

CONVERSATION GUIDE:

OPENING QUESTIONS:

- When (or have you) faced opposition for your faith?
- What does it mean to you that suffering can be a gift from God?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How does Paul's perspective on suffering challenge our modern views?
- What does it mean that our resistance can be a sign of others' destruction but our salvation?
- How can we maintain joy in the midst of opposition?
- What role does community play in facing persecution?
- Are you going through anything you need your community's support as you face it?

PERSONAL APPLICATION:

- Reflect on times when standing firm in faith was difficult.
- Consider how your suffering might be used by God for redemption.
- Examine areas where you might be compromising to avoid conflict.

GROUP FOCUS:

- Share experiences of standing firm in faith despite opposition.
- Pray for those facing persecution for their faith.
- Discuss ways to support each other when facing cultural pressure.
- Thank God for both the gift of salvation and the privilege of suffering for Christ.



WEEK 10 THE JOY OF A CLEAR SIGN (PHILIPPIANS 1:27-30)

TODAY'S VERSES:

Philippians 1:27-30 1 Thessalonians 2:1-2 Philippians 3:10
Acts 16:11-12 John 1:12-13 2 Timothy 4:8
2 Timothy 3:12

MARCH 16, 2025

WEEK 10 THE JOY OF A CLEAR SIGN

Paul starts the first part of Philippians by talking about his emotions and struggles; he will then spin it back to talk about the Philippians' struggle (which is actually the same struggle). Paul has idea stacked on idea stacked on idea that points to our life in Christ, our life with one another, and the Kingdom of God.

Nero was emperor at the time Paul wrote his letter. Nero had two ways he wanted himself described: *kyrios* (which means LORD) and *soter* (which means savior). Nero, the Roman emperor, was referred to by the masses as 'our Lord and Savior'. "He brings about peace, and we are citizens of the empire by his goodness and we are blessed because of Caesar." Rome was a military machine that believed they were gods sent to bring the earth together with violence under one name. If you lived in Philippi you had a strong sense of a Roman military heritage. So, Paul instead says that we proclaim: Jesus is Lord and Savior!

Jesus is Lord – Paul is telling the Philippians that he knows things are getting worse and it is getting harder to be a Christian without paying a price. Everyone is coerced to bow down and worship Caesar and not Jesus; Paul himself writes this from prison partly because he is refusing to submit to the empire the way they want. He tells them that they need to stand firm side by side.

The joy of a clear sign - "This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God." We live in a world today that is trying to force us to discount what God has said and to deny His truth. How do we stand firm when our cultural viewpoint on truth stands so at odds? **"a clear sign"** – This is a word that means to show forth or point out with the finger, the word is *endeixis*; it means that something will be shown or pointed out.

...it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer... "Granted" is the word for grace or gift. The word suffer means that when you do the right thing in the face of opposition (telling the truth when no one else will) you will be granted (graced) with suffering. For Paul, salvation *and* suffering is a gift. It is not random suffering, it means that God will use it to bring about redemption; suffering that will be redeemed.

If Jesus went to the cross for us what makes us think our lives, reflecting His, wouldn't be the same? If we confront a world that is falling apart, how are we not going to bump up against something that is hard and hurts.

- If you love, in a Biblical standard of love, you will run up against hate.
- If you are generous in a Biblical way you will run up against greed.
- If you pursue real forgiveness and justice you will run up against revenge and vengeance.
- If you love your enemies you will run up against people who only know how to destroy their enemies.

What did the Romans do to those who didn't fall in line? Crucifixion. What does our culture do today? Crucifixion, just in a different way. Don't be overcome with hatred for those who are lost, stand for truth the way Jesus did: with honesty and grace.

Paul's point was that he and the Philippians were all recipients of grace as they had been given the gifts of salvation and suffering. John Calvin wrote, "Oh, if this conviction were fixed in our minds, that persecutions are to be reckoned among God's benefits, what progress would be made in the doctrine of godliness!" The understanding that suffering and salvation are both gifts of grace are essential to discipleship and perseverance.