

Four Choices We Can Make to Advance the Gospel

SCRIPTURE TEXT: PHILIPPIANS 1:12-14 (ESV)

¹²I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. ¹⁴And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Choice #1 - Allow Christ's activity in your current season of life to flow into others - vv.12-14

Acts 28:16-31 provides details about Paul's prison time in Rome. For two years, Paul was chained to a guard and was not given any privacy. He ate, he slept, he wrote, he prayed, he visited his friends, he taught and preached. He remained chained to a guard while he did everything necessary to continue living within the mission God had given him. Paul had a life that many of us would pass on taking. We would rather remain comfortable Americans than experience half of Paul's experiences, even if it meant the proclamation of Gospel.

Naturally, the Philippian church was concerned for Paul's well-being. You and I would be concerned as well. In verse 12, Paul wants them to understand he is okay. In fact, he uses language that communicates important information is coming.

Listen up. I don't want you to miss this. My current season of life is okay because the gospel of Jesus Christ is being advanced. The word "advanced" parallels the military moving ahead even though resistance could overtake them at any moment. In other words, Paul was willing to accept today's struggle because he knew God was going to win tomorrow. That's not my attitude in all situations and you might be able to relate.

Verse 13 gives one way the gospel was being advanced. The gospel became known throughout the entire imperial guard. Some of your translations might read "*praetorian guard*". This guard was 10,000 handpicked soldiers who were dispersed throughout Rome to keep the peace and protect the emperor. The conclusion could be made that Caesar saw Paul to be a large threat and Rome's peace was in danger.

Verse 14 gives a second way the gospel was being advanced. Paul remained faithful and he was a model of joy and peace. As other Christians watched his life, they gained confidence and boldness to share their faith.

Courage is contagious. Conformity is contagious. Complacency is contagious.

Who are the people watching you as you walk with Jesus? Are they gaining confidence and boldness to share their faith? Are they learning to blend in with the culture around us?

Choice #2 - In all matters, allow Christ's name to be proclaimed - vv.15-18

SCRIPTURE TEXT: PHILIPPIANS 1:15-18 (ESV)

¹⁵ Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. ¹⁶ The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. ¹⁸ What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice,

Paul just told us about the gospel's momentum. In verses 15-17, some people are preaching and spreading the gospel wrongly. Let's not pretend this situation only occurred in the New Testament. There are churches who are jealous of others churches. There are churches that view other churches as competition. There are churches who add preferences to the gospel. There are churches who dilute the gospel to have a larger attendance. *As Christians, what is our response to a church or preacher that falls into those practices?*

- Our first response should always be internal. Search your own heart for any guilt in those areas. Envy, rivalry and selfish ambition are listed in several places in the New Testament as major sins. It will be difficult to allow Christ's name to be proclaimed when we keep those sins in our lives.
- Our second response depends on how close you are to the church or preacher. If you notice this pattern in your church or from your pastor, it is appropriate and biblical to schedule a meeting with your church leaders and lovingly talk about your observations. Pray for the issue to be resolved. If it's not your church or your pastor, it's not your battle.
- Our third response is to look for the exclusive proclamation of Jesus Christ within the church. Some people are always drawn to what a church is doing wrong, that they miss how Jesus is being proclaimed. It is a completely different conversation if a church does not exclusively proclaim Jesus. Either way, our response should be filled with love as we allow Christ's name to be proclaimed.

Choice #3 - Allow Christ to be honored through your expectations in life - vv.19-21

SCRIPTURE TEXT: PHILIPPIANS 1:19-21 (ESV)

¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, ²⁰ as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Paul remains confident with his future. Verse 19 says, “I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance.” Paul’s confidence remains strong because of the prayers of the Philippian church and by the help of the Holy Spirit.

Paul’s expectation and hope of deliverance is not a physical deliverance because the possibility of death is spoken of in verses 20-21. He is not ashamed of his life and he is certain that Christ will be honored if his life ends. What deliverance does he speak of? The Greek word for deliverance is *sō-tā-rē'-ā*. This word is where we get the word soteriology, which is the doctrine of salvation.

Not only has Paul’s conduct on earth pointed others to Christ, but his death will point others to Christ. He is confident when he passes from this earth, he will be ushered into the presence of Jesus Christ and experience salvation to its fullest.

Most likely, Paul had choices about what things to be hopeful of, but reserves his hope and eager expectation for day when he stands in front of Jesus Christ. Paul’s life honored God with his expectations. He wanted to stay on earth, but he wanted to be with Jesus. Paul decided that his life would honor God whether he lived or died.

Choice #4 - Allow your life to produce spiritual fruit - vv.22-26

SCRIPTURE TEXT: PHILIPPIANS 1:22-26 (ESV)

²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

If we look for Christ’s activity in our current season of life, if we allow Christ’s name to be proclaimed in all matters, if we allow Christ to be honored through our expectations, our life will produce spiritual fruit.

When the gospel of Jesus Christ is faithfully proclaimed, it will constantly bear fruit and increase in numbers. When a church of Jesus Christ has not increased in numbers, it could be that its members have not faithfully proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul vulnerably shares the tension in his life. He knows the longer he lives on earth, the more people will hear the gospel proclaimed. He also knows that death brings something much better; standing in the presence of Jesus.

Is Paul's next thought true of our lives? Verses 24-25 says, "*But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.*"²⁵ *Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith.*"

Paul doesn't passively coast through life. He is close to death, but declares living is spiritually beneficial for the Philippian church. Paul had a personal conviction that his work with the Philippian church was not yet completed. He knew those under his care still needed to grow in their faith and in their joy. He chose to continue with his mission of producing spiritual fruit in others.

In every stage of life, verses 23-24 ought to remain on the radar of our thoughts. "²³*My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.*"²⁴ *But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.*" Although our desire is to be with Christ in Heaven, it is necessary for us to assist to progression of the faith and joy of those in our lives.

Of the four choices we have in Philippians 1, which choice needs improvement in your life?

- **Do you choose to see Christ's activity in your current season of life?**
- **Do you choose to proclaim Christ's name in all matters?**
- **Do you choose to honor Christ through the expectations of your life?**
- **Do you choose to produce spiritual fruit with your life?**