

# Philippians

*Dealing with the trial of Death*

1:12-30

Following the theme of *working out your salvation* through the book of Philippians, the first issue we will consider is our attitude towards trials and with death. When we are facing circumstances of which we have no control, often anxiety and fear can overtake us. This is certainly true when death comes knocking. Yet, for the Christian, having a living hope of salvation causes us to embrace our trials, and even death, rather than shun them.

Paul has found himself in prison because of his preaching of the gospel. He is chained to a guard and uncertain if he will live or if this will lead to his death. Remarkably, his first concern is centered on his opportunity to continue to preach the gospel:

“Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the **greater progress** of the **gospel**” (1:12)

## When facing trials

**PROGRESS:** *prokope*; properly, *advance* (progress) – literally, “advancement by *chopping down* whatever impedes progress”; as clearing the way for an approaching army; ‘furtherance’



Being in prison has benefited the spread of the gospel. How is this possible?

### A. REMEMBER THAT GOD IS IN **CHARGE** AND HE CAN USE ANY CIRCUMSTANCE AS AN **OPPORTUNITY** FOR GOOD

Paul did not consider his circumstances as an excuse to stop or as a hindrance in continuing his work. Rather, as we learn in another prison letter, Paul is even asking for opportunity from God to still speak the word (Colossians 4:2, 3) – all while he is in prison!

Key observations:

- Paul is more concerned about the progress of the **gospel** than he is of his own personal welfare.
- Even though he has no control of his situation, he **trusts** that God is in control; and he lives to *will and work for His good pleasure* (2:13).
- Although he is a captive, Paul knows he has a **captive** audience and he speaks to his guards, so that the whole praetorian guard (and everyone else) now knows of his cause for Christ (1:13).
- The gospel had **greater progress** with Paul being in prison (in contrast to him being free). In prison Paul was given unique opportunities.
- Working out our salvation results in us looking for the good in even the most trying circumstances.
- Most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of His imprisonment, now have far more **courage** to speak the word of God without fear (1:14).
- In all of this, Paul **rejoices**. He knows that he will not be put to shame in anything, in either life or in death (1:18, 20).

When, like Paul, our life on this earth is no longer about ‘us’ but becomes about *God working* in us, then the trials we face seem

## When facing death

**PROFIT:** *kerdos*; to get gain, make a profit, see James 4:13

**HARD-PRESSED:** *sunechó*; to be pressed together, confined on every side [‘in a strait betwixt two’ (KJV); ‘torn between the two’ (ESV)]

**CONDUCT:** *politeia*; the relation (behavior) in which a citizen stands with the State



less daunting, and can be viewed as doors of opportunity. In short, for Paul ‘to live is Christ’ (1:21). For so many, to live is *money*, to live is to have *fun*, or to live is *do what you want*. Working out our salvation brings a Christian to a place where they can say, ‘to live is Christ. This is why Paul can say, ‘to die is gain’ (1:21b).

### **B. REALIZE THAT DEATH IS NOT A DEFEAT, BUT SIMPLY A DEPARTURE FROM THIS WORLD TO BE WITH CHRIST**

It is not often that you hear someone speak of death being *profitable*. Paul uses this word when he says to die is *gain*. Profit is defined as the return on your investment. If the return is less than the original investment, then we suffer a *loss*. But when the return exceeds the investment we reap a *profit*. For the Christian, investing one’s life for Christ while on these earth will reap a huge profit upon death. This conviction brings a dilemma for Paul:

“I am **hard-pressed** from both directions, having the desire to **depart and be with Christ**, for that is **very much better**; yet to remain on in the flesh is more **necessary** for your sake.” (1:23-24)

Paul desires (*lust*) to depart (i.e. *die*), so he can be with Christ, which he says is *very much better* than living here in this world. Paul also realizes that death ends his opportunities to labor with the saints. More work or glory? Sounds like an easy choice. Yet, Paul’s love for souls is equal to his desire to be with Christ, thus creating his dilemma. He concludes that it is best that he *remain on in the flesh* (1:24, 25). Working out our own salvation results in us having similar attitudes about facing death – the only reason we will want to remain here is so we can help bring about the salvation of more souls. There is no other reason to stay.

- Death’s dilemma makes us rethink and revisit our **priorities** in life. Doing so helps us set our minds on that which is truly important.
- Checking our priorities makes us realize the value of a single **soul** and causes us to reevaluate the position of Jesus in our life.
- To be with Christ necessitates our dying. This realization, when accepted, causes one to **embrace** death when it comes.
- While we remain here on this earth, Paul exhorts us to *conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ* (1:27). The word conduct (*politeia*) reminds us that we are citizens of heaven, and not of this earth – so act that way!

Finally, Paul reminds each of us that just as it is a privilege to believe in Christ as one of His disciples, we also have been given the favor of suffering for His cause.

For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake. (1:29)

Since we cannot escape trials or death, we choose to work out our attitude in their regard!

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