

Philippians: Rejoice in the Gospel of Jesus Christ - Study Guide

The Progress of the Gospel, Part 2 - Philippians 1:18b-26

Author: Dr. Matthew S. Harmon | Session 4

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Abstract:

This academic transcript features **Dr. Matthew S. Harmon** teaching on **Philippians 1:18b–26**, specifically focusing on the theme of **gospel progress** through the lens of future expectations. Harmon argues that Paul views his potential execution or release as a **win-win scenario**, where "to live is Christ and to die is gain." The lecture highlights how Paul uses **eschatological language** to confirm his confidence in **eternal salvation** rather than mere physical deliverance from prison. Central to this perseverance are two key elements: the **intercessory prayers** of the church and the **strengthening power** of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, the text encourages believers to evaluate all personal circumstances based on how they might **magnify Christ** and serve the spiritual growth of others. The session concludes by challenging listeners to adopt an **other-centered mindset** that prioritizes the advancement of faith over personal comfort.

Briefing Document:

The Progress of the Gospel: A Briefing on Philippians 1:18b-26

Executive Summary

This briefing analyzes Dr. Matthew S. Harmon's teaching on Philippians 1:18b-26, which details the Apostle Paul's perspective on his future circumstances while imprisoned. The central theme is that the "progress of the gospel" serves as the primary lens through which believers should evaluate their life circumstances—past, present, and future.

Critical takeaways include:

- **Eschatological Salvation:** Paul's reference to "deliverance" is interpreted not as physical release from prison, but as final spiritual salvation and vindication before God.
- **The Means of Perseverance:** Perseverance in faith is achieved through a "unified partnership" of the prayers of believers and the help of the Holy Spirit.
- **The "Win-Win" Paradigm:** Paul frames the choice between life and death as a win-win scenario: life offers "fruitful labor" and the progress of the gospel, while death offers the superior gain of being directly with Christ.

- **Others-Centered Ministry:** Despite his personal preference to "depart and be with Christ," Paul concludes that remaining on earth is "more necessary" for the spiritual progress and joy of others.

The Nature of Deliverance and Salvation (v. 19-20)

In verse 19, Paul states, "this will turn out for my deliverance." Dr. Harmon argues that this refers to **spiritual/eternal salvation** rather than physical release from custody. This conclusion is supported by several linguistic and contextual markers.

Evidence for Spiritual Salvation (Soteria)

Evidence Category Details

Lexical Consistency	In every other instance in Paul's letters, the Greek word <i>Soteria</i> refers to spiritual or eternal salvation.
Verb Usage	Paul consistently uses the cognate verb <i>sozo</i> for spiritual salvation. When he wishes to describe deliverance from physical danger, he utilizes a different Greek verb.
Eschatological Language	Paul uses terms like "eager expectation," "hope," and "not being ashamed," which typically refer to the final judgment and appearing before God.
Biblical Echoes	Paul's phrasing ("this will turn out for my salvation") is an exact five-word match in Greek to Job 13:16 , where Job discusses his vindication before God's judgment.

Paul's confidence is rooted in the belief that he will persevere in his faith and stand before God without shame on the last day, regardless of the outcome of his trial before Caesar.

The Unified Means of Perseverance

Paul identifies two specific means by which God ensures a believer's perseverance in faith:

1. **The prayers of believers:** The intercession of the Philippian church.
2. **The help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ:** The empowering work of the Holy Spirit.

The Greek Synthesis: In the original Greek text, a single definite article governs both "prayers" and "help." This grammatical structure links the two items into a "unified whole." It suggests that when believers pray, God answers by providing the Spirit's help to enable the subject to persevere.

The Christ-Centered Life (v. 21)

The core of Paul's philosophy is captured in the emphatic, proverbial statement: *"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."*

Defining "To Live is Christ"

Based on insights from Philippians 3 and Galatians 2:20, "living as Christ" involves:

- **Relational Knowledge:** Knowing Christ as the highest, most intimate goal of life.
- **Total Valuation:** Gaining Christ is worth the loss of all other things, even good things.
- **Identification:** Sharing in the power of Christ's resurrection and the shame of his sufferings.
- **Empowered Life:** Christ lives in the believer, and faith in Him empowers daily existence.
- **New Creation:** Being "in Christ" makes the believer a new creation.

Defining "To Die is Gain"

For Paul, death is "gain" because it results in being directly in the presence of Jesus Christ, which he describes as "far better."

The Apostolic Dilemma and Others-Centered Mindset (v. 22-26)

Paul describes himself as "hard pressed" between the desire to be with Christ and the necessity of continuing his ministry.

A Win-Win Framework

Paul refuses to frame his trial as a win-lose situation. Instead, he presents two positive outcomes:

- **Acquittal:** Results in continued "fruitful labor," the advancement of the gospel, and the establishment of more churches.
- **Execution:** Results in being directly with the Lord.

The Conclusion of the Dilemma

Ultimately, Paul adopts a self-sacrificial mindset. He concludes that remaining in the flesh is "more necessary" for the Philippians' **progress and joy in the faith**.

- **Progress in Faith:** This is defined not as a quantitative increase in faith, but as a "growing awareness of the sufficiency" of Christ's person and work.
- **The Goal of Reunion:** Paul's ultimate aim for his return is that the Philippians would "glory" or "boast" in Christ Jesus rather than in Paul himself.

Big Picture Summary and Application

The totality of Philippians 1:12-26 demonstrates that the progress of the gospel must shape how believers evaluate all circumstances—past, present, and future.

The Fourfold Application Bridge

- **Think/Understand:** Recognize that God is in control of all circumstances. Paul wrote these words while chained to a Roman soldier, demonstrating that trust in God is possible even in life-threatening conditions.
- **Believe:** Internalize that "to live is Christ and to die is gain." This should fundamentally alter one's approach to everyday life.
- **Desire:** Long to see Christ glorified and magnified in the body, ensuring that others see the beauty of Christ through one's hardships.
- **Do:** Reflect on specific, difficult circumstances (illness, economic hardship, or conflict) and pray for insight into how the gospel might advance through those specific challenges.

Study Guide:

Study Guide: Philippians 1:18b-26 — The Progress of the Gospel, Part 2

This study guide examines the second part of Dr. Matthew S. Harmon's teaching on the progress of the gospel in the book of Philippians. The focus is on Paul's evaluation of his future circumstances, his confidence in spiritual salvation, and the tension between his desire to be with Christ and his commitment to the growth of the Philippian church.

Short-Answer Quiz

Instructions: Answer the following questions in 2–3 sentences based on the provided text.

1. What is the significance of the Greek word *Soteria* in the context of verse 19?
2. How does Paul's use of eschatological language in verse 20 support the idea of spiritual salvation over physical deliverance?
3. What does the echo of Job 13:16 suggest about Paul's mindset regarding his trial?
4. According to the text, what are the two distinct means God uses to ensure a believer's perseverance?
5. How does the Greek grammar in verse 19 link the prayers of believers with the help of the Holy Spirit?
6. What does the phrase "to live is Christ" imply regarding the goals and losses of a believer's life?

7. Why does Paul describe his situation as a "win-win" rather than a "win-or-lose" scenario?
8. How does Paul's decision to remain for the Philippians reflect the "other-centered" mindset he later commands them to have?
9. What is the literary "inclusio" found between Philippians 1:12 and 1:25?
10. How does Dr. Harmon define "progress in the faith" in contrast to a quantitative view of faith?

Answer Key

1. **What is the significance of the Greek word *Soteria* in the context of verse 19?** In Paul's letters, *Soteria* is almost always translated as spiritual or eternal salvation rather than physical rescue. This suggests that Paul is concerned with his ultimate standing before God on the last day rather than merely being released from prison.
2. **How does Paul's use of eschatological language in verse 20 support the idea of spiritual salvation over physical deliverance?** Terms like "eager expectation," "hope," and "not at all ashamed" are frequently used in the New Testament to describe the final judgment and the consummation of all things. This indicates Paul is focused on his future vindication before God's judgment seat rather than his immediate physical safety.
3. **What does the echo of Job 13:16 suggest about Paul's mindset regarding his trial?** By using the exact five-word phrase from Job, Paul identifies with Job's desire to be vindicated before God. This emphasizes that Paul views his current trials as a path toward final spiritual salvation and a righteous standing before the Lord.
4. **According to the text, what are the two distinct means God uses to ensure a believer's perseverance?** Paul identifies the prayers of fellow believers and the help provided by the Spirit of Jesus Christ as the means of perseverance. While the believer is responsible for trusting Jesus, God uses these two elements to empower them to remain steadfast.
5. **How does the Greek grammar in verse 19 link the prayers of believers with the help of the Holy Spirit?** Paul uses a single definite article to govern both "prayers" and "help," which signifies that they are a unified whole working in partnership. This implies that when believers pray for one another, God answers by providing the Spirit's help to enable perseverance.
6. **What does the phrase "to live is Christ" imply regarding the goals and losses of a believer's life?** It indicates that knowing Christ is the highest goal of life, making the loss of all other things—even those previously considered gains—worthwhile. It also means sharing in Christ's resurrection power and the shame of his sufferings, as Christ is the ultimate purpose of existence.

7. **Why does Paul describe his situation as a "win-win" rather than a "win-or-lose" scenario?** Paul views acquittal as a "win" because it leads to more fruitful ministry and the advancement of the gospel. Conversely, he views death as a "win bigger" scenario because it results in being directly in the presence of Christ, which he considers "far better."
8. **How does Paul's decision to remain for the Philippians reflect the "other-centered" mindset he later commands them to have?** Despite his personal desire to depart and be with Christ, Paul concludes that remaining in the flesh is "more necessary" for the progress and joy of the Philippians. He models the self-sacrificial mindset that puts the needs and spiritual growth of others above his own comforts or preferences.
9. **What is the literary "inclusio" found between Philippians 1:12 and 1:25?** Paul uses similar language regarding the "advance" or "progress" of the gospel at both the beginning and the end of this section. This creates a "bracketing" effect that marks verses 12 through 26 as a distinct literary unit focused on how the gospel moves forward.
10. **How does Dr. Harmon define "progress in the faith" in contrast to a quantitative view of faith?** Progress in the faith is not about increasing the "quantity" of faith like filling a container, but rather growing in the awareness of Christ's sufficiency. It is a deeper recognition that the person and work of Christ are entirely enough to forgive and transform the believer.

Essay Questions

1. **The Lens of the Gospel:** Analyze how Paul uses the "progress of the gospel" as a lens to evaluate his past, present, and future. How does this perspective change the way a person might view difficult or life-threatening circumstances?
2. **The Theology of Perseverance:** Discuss the relationship between human responsibility (trusting in Christ) and divine empowerment (the Holy Spirit and the prayers of the church) in Paul's theology of perseverance.
3. **To Live is Christ:** Synthesize the four insights from Philippians 3 and the references to Galatians and 2 Corinthians to provide a comprehensive definition of what it means for a believer to say "to live is Christ."
4. **The Role of Community in Spiritual Growth:** Explore why Paul believes his continued physical presence is "necessary" for the Philippians' joy. What does this suggest about the role of leadership and communal encouragement in the "progress of the faith"?
5. **Vindication and Shame:** Examine the eschatological concept of "not being ashamed" at the final judgment. How does Paul's confidence in Christ's sufficiency protect him from the shame of his current sufferings and chains?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Cognate Verb:** A verb related to a noun in origin and meaning; in this context, the verb *sozo* (to save) is the cognate of the noun *soteria* (salvation).
- **Eschatological:** Relating to the "last things" or the final stages of God's plan for the world, including death, judgment, and the final state of humanity.
- **Fruitful Labor:** Paul's term for continued ministry and the successful advancement of the gospel through his work and preaching.
- **Inclusio:** A literary device where a passage begins and ends with similar themes or language, serving to "bracket" the section as a single unit.
- **Means of Perseverance:** The tools or methods God uses—specifically the prayers of believers and the help of the Spirit—to keep a person trusting in Christ until the end.
- **Other-Centered:** A mindset that prioritizes the interests, needs, and spiritual progress of others over one's own personal preferences.
- **Progress of the Gospel:** The overarching theme of Philippians 1:12-26, describing how the message of Christ continues to spread and mature regardless of external circumstances.
- **Soteria:** The Greek word for salvation; used by Paul to refer to spiritual and eternal deliverance rather than mere physical rescue.
- **Sufficiency of Christ:** The theological concept that the person and work of Jesus are entirely adequate for a believer's forgiveness, transformation, and perseverance.
- **To Die is Gain:** The proverbial expression of Paul's belief that death is a benefit because it brings the believer into the immediate, relational presence of Jesus Christ.