to "remain in the flesh" (v. 24)—certainly has its own benefits and purposes. How does Paul describe that outcome in verses 20–26? Or, how does he view his life? How might Paul's aims relate to the two great commands in Matthew 22:36–40?

[p 31](#) In a footnote, the ESV notes that the phrase "let your manner of life be worthy" (v. 27) can be more literally translated "behave as citizens worthy." Notice that in 3:20 Paul similarly says "our citizenship is in heaven." That word "citizen" is rich with significance. Why? List some dynamics of citizenship that Paul intends for his readers to apply to their Christian lives.

Within his commands, Paul gives encouragements or reasons to more fully embrace that path (see vv. 28b–30). What are they?

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections may have for you.

Gospel Glimpses

TO DIE IS TO GAIN. Death can only be gain if what is on the other side is of greater value than anything on this side. In his death and victorious resurrection, Jesus “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10). He died so that “through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery” (Heb. 2:14–15). Death is as good as dead. It is not fully dead yet—obvious enough since we still die (see 1 Cor. 15:25–26). But for the Christian, death is nothing more than a passageway to another stage of redemption, to more of Christ’s presence, to the absence of sin and sickness and pain. So even now we can say with Paul, “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” (1 Cor. 15:54–55). Jesus defeated death. Now, death is gain.

p 32 PROGRESS AND JOY IN THE FAITH. If Paul is given life beyond his imprisonment, and is able to return to Philippi, he envisions that his ministry among the Philippians will be for their “progress and joy in the faith” (v. 25). That phrase, in many ways, captures the essence of the Christian life. It is one of progress, of growing. As Paul will later say, we are to “work out ... salvation” (2:12) and “press on toward the goal ... of the upward call” (3:14). But this “progress” is not merely an improved performance or deeper knowledge. Conduct and knowledge are certainly involved, but at the root, Paul insists that we are to progress “in the *faith*”—in the gospel. It is not something we move beyond after we’ve received it; we live, and relate to God, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, first to last, in light of the gospel.

Whole-Bible Connections

TO BE WITH CHRIST. God’s plan can be charted through a lens of his presence among his people. The garden of Eden was a place of his presence, the first couple in perfect communion with him. But after their sin, Adam and Eve hid from God. God came calling for them, but that conversation ended with them being cast out of the garden. In time, God spoke to Noah, then to Abraham and his offspring, but these were not frequent or constant experiences. God spoke more frequently to Moses, but it wasn’t until after the exodus that God began to be “in the midst” of the people (see Ex. 25:8). The tabernacle was a place for his dwelling; the temple would be his more permanent house in the Promised Land. God’s people have always fearfully but joyfully longed for his presence (Ps. 16:11)—and indeed granting this has been God’s plan. That’s why Jesus “tabernacled” among us (John 1:14); why he later gave us his Spirit to dwell in our hearts; and why Jesus will come again—that we might be fully with him and see his glory (John 17:24). And *that* is why Paul could say, to “be with Christ” would be “far better” (Phil. 1:23).

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS. Paul was a man with one foot planted on earth and another planted in heaven. He lived at the same time in this world and in the world to come. This is apparent as he wrestles with conflicting desires—wanting to depart from this world to be with Jesus, and yet feeling the need to remain in this world for the sake of the church. We too should see that needs are many and there is much work to be done for Jesus and his church. But, like Paul, we too should have a constant eye on, even a sincere longing for, what’s to come, whether at the time of our death or at Jesus’ return.

Theological Soundings

SUFFERING FOR CHRIST VERSUS SUFFERING WITH CHRIST. Paul was clear that only Christ’s suffering secures our salvation. In fact, he had strong words [p 33](#) for false teachers who insisted on self-induced suffering as a form of religion (see Col. 2:18–23). That said, in Philippians 1, he insists that those who savingly know Christ’s suffering *for them*, will also willingly embrace suffering *for him*. It “is a clear sign ... of your salvation,” and it is “from God” (Phil. 1:28). We’ve been “granted ... not only [to] believe in him, but also [to] suffer for his sake” (v. 29). This kind of suffering for Christ is not a saving suffering; it is not penance or paying off guilt. But it does have great value. It gives assurance to us and confirmation to the world that we belong to and follow Christ. Further, as Paul insists later in Philippians and elsewhere, suffering for Christ is a special kind of identification with him; in that sense, we “share in his sufferings” (Phil. 3:10; Rom. 8:17; 2 Cor. 1:5).

WORTHY OF THE GOSPEL. Paul exhorts the Philippians, “let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel” (v. 27). Paul is not suggesting that the gospel can be earned with a worthy life. No one, in this life or the next, will be “worthy of the gospel” in that sense. The gospel is good news about Someone else’s worth and work. What then does Paul mean by his call to a “manner of life” that is “worthy of the gospel”? As noted above, this phrase “manner of life” can be translated “life as *citizens*.” It is a word picture that is grasped in any culture that has citizenship, but it would have been especially forceful to people in a city such as Philippi, most of whom were Roman citizens. To be a Roman citizen didn’t just mean that you were born in a Roman province. It was to be *Roman*—with Roman thinking, Roman ways, Roman culture, and Roman allegiances (especially to Caesar). Paul is shaking all that up by directing their focus to a higher citizenship, higher identity, higher standard of conduct, and higher allegiance. They are now to live in a way that befits—that is “worthy of”—the gospel and this heavenly citizenship.

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Philippians 1:19–30 for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of the (1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

p 34 2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

4. Philippians 1:19–30

As You Finish This Unit ...

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you continue in this study of Philippians. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on a few key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight and underline these things to review again in the future.