



# International Bible Lessons Commentary

Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series

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## **Philippians 1:12-21** **New American Standard Bible** **January 20, 2019**

The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, January 20**, is from **Philippians 1:12-21**.

**Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

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

Paul loved the Christians in the Philippian Church because he had led many of them to faith in Jesus Christ, and they had remained obedient servants of Jesus Christ. They supported his missionary work by their prayers, their financial assistance, and by sometimes sending someone from their church to help Paul in his ministry or in prison. Paul's letter to them reported that even though he was in prison, the spreading of the gospel continued through his efforts. And advancing the gospel was more important to Paul than any suffering he might experience while serving Jesus Christ, his Lord and Savior.

**(Philippians 1:13) so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else,**

A member of the imperial guard took Paul to Rome as a prisoner. The imperial guard was composed of official guards, subject to the orders of the Roman Emperor, and Paul had appealed his case to the Emperor. Paul had been shipwrecked and saved by a centurion of the imperial guard while a prisoner on the way to Rome. Paul shared the gospel with this centurion. Everyone who guarded Paul heard about Christ, and about how Christ had saved everyone from death when his ship sank. Eventually, all the imperial guard learned about Jesus Christ and that Paul was a prisoner because he believed in and taught about Jesus Christ. His willingness to suffer for his faith in Jesus Christ convinced many that his faith was authentic and firmly grounded in the truth of and about Jesus Christ.

**(Philippians 1:14) and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.**

Because Paul kept teaching the good news of Jesus Christ even in the face of danger and the threat of persecution, he served as a good example and still serves as a good example for us. He did so prayerfully, wisely, and with the leading of the Holy Spirit. Though he often suffered, he taught everyone about the faithfulness of God to him and about how God used every experience to help him teach more people about Jesus. Therefore, no matter what the personal cost, others in the church were encouraged to teach about Jesus too.

**(Philippians 1:15) Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will;**

Paul had many amazing, inspiring, and wonderful stories to tell about Jesus Christ and Christ's faithfulness and help. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to sacrifice to share the gospel in various situations, and Jesus Christ remained with him and rescued him many times when in danger and suffering. Christ's faithfulness to Paul and Paul's steadfast faith in Christ

influenced some people to envy Paul, so perhaps they proclaimed Christ in order to prove that they preached Christ better than Paul did. Others preached Christ because they prayed and hoped that their listeners would receive and accept the good news of salvation from their preaching.

**(Philippians 1:16) the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel;**

The proper motive for proclaiming the good news about Jesus is love for God, Christ, the Church, and those who do not yet know Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. Rather than assume that Paul's imprisonment was God's punishment for some hidden sins, and they could do better than Paul could, they preached Christ knowing the real reason Paul suffered imprisonment was because he loved Christ and others and tried to explain the truth of the gospel to those who initially rejected Christ or might reject Christ and persecute him for his preaching.

**(Philippians 1:17) the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment.**

The opposite of preaching from love and seeking the good of others is preaching in order to promote one's personal self-interest, to advance one's career, to make more money or to have power over others. Selfish ambition is the opposite of love for God and others, and its root is self-centeredness. Some preached the gospel to try to prove that they were superior to Paul, and because they were not in prison, they assumed they were superior to Paul. They wanted to gloat over Paul and make his suffering worse. Furthermore, Paul suffered affliction as he prayed fervently that those proclaiming Christ from selfishness would not eventually mislead faithful Christians away from the true gospel.

**(Philippians 1:18) What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice,**

Paul did not justify those who preached from a wrong motive. He did not

say that it was okay to preach from a wrong motive, as though it did not matter to God whether a person preached from love for God or supreme love for self—selfishness. Paul did mean that he was not going to let the false motives of some and the efforts of some to hurt him bother him. He could rejoice in the fact that the gospel of Jesus Christ was preached, and some came to saving faith (even though the gospel was preached by some who had a false motive or unchristian reason for preaching). Thankfully, God can use the misguided efforts of some to save others.

**(Philippians 1:19) for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,**

Paul knew the vital importance of prayer—Jesus sometimes prayed all night. Paul told the Philippians how crucial their prayers were for him to continue to preach the gospel effectively. Paul also acknowledged how important the Spirit of Jesus Christ was to direct and empower Christian prayer, to work upon the hearts and minds of those who came to faith through Paul’s preaching, and to work on those who imprisoned or persecuted him, so they would act better and perhaps come to faith in Christ too. Paul did not believe he should just sit and wait and suffer in prison to see what would happen next; rather, Paul asked for prayers that he would be delivered from prison to continue his missionary journey—he believed and taught that praying Christians could make a difference because God answers prayers.

**(Philippians 1:20) according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.**

Paul trusted in prayer and Jesus Christ, who inspired and answered Christian prayers. Therefore, he expected to honor Christ by what he said and did, as well as by whatever happened to him, because Christ would be with him and work in and with him. Paul did not take these blessings from Christ for granted, and that is why he said it was his “eager expectation and hope” when he spoke boldly. He wanted to live faithful and die faithful;

then, either way he could exalt Christ. He prayed that if he died his death would honor Christ, but he also prayed to keep living so he could keep honoring Christ in this world.

**(Philippians 1:21) For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.**

Jesus lived with Paul spiritually, and Jesus Christ filled Paul with His spirit, the Holy Spirit. Paul chose to follow Jesus Christ at all times and leave the consequences of his following Jesus Christ with Jesus Christ, his King and Redeemer. He lived for Christ at all times and for him “living is Christ.” He obeyed Christ at all times, so if the best result of his obedience was that “he died” this was also gain for him—for he would go to live with Christ in heaven, which would be far better for him personally.

### **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further**

1. Thinking of the good consequences of Paul’s imprisonment, can you think of any other examples in the Bible when something bad happened to someone and God worked it out for good?
2. Since Paul was a faithful apostle of Jesus Christ, how would you explain to someone why Paul was in prison?
3. What are some of the ways Paul serves as a good example for other Christians to follow?
4. What might you say to someone who expressed envy or jealousy of another Christian?
5. What are some good reasons for telling others about Jesus Christ?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly  
*International Bible Lesson.*

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