

LOVE AND HAPPINESS

CHRIST'S LOVE FOR THE CHURCH

LESSON AIM:

By the end of the lesson, teens will:

- (1) examine imagery of Jesus as light overcoming darkness detailed in John and Ephesians;
- (2) imagine living in constant light, where there are no secrets; and (3) commit to discovering how to live a life as the fruit of light.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Bible, student magazines, pencils or pens, markers, craft paper, poster board

OPEN THE LESSON

Create two lists on a chalkboard or white board. One list should be “How Jesus Was a light in the world” and the other list should be “How I Am a Light in the World.” Then, ask the students to think of ways Jesus was a Light in the World. Next to each item they write for Jesus, ask them how they could do something similar to each thing that Jesus did to be a light in their world today. Discuss this significance in light of today’s holiday!

PRESENT THE SCRIPTURES

Paul teaches about the responsibility Christians have to love, respect and submit to one another. Submission can be seen as a misnomer considering our modern era. But submission should not be shunned, because God calls all Christians to submit to one another. Then Ephesians continues with the call for wives to submit, husbands to love, and children to obey. All of these postures are a response to our first love, Jesus. So we respond, not out of duty, but out of love for Christ. If we are careful to love our family members with the same love that Christ loves the Church, we will experience the joy that comes from the knowledge that we are pleasing God. We must give of ourselves as

a sacrificial act of love. This is exactly what Christ did for the Church when He gave His life on the cross. This kind of love is essential to building healthy relationships within our families.

EXPLORE THE MEANING

Have the students read out loud and discuss the story, “Love and Happiness.” Ask the students to discuss the idea of marriage and how it is presented in the media or the entertainment world. Ask them to compare those marriages to the marriage presented in the story. Then, have the students read through the Scripture passages and the Scripture Discussion. Ask the students to apply the principles from the Scripture text to the marriages displayed in the media and entertainment world. Have them explain the ways those biblical truths could change the portrayal of marriage in our society today.

Have the students answer the questions in the Check It and Think It sections to make sure they understand the lesson. Talk to them about questions they may have about the passage.

NEXT STEPS FOR APPLICATION

Have the students read the Do It section of the student book. The students should consider the marriage vows that husbands and wives make to one another during the wedding ceremony and create their own list of vows or “promises” to make to their

parents or guardians. Be sensitive to the fact that students may come from a diverse family makeup. Using the sample wedding vows from the opening activity, have them write out their list with each vow starting with “I promise to _____.” Encourage them to type this list, date and sign it, and present it to their parents.

WORSHIP GUIDE

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: Christ’s Love for the Church

Theme Song: “The Love of Christ is Rich and Free”

Scripture: Ephesians 5:21–6:4

Song: “There is No Greater Love”

Prayer: Dear Jesus, may my love for You be reflected in the way that I treat others. In Jesus’ name, amen.

FROM THE STUDENT MAGAZINE

Love and Happiness

June 18, 1998,” Camille said aloud as she looked through an old photo album.

“Whoa! Look at Dad’s hair!” her brother, Colby, said, laughing hysterically. “I can’t believe he used to look like that!”

“That’s a photo from our wedding,” said their mom.

“Mom, your dress was so pretty!” said Camille. “Do you still have it?”

“I actually do. I’ve kept it in a special box since our wedding day.”

“Go get it, Mom! Please?” Camille begged. “I really want to see it.”

“I haven’t pulled that dress out in years. But I’d like to see it, too. I’ll go get it—wait here,” she said.

Their mother soon entered the room wearing a sparkling white wedding gown and a lace veil.

“Mom, you look amazing,” said Colby.

“Yeah, Mom, you were a beautiful bride,” said Camille.

Suddenly, someone else walked in the room.

“Who’s this gorgeous woman in my house?” their father said. “You look as stunning as you did 17 years ago.”

“This dress doesn’t exactly fit the way it did 17 years ago. I can’t even button it up all the way,” their mother said.

“Doesn’t matter,” their father said. “What matters is that we still fit after 17 years—hasn’t been easy, but it’s definitely been worth it.”

“And we’re just as committed to you kids as we are to each other,” their mother said. “I hope we’re always an example for you two to follow.”

Scripture Discussion

In this passage, Paul explains the dynamics of various types of relationships. The various roles described by Paul provide direction for our behavior. The beginning of Ephesians calls all people to be submissive. Paul tells us all to love and obey. The emphasis in Ephesians is a reminder, because it is in these roles where we will be challenged. But our treatment of others is a reflection of our love for Christ. We submit because we love Him, we love because we love Him, and we obey because we love Him. When we submit our will to these precepts, we find joy in the knowledge that God is pleased.

NOTES

Christ's Love

Bible Background • EPHESIANS 5:21–6:4

Printed Text • EPHESIANS 5:21–6:4 | Devotional Reading • JOHN 3:16–21

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: COMPARE Christ's love for the church with the relationships among family members; APPRECIATE Christ's sacrifice to show love and care for the church; and ACCEPT responsibility for showing love in the family as Christ demonstrated love for the church.

In Focus

Angie's heart broke as she read through her students' papers. Angie had assigned her fifth-grade students an assignment that began, "I wish..." as a way to get them thinking about the New Year. The students were instructed to write at least two sentences on the topic.

Angie expected to read things like "I wish we could go on vacation to Disneyland," or "I wish I could have a new computer." Instead, 15 out of 20 students wrote about their families:

"I wish my dad would come back."

"I wish my parents didn't fight all the time."

"I wish I could get good grades so my parents would love me."

"I wish my brother wasn't so mean."

"I wish my mom's boyfriend didn't live with us."

"I wish we could have Christmas all together for once."

Angie bowed her head over the papers and wept. Her students needed the love of Christ to permeate their lives and transform their families. She prayed for the upcoming year to bring these students and their families Christ's peace and love.

Strong families are built upon the foundation of Christ's love for the church. In this lesson, we will see how serving one another in love creates an atmosphere where families can grow and thrive.

Keep in Mind

"Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God."
(Ephesians 5:21, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV **Ephesians 5:21** Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

22 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.

23 For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.

24 Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.

25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

28 So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.

29 For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:

30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.

31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

33 Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.

Ephesians 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.

2 Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise;

3 That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.

4 And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

The People, Places, and Times

A Household Code. The verses found in Ephesians 5:21–6:4 comprise what is called a household code. At the time Paul wrote Ephesians, many Romans were concerned that religions such as Judaism and Christianity would negatively influence traditional Roman family values. To allay these fears and show their support for these values, Christians, Jews, and other religious groups would often employ a standard form of statements. Paul writes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to give God's directives for family. Also known as household codes, the statements were often broken down into discussions of husband and wife, and father and children.

Background

In Ephesians 5, Paul calls on believers to live out a life of holiness in relation to the world around them. He challenges them to live wisely, being led by the Spirit. Such a life will produce a believer who becomes more like Christ every day. As we become more like Christ, we will learn to respect and submit to others in love and humility. The foundation of family relationships is to be modeled after Christ's love for the church.

At-A-Glance

1. Wives' Submission Should Reflect Christ's Authority Over the Church (Ephesians 5:21–24)
2. Husbands' Love for Their Wives Should Reflect Christ's Love for the Church (vv. 25–33)
3. Children Should Be Obedient and Loved (Ephesians 6:1–4)

In Depth

1. Wives' Submission Should Reflect Christ's Authority Over the Church (Ephesians 5:21–24)

Ephesians 5:21 is a general instruction to all believers to submit to one another in love. This principle is directly associated with verse 18, where Paul instructs believers to be filled with the Spirit. When we are living a Spirit-led life, God gives us the grace to live in an attitude of humility and submission to others. Paul addresses the wives first. He instructs wives to submit to their husbands “as unto the Lord” (verse 22). The word “submit” in this verse means to yield one’s rights or to cooperate. This word does not imply slavish obedience or being silent in the home. Though the household codes of ancient days often required a wife to obey her husband, Paul does not make this a requirement, as he does for children. Rather, he appeals to a wife’s dedication to God as a basis for submission to her husband. In other words, when a wife honors and respects her husband, she submits to God and His plan for the family.

In verse 23, Paul explains why a wife is to submit to her husband: because he is the “head” of the wife and family just as “Christ is the head of the church.” Christ was appointed by God to be the head of the church. On the basis of this

authority, the church is to submit to Him. Some people might conclude from these verses that there is an inequality between male and female. But Paul makes clear that in Christ, all are equal (see also 1 Corinthians 11:8–12; Galatians 3:28). Within this equality, however, order and respect for authority should exist.

2. Husbands' Love for Their Wives Should Reflect Christ's Love for the Church (vv. 25–33)

Paul now turns his attention to the husbands. Interestingly, he does not stress the husband’s authority or headship over the wife. Instead, Paul charges the husband to love his wife. And not only is the husband supposed to love the wife, he is to love her “even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (v. 25). A husband’s love for his wife is to follow the pattern of Christ’s love for the church. Christ’s love for the church was self-sacrificing. A self-sacrificing love is unselfish love. A husband with self-sacrificing love will demonstrate his love by seeking the best for his wife. This kind of love is committed and faithful, even through rough times. This kind of love does not depend on emotions or circumstances but strives to hold the marriage together forever. A loving, Christ-like husband will also provide for his wife. Just as the church is the body of Christ, a wife is a part of her husband. God says that a husband should love his wife just as he loves himself. As a husband nourishes, protects, and provides for his wife, he “loves himself” (vv. 28, 29). Christ’s love for the church is a secure love. The love of a husband for his wife should be the same (verse 31). When a couple marries, they become “one flesh.” Paul explains this as part of the “mystery” of marriage (v. 32). Within the security of this relationship, a wife can submit to her husband.

3. Children Should Be Obedient and Loved (Ephesians 6:1–4)

After discussing the husband-wife relationship, Paul now gives specific instructions to children. Children are exhorted to obey their parents “in the Lord,” that is, in the spirit of obedience as if they were obeying God (6:1). Paul also instructs children to obey their parents because it is the right thing to do. Obedience to parents is also a commandment of God (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16). And according to Ephesians 6:1–3, when a child honors, respects, and obeys his parents, that child is blessed. Just as children have a responsibility to obey their parents, parents also have responsibilities to their children. In verse 4, Paul speaks specifically to fathers as the head of the family. He first gives the fathers a negative instruction—“do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them” (v. 4, NLT). A father’s role in his child’s life makes a direct impact on the child’s concept of God the Father. Fathers, therefore, need to be watchful and consider how their behavior influences their children’s actions. Unreasonable expectations, harsh or unfair punishment, or playing favorites will dishearten a child and can lead to disillusionment or rebellion.

Instead of these behaviors, fathers are encouraged positively to “Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord” (v. 4). It is the father’s responsibility to see that his children are being raised according to God’s principles. Fathers are to nurture their children, which means to care for them tenderly and to lead them gently into God’s ways. Therefore, parents are to give correction and instruction with the goal of developing their child’s character and pointing the child toward righteousness. We give our children a great gift when we teach them how to obey God and His Word.

Search the Scriptures

1. Why are believers commanded to submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21)?
2. How are wives to submit to their husbands (v. 22)?
3. How are husbands to love their wives (v. 25)?
4. What specific instructions does Paul give to fathers (Ephesians 6:4)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. What does Paul mean when he says that wives should submit to their husbands just as the church submits to Christ (Ephesians 5:24)?
2. How can a husband love his wife as his own body (v. 28)? Why is this important?

Liberating Lesson

In our post-Christian culture, we are witnessing the breakdown of the family unit. Marriages are disintegrating. Children are disobedient and disrespectful to parents and others in authority. Families are important to God. He created them! He also laid out specific principles for creating a loving, harmonious family life. When we live according to these principles, a godly family is the result. And a godly, harmonious family is a living testimony to Christ’s love for the church.

Application for Activation

How can we serve one another in the home in the name and Spirit of Christ? Think about your relationship with each family member. Are you following God’s principles for family life? Pray that God would show you areas that need improvement, and then be willing to change and grow. Pray for your family members that they, too, would be willing to follow God’s plan for your family. If possible, pray together as a family, committing to grow together in God’s ways.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

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New Testament Greek Lexicon. Bible Study Tools.com. <http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/> (accessed October 24, 2011).

The NIV Study Bible. 10th Anniversary Edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995. 1800-1801.

Vine, W. E. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words. With Topical Index*. Edited by Merrill F. Unger and William White, Jr. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996.

Say It Correctly

Nurture. NUR-cher.
Admonition. ad-muh-NISH-un.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

God Is Love
(1 John 4:7–12)

TUESDAY

God's Gift of Love
(John 3:16–21)

WEDNESDAY

The Proof of God's Love
(Romans 5:6–11)

THURSDAY

The Example of Jesus' Love
(John 13:1–9)

FRIDAY

Abiding in Christ's Love
(John 15:9–17)

SATURDAY

Following the Commands of Christ
(1 John 3:18–24)

SUNDAY

Following the Example of Christ
(Ephesians 5:21–6:4)

KIA'S CHRISTIAN RIDE

PROCLAIMING CHRIST

LESSON AIM:

By the end of the lesson, teens will:

- (1) comprehend Paul's message of love for and toward the people, despite his incarceration;
- (2) reflect on the variety of motives for proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus the Christ; and (3)
- fashion a personal proclamation of the Gospel focusing on their motive and their message.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Bible, student magazines, pencils or pens, markers, craft paper, large Post-It sticky notes

OPEN THE LESSON

Open today's lesson with an activity. Prepare a self-adhesive label or post-it® note for each young person in your group. Write on it the name of a well-known or famous person who has made a positive impact in the lives of African Americans. Include a good mix of men and women. Keeping the names hidden, stick the self-adhesive notes on the foreheads of everyone in the group. They must then ask questions of the others to find out their identity. Only ten "yes" or "no" questions may be asked. If the answer is "no," their turn is over. If the answer is "yes," they can ask another question and keep going until they get a "no," or guess the person. Keep playing until everyone has guessed; if time is short, stop after the first few correct answers.

PRESENT THE SCRIPTURES

In today's passage, Paul gives us a visual image of what it looks like to live and die for Christ in the midst of life's challenges. Paul's motive of love is expressed through his message of love in his letter to the people of Philippi. In a media-driven world, we hear many messages without fully knowing what motivates the "messenger." Paul claimed that regardless of the person's intentions or

situation, the result was still that "Christ is proclaimed in every way."

EXPLORE THE MEANING

Unlike the other cities that were struggling with lack of faith, obedience, sacrifice, and love for Christ, the people of Philippi needed some guidance and support from Paul to keep them in right relationship with Christ. Therefore, this letter is a more loving letter versus the chastisement and harsh words in the others.

It is important to note that in the midst of Paul's suffering, he remained joyful. He was encouraged and strengthened by the love of the people of Philippi. He was excited about the exalting of Jesus' name, even in the midst of his imprisonment.

As your teens read the Scripture, encourage them to picture themselves in Paul's position. What does the text sound like? Feel like? Look like? Smell like?

Have your teens read the Scripture Discussion. Have them answer the questions in the Check It and Think It sections to make sure they understand the lesson.

NEXT STEPS FOR APPLICATION

Have the students read the Do It section of the student book. Refer to the Do It section of the student book. Guide your students on how to see and experience Christ in the midst of trouble using the five senses of

sound, speech, sight, touch, and smell. Encourage the students to seek Christ and what it might feel like once Christ is found and experienced—just like Paul when he found joy and expressed love in prison.

WORSHIP GUIDE

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: Proclaiming Christ

Theme Song: “I’m Trading My Sorrows”

Scripture: Philippians 1:15–26

Song: “How He Loves” by David Crowder Band

Prayer: Dear Jesus, may my love for You be reflected in the way that I treat others. In Jesus’ name, amen.

FROM THE STUDENT MAGAZINE

Kia’s Christian Ride

Kia was born and raised in a housing project in Harlem: 16-story brick buildings, eight apartments on each floor with 42 buildings in all. Kia’s parents were very nurturing, spiritual, loving, and active in Kia’s life. They stressed the importance of going to school, having hopes and dreams, and doing the best one could, despite adverse situations.

Some adverse situations included many of her peers not attending school, drug dealers on every corner, gangs, and many families who were on the lower scale of the income range. This was very challenging for Kia. She would hear the words and feel the love of her parents, but the adverse conditions she experienced when out of the presence of her parents were hard to resist, avoid, and remove.

Kia would remember the goals and dreams her parents encouraged her to create. She was never rude or disrespectful to those who thought and behaved differently; she was focused on her success and welcomed anyone who would like to join her on this Christian ride. She knew the importance of leading

by example and would encourage anyone along the way. Kia would make friends in the church and in school to keep positive images around her, despite having to pass through negativity as she traveled along the way. Kia’s motives to fulfill her hopes and dreams, which were rooted in Christ, matched her daily walk with Christ and, in turn, became an amazing witness to others.

Scripture Discussion

Paul celebrated the people of Philippi for their attempts to serve Christ, identified areas of improvement, led by example by praising and admonishing Christ, even in the midst of incarceration, and never gave up on the Word of God.

Paul reminds us that no matter what we are going through or what we may face, God is bigger and more powerful than our adverse situation. Paul leads by example by showing us how to continue to praise God, even when the situation seems to have us in bondage. His motive of love for the people matched his message of love to the people, despite his adverse situation.

Kia had her challenges. Surely she made some mistakes along the way. Nonetheless, Kia had hopes and dreams rooted in Christ, and she knew that in order to achieve those dreams, she must make decisions that match her motives. Paul had a similar situation. After years of proclaiming the Gospel of Christ, Paul was challenged with putting his teachings into practice. He was incarcerated due to false accusations. His incarceration could lead to death. Yet, Paul focused on his love for Christ and not his dire situation. Paul chose to focus on Jesus’ example of love in spite of his surroundings. Paul’s motive for loving and serving Christ resounded in his message of love to the people of Philippi.

Proclaiming Christ

Bible Background • PHILIPPIANS 1:12–30

Printed Text • PHILIPPIANS 1:15–26 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 119:169–176

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: COMPREHEND Paul’s message of joy in the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; REFLECT on the variety of motives for proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ; and FASHION a personal proclamation of the Gospel.

In Focus

Warren and Deloris drove home from the doctor’s office in silence. They both had a hundred thoughts passing through their heads. The doctor had actually said the word: cancer. If he were to live at all, Warren would have to undergo surgery and extensive chemotherapy. They would have to break the news to their children and grandchildren. Warren would also have to tell the church.

“Well,” Warren finally broke their silence, “this will certainly put my faith to the test. Now I must live what I have preached for so long.”

“Baby, don’t try to deny what you are really feeling about this. Not for my sake, not for the children’s, and not for the church’s sake, either,” Deloris responded.

“It’s not that,” Warren said. “I know that people will be watching me. It’s important to me that I will be able to praise the Lord throughout this ordeal, whether it means life or death. If I can’t, I’ll end up feeling like my entire life, not to mention my faith, has been just a front.”

Many things come into our lives that challenge our public witness. People are watching to see if we are for real. Paul teaches us how to walk with God through the fires of life.

Keep in Mind

“What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.”
(Philippians 1:18, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV Philippians 1:15 Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will:

16 The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds:

17 But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel.

18 What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.

19 For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

20 According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed,

but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.

21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

22 But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not.

23 For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:

24 Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.

25 And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith;

26 That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.

The People, Places, and Times

Prison. During the time that the New Testament was written, people could be imprisoned for nonpayment of debt (Matthew 5:25–26), political insurrection, criminal acts (Luke 23:19, 25), and for certain religious practices (Acts 8:3). The Apostle Paul was often in prison. On one occasion, he and Silas were placed under the charge of a lone jailer, who put them in an inner cell and placed their feet in stocks (Acts 16:23–24). The inner cell was probably for maximum security or solitary confinement. In Jerusalem, Paul was detained in a Roman barracks (Acts 23:11–18). In Caesarea, Paul's confinement did allow him some freedom, and he was allowed to have visitors (Acts 23:33–35). As he awaited trial in Rome, Paul was guarded constantly under a type of house arrest (Acts 28:16–17, 30). While there, he met his own expenses and was free to receive visitors and preach the Gospel.

Roman Empire. In the early days of the Christian movement, several emperors ruled the empire. Most of Paul's ministry is believed to have occurred under the reign of Gaius (Caligula, A.D. 37–41) and his aging uncle Claudius (A.D. 41–54). Claudius reportedly expelled some Jews from Rome because they were creating disturbances with their efforts to spread the Gospel. It is believed that both Paul and Peter were martyred during Nero's reign (A.D. 54–68), perhaps in connection with the burning of Rome in A.D. 64, an event for which Nero blamed Christians.

Background

It's interesting how some people can devote themselves to encouraging others in the midst of their own struggle. Many terminally-ill children, instead of feeling sorry for themselves, have been a source of encouragement for the families they leave behind. Paul was encouraging to his Christian family. Even

as he sat in prison, his letter was full of love, encouragement, and instruction for those who were carrying on the work. It is very likely that his co-laborers in Christ were feeling worse about Paul's imprisonment than he was. Paul recognized that his release from prison was uncertain. However, as he contemplated his fate, Paul did not lose faith in God. He did not become bitter or angry about his circumstances. He did not cease the work to which he had been called. Through good times and trials, Paul remained faithful to God and his task.

At-A-Glance

1. A New Effort (Philippians 1:15–18)
2. A Certain Victory (vv. 19–26)

In Depth

1. A New Effort (Philippians 1:15–18)

Paul's confinement led to many new efforts to spread the Gospel. No one particular movement could do the work. Some followers were stronger because Paul was in jail. Perhaps they felt they had to fill in the gap left by Paul's absence. Paul called into question the motives of those who were preaching about Christ. Some were preaching out of "envy and strife" (v. 15), while others were preaching out of genuine goodwill. Some may have been jealous of the attention Paul was receiving despite his imprisonment. This very well may have been the case in Rome where Christianity had been established before Paul came. His presence there may have posed a threat to the Christian leaders who were already there. Some were likely vying for Paul's leadership role within the Christian community, assuming he would not be released. His rivals must have felt that their success would cause Paul to become jealous, perhaps adding to his troubles. Instead, he

rejoiced that others were spreading the Gospel, regardless of their motives. Paul recognized that the Gospel is powerful enough to transcend human pettiness. If this were not so, the spread of the Gospel would have stopped at Calvary. There is no human who is truly worthy to preach the Gospel. It is fallen human nature to be affected by envy, strife, egotism, narcissism, and partisanship. From the pulpit, all kinds of motives fuel the Sunday morning sermon. Still, the Gospel is preached, and people come to Christ. Paul's solution was to continue making the Gospel known and rejoice that it came through multiple means. The Good News cannot be held hostage to human imperfection. No one can alter its power. Not even the worst example of Christianity can take away the power of the Gospel. Paul's message has many implications for the Christian community today.

2. A Certain Victory (vv. 19–26)

Paul was confident that his experience—of being both jailed and harassed by rival Christians—would lead to victory. He wrote confidently of salvation as a result of his circumstances (v. 19). Some translations refer to Paul's "deliverance," and others suggest that he was referring to salvation in its fullest sense. The latter is that full redemption would be realized through Christ. The apostle was sure of his dependency on Christ for the impending victory. He quoted Job 13:16 (the Septuagint—the Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures) where Job looked confidently to his ultimate vindication. There is no indication, however, that Paul was certain of his release from prison, nor did he appear to be excessively concerned about it. Paul's primary concern was not with life or death, as determined by the outcome of his trial. He appears to have been chiefly concerned with his own constitution, that he would not be afflicted with any manner of shame. Instead, he hoped for Christ to be "magnified" (Philippians

1:20). Paul was not looking to be a hero. He was willing to meet his fate, whether life or death, so that all could see how much Christ meant to him.

Paul stood at the crossroads between life and death. The apostle found favor in either outcome. Paul had no desire to escape death in favor of life. He viewed death as a portal into the greater realm of a life already filled with greatness. To Paul, life was Christ, who gave Paul's life meaning. Apart from Him, life held no meaning or purpose. Death, therefore, did not equal loss but gain. He knew that death was not final. Rather, it was an extension of his marching orders as a soldier in the army of the Lord. The life he knew in Christ would only become more magnificent through death. Conversely, if Paul's life was spared, he viewed it as an invitation to do more fruitful work for the kingdom. His only interest in being released from jail was that it would allow him to continue his ministry. He could preach the Gospel a while longer. He could continue to encourage the churches that had become so dear to him. Through life, he could continue to live and do more for Christ.

For years, Paul had been working in the trenches as a missionary—spreading the Gospel and encouraging and guiding the faithful. His hard work was just beginning to show results. Like a farmer who has been tending to trees hoping they will bear fruit, Paul is longing to see evidence of the harvest. He desires to stay because there is so much to be done. The two options the apostle faced did cause some divided feelings, which he expressed in verse 23. Understandably, Paul was pulled between his two options. Not that he viewed either as negative. Instead, in his heart, he longed to be with Christ. His was not a morbid desire, however. Paul probably envisioned a life with Christ too wonderful for the human spirit to totally conceive.

On the other hand, he wanted to be of service to his fellow Christians. He viewed the

continuance of life as being necessary only for the sake of the Philippians (v. 24). Paul was willing for his life to be used in whatever way the Lord deemed necessary. The Philippians were openly proud of Paul, whom they, in a sense, regarded as their own special apostle. Paul lovingly reminded them that Christ, not he, must remain the subject of their boasting. If he was to return to them, they should rejoice in the works of Jesus Christ, not himself. Paul's ability to have hope, even in the most hopeless of circumstances, came from his own experience of being granted new life after his former life had passed on. The boldness he possessed came from his certainty that Christ would be honored by him, whether through his life or his death.

Search the Scriptures

1. For what motives were some preaching the Gospel (Philippians 1:15–17)?
2. Why were motives unimportant in preaching the Gospel (v. 18)?
3. For what reason did Paul want to remain alive (v. 25)?
4. Of what benefit would his continued life be to the Philippians (v. 26)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Paul reached a high spiritual point that caused him to rejoice, whether the outcome of his trial meant life or death. How did he reach such a point of spiritual maturity?
2. Why were some of the Christians strengthened by Paul's imprisonment? Why did they not become fearful that the same thing might happen to them?

Liberating Lesson

Every Christian professes belief in eternal life. Yet, very often, when we think of death, we get scared at the uncertainty of our fate. Perhaps this is because we do not feel certain about our salvation. Some may doubt Christ's

promise. Our enslaved ancestors sang often of heaven—of the streets paved with gold, the pearly gates, where the Sabbath would have no end. They longed for the day when “trouble will be no more,” and every person would live in freedom and equality. Perhaps because there has been a general improvement in our social and economic standing, many of us now appear to place more value on life on earth than eternal life. No matter what attainments life holds, it can never compare to the future glory of life with Christ Jesus. As Christians, we must rejoice in our assurance of eternal life and leave the matter of when we will go to heaven in the hands of God.

Application for Activation

If you were told today that you may not live much longer, what preparation would you make to ensure that Christ would be glorified through your experience of passing from life to death?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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Say It Correctly

Philippians. fi-LIP-ee-uhn-z.
Praetorian. pray-TOR-ee-uhn.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Praising God in Word and Life
(Psalm 119:169–176)

TUESDAY

Giving Glory to God
(Matthew 5:13–16)

WEDNESDAY

Making the Word Fully Known
(Colossians 1:21–29)

THURSDAY

Sharing in the Gospel
(Philippians 1:1–7)

FRIDAY

Speaking the Word with Boldness
(Philippians 1:8–14)

SATURDAY

Toiling to Proclaim the Gospel
(1 Thessalonians 2:1–11)

SUNDAY

Proclaiming Christ in Every Way
(Philippians 1:15–26)