

# Coronavirus Online Bible Study

## ***Week Three- Imprisoned!- Philippians 1***

### **Introduction:**

Feeling stuck? Like you can't go anywhere, maybe even a little stir crazy? Over the past few weeks, we've had to "hunker down", and after awhile it gets a little tiresome not getting to do the things we like to do. A couple weeks ago, we learned that Paul said in Philippians 4 that he had learned the secret of contentment, whatever his circumstances. It might interest you to know that when Paul wrote those words, he was sitting in prison! Today, we begin a study of his outstanding letter to the church at Philippi. Paul knew what it was like to be stuck somewhere, yet he approached his situation with an attitude of joy! It is my hope that during this time of "quarantine", we will discover new joy even while we are "stuck".

**Read Philippians 1:1-2.** What does the word "saint" mean? To whom is Paul referring by using the word "saint"? How do we tend to use that word?

Why does Paul open his letters with greetings like that found in verse 2? What can we learn from his words about our prayers for and relationships with other Christians?

**Read Philippians 1:3-6.** When you think of your church family, what are some things you are thankful for? How do you see Christ in the Christians God has put in your life?

Do you think we spend enough time thanking God for other believers? Why might this be a helpful exercise for us to do regularly?

The word Paul in verse 5 for "partnership" is "Koinonia". It refers to being united in heart and in purpose, and often refers to the fellowship believers have in Christ. What does it mean to be "partners" with other believers? What effect does partnering with others have on our relationship with God? With other Christians?

What promise is there for us in verse 6? How does this promise encourage us?

**Read Philippians 1:7-11.** In what sense do the Philippians "share in God's grace" with Paul? Is the fellowship of believers lessened when they aren't in the same location?

Paul's letter to the Philippians was written after the church at Philippi had sent a love gift of money to Paul to aid his ministry. They had entrusted this gift to a man named Epaphroditus, who delivered it to Paul, and after spending several

weeks or months working with Paul, was returning to Philippi. Having read this, how have the Philippians proven their partnership with Paul?

Many times, we are tempted to see our circumstances as evidence of God's grace (or disfavor) toward us. Based on verse 7, does Paul see his freedom or imprisonment as evidence of God's gracious love toward him?

Look at Paul's prayer for the Philippians believers in verses 9-11. What is God's desire for our lives, based on these verses?

What does Paul mean by "knowledge and depth of insight"?

Paul prays that the Philippians may "be able to discern what is best." One thing that distinguishes Christianity from other religions is that we have relatively few "rules" we must follow. Rather, we are called to discern how we should live. What is the process we use to "discern what is best"?

**Read Philippians 1:12-19.** Did Paul see his own imprisonment as a hindrance to God's ministry? Why do you say that? What effect has Paul's imprisonment had on other believers?

What should we learn from this in our current situation?

What is Paul describing in verses 15-18? Who are those who "preach Christ out of envy and rivalry"? Does Paul's attitude toward them surprise you at all?

It is important to note that the teachers Paul refers to here are apparently teaching good doctrine. Paul had no patience for false teaching, and if these teachers had been teaching bad doctrine Paul would have certainly confronted them. Their doctrine wasn't at issue here; their motives were. Do you think there are those today who preach out of impure motives? What might drive them?

Why is Paul able to rejoice even if these preachers had impure motives? What should we do for a Christian brother or sister whose motives may not be pure?

**Read Philippians 1:19-26.** What do you think Paul is referring to in verse 19 by the words "my deliverance"? Would it change your answer to discover that the Greek word Paul uses here, "soteria", is usually translated "salvation"?

As Paul writes, he genuinely doesn't know whether his imprisonment will end in his release or in his death. Yet he approaches this uncertainty with confidence, saying that "Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death." What is the source of his confidence? Is it something we share? What obstacles can get in the way of this confidence?

What ultimately leads Paul to the conclusion that he will survive his time in prison? (vs. 25-26)

**Read Philippians 1:27-30.** What does it mean to "conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ? What does this mean to us as individuals? As a church?

The word translated as "contending" used in verse 27 comes from the Greek word "athleōs", from which the word "athlete" comes. How is the work of the church similar to athletes contending in games? How do we contend for the faith of the gospel?

What does Paul mean when he says that "this is a sign to them that they will be destroyed"?

Why don't we see verse 29 on plaques adorning peoples' living rooms? Do you think this verse is true only to some Christians, or to all Christians? What does this verse mean for those that aren't being persecuted?

## **Closing Thoughts:**

We all like to think we are good at making the most out of a bad situation. The Apostle Paul was doing what God called him to do, preaching and "contending" for the Gospel all over the Greek-speaking world. He helped start the church in Philippi and several other cities. Then suddenly, he found himself in prison. What does an apostle do from behind bars? He prays, witnesses to those in prison, and encourages other believers. That was Paul's purpose in writing the church in Philippi- to thank them for their generosity and to encourage them to continue living for Jesus. In chapter 1 of Philippians, we get a glimpse of Paul's heart. He is fervent in prayer for other believers, and genuine in his desire to see the word of Christ preached by others while he is "out of the game". But we also see a confidence that should encourage us when we are "stuck" in a bad situation. He is confident that God will use hardship for His glory, that good will come from it, and that God will supply the ability for he and other Christians to be bold in the face of opposition, forcing unbelievers to reflect on their eternal destiny. Paul's words exude JOY- in fact, joy is often considered the theme of Philippians. Joy in the midst of hardship, uncertainty, and opposition. We have joy because hardship provides us an opportunity to become more like Christ, and to witness to others.