

What's the Message – Lesson 130

We continue our study of St. Paul's guidance to the Church, as recorded in the letter to the Philippians.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. O God, by the death and resurrection of Your Son, You raised up the fallen world. Grant to Your faithful people who have been rescued from the peril of everlasting death, the joy and gladness of faith that lasts forever through Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Last time we drew upon a portion of Paul's letter to the Ephesians to obtain guidance in our relationships within the Church, and with the world around us. In today's lesson we look into another of what are known as Paul's Captivity Letters, the letter to the church at Philippi. Please refer back to our lesson 118 where we gave you the background of how Paul was sent into Europe and Philippi became the place where the first Christian church was established. Although Paul was only there a short time, the church grew under the stewardship of Luke and consisted primarily of Gentiles. This was Paul's "first-born" church in Europe, and it remained near and dear to him.

When they heard of Paul's imprisonment in Rome, they were concerned, and sent a gift to Paul, a gift that was carried by a man named Epaphroditus, a man who – according to Paul – “nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life” in his effort to complete the service of the Philippian church to their beloved apostle. To thank them was the initial reason for Paul's letter, but he also used it to give them confidence, and to admonish them about false teachers in their midst. It is a letter so crammed full of familiar verses that we might be amazed to find it all here in one short letter. The first such instance may well be verse 6, where Paul writes: *And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*

Paul then shares his insight with them about his imprisonment with these words: *I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for*

Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the Word without fear.

Many sermons have been written on just these two selections, but to hold to the objective of this course and to summarize briefly, we should first hold firm to the confidence that God will complete the work He has begun in us and will take us home to Him eternally. Secondly, that the suffering Paul is now experiencing is actually not a bad thing, in fact it is being used by God to spread His Word, and this is good. Christ is being proclaimed, and in that Paul rejoices. He then goes on to add, beginning with verse 20, that . . . *with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. . . . My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.*

Paul is convinced that whatever may befall him, Christ will be glorified, and that Paul is willing to accept the duties of the calling he received to be a missionary to the Gentiles. Now Paul changes the direction of his comments. In verse 27 he says, "Let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel." Then he expounds on this point, and tells them that if they are to be partners with him in the Gospel, it will be shown in their lives in three ways. The first of these is unity of spirit, and he tells them to stand firm, side by side, striving for the faith of the Gospel, and not frightened by opponents. The second way, he says, is by humility and self-effacement. Beginning at 2:3, we read:

Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Just as Jesus humbled Himself, and took on the form of a servant for us, so we are to consider ourselves as servants to others. Jesus humbled Himself and became, as Paul has written, obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has

highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The third way the Philippians will show their partnership in the Gospel in their lives is in their attitude as servants of God. This he covers in 2:12 – 18. Dr. Franzmann comments: “The servant of God, eager to please and fearful of failure, works with ‘fear and trembling’ at the work of salvation which God does in and through him, and thus shows himself as the light of the world.”

But before concluding his letter, Paul warns them of false teachers among them, men who put their confidence in acts of the flesh, the works of man. Paul states that he boasts not in himself, *not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith . . . Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own. . . . Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body . . . Therefore, my brothers . . . stand firm . . . in the Lord.*

Next time we will look for more guidance in Paul’s Pastoral Letters to Timothy and Titus.