



READING GUIDE — WEEK 29

PAUL'S MISSION

Phil. 3:3b-9; Gal. 1:13-2:14; 1 Thess. 2:1-12; 2 Cor. 11:23-29;
Acts 8:1b-3, 9:1-30, 11:25-30, 22:1-21, 26:2-23

Philippians 3

3b We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort, 4 though I could have confidence in my own effort if anyone could. Indeed, if others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more! 5 I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. 6 I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault. 7 I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. 8 Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ 9 and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith.

Galatians 1

13 You know what I was like when I followed the Jewish religion—how I violently persecuted God's church. I did my best to destroy it. 14 I was far ahead of my fellow Jews in my zeal for the traditions of my ancestors. 15 But even before I was born, God chose me and called me by his marvelous grace. Then it pleased him 16 to reveal his Son to me so that I would proclaim the Good News about Jesus to the Gentiles. When this happened, I did not rush out to consult with any human being. 17 Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to consult with those who were apostles before I was. Instead, I went away into Arabia, and later I returned to the city of Damascus. 18 Then three years later I went to Jerusalem to get to know Peter, and I stayed with him for fifteen days. 19 The only other apostle I met at that time was James, the Lord's brother. 20 I declare before God that what I am writing to you is not a lie. 21 After that visit I went north into the provinces of Syria and Cilicia. 22 And still the Christians in the churches in Judea didn't know me personally. 23 All they knew was that people were saying, "The one who used to persecute us is now preaching the very faith he tried to destroy!" 24 And they praised God because of me.

Galatians 2

THE APOSTLES ACCEPT PAUL

1 Then fourteen years later I went back to Jerusalem again, this time with Barnabas; and Titus came along, too. 2 I went there because God revealed to me that I should go. While I was there I met privately with those considered to be leaders of the church and shared with them the message I had been preaching to the Gentiles. I wanted to make sure that we were in agreement, for fear that all my efforts had been wasted and I was running the race for nothing. 3 And they supported me and did not even demand that my companion Titus be circumcised, though he was a Gentile. 4 Even that question came up only because of some so-called Christians there—false ones, really—who were secretly brought in. They sneaked in to spy on us and take away the freedom we have in Christ Jesus. They wanted to enslave us and force us to follow their Jewish regulations. 5 But we refused to give in to them for a single moment. We wanted to preserve the truth of the gospel message for you. 6 And the leaders of the church had nothing to add to what I was preaching. (By the way, their reputation as great leaders made no difference to me, for God has no favorites.) 7 Instead, they saw that God had given me the responsibility of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as he had given Peter the responsibility of preaching to the Jews. 8 For the same God who worked through Peter as the apostle to the Jews also worked through me as the apostle to the Gentiles. 9 In fact, James, Peter, and John, who were known as pillars of the church, recognized the gift God had given me, and they accepted Barnabas and me as their co-workers. They encouraged us to keep preaching to the Gentiles, while they continued their work with the Jews. 10 Their only suggestion was that we keep on helping the poor, which I have always been eager to do.

PAUL CONFRONTS PETER

11 But when Peter came to Antioch, I had to oppose him to his face, for what he did was very wrong. 12 When he first arrived, he ate with the Gentile Christians, who were not circumcised. But afterward, when some friends of James came, Peter wouldn't eat with the Gentiles anymore. He was afraid of criticism from these people who insisted on the necessity of circumcision. 13 As a result, other Jewish Christians followed

Peter's hypocrisy, and even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. 14 When I saw that they were not following the truth of the gospel message, I said to Peter in front of all the others, "Since you, a Jew by birth, have discarded the Jewish laws and are living like a Gentile, why are you now trying to make these Gentiles follow the Jewish traditions?"

1 Thessalonians 2

PAUL REMEMBERS HIS VISIT

1 You yourselves know, dear brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not a failure.2 You know how badly we had been treated at Philippi just before we came to you and how much we suffered there. Yet our God gave us the courage to declare his Good News to you boldly, in spite of great opposition.3 So you can see we were not preaching with any deceit or impure motives or trickery. 4 For we speak as messengers approved by God to be entrusted with the Good News. Our purpose is to please God, not people. He alone examines the motives of our hearts.5 Never once did we try to win you with flattery, as you well know. And God is our witness that we were not pretending to be your friends just to get your money!6 As for human praise, we have never sought it from you or anyone else. 7 As apostles of Christ we certainly had a right to make some demands of you, but instead we were like children among you. Or we were like a mother feeding and caring for her own children.8 We loved you so much that we shared with you not only God's Good News but our own lives, too.

9 Don't you remember, dear brothers and sisters, how hard we worked among you? Night and day we toiled to earn a living so that we would not be a burden to any of you as we preached God's Good News to you.10 You yourselves are our witnesses—and so is God—that we were devout and honest and faultless toward all of you believers.11 And you know that we treated each of you as a father treats his own children.12 We pleaded with you, encouraged you, and urged you to live your lives in a way that God would consider worthy. For he called you to share in his Kingdom and glory.

2 Corinthians 11

23 Are they servants of Christ? I know I sound like a madman, but I have served him far more! I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again.24 Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes.25 Three times I was beaten with rods.

Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea.26 I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not.27 I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm. 28 Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of my concern for all the churches.29 Who is weak without my feeling that weakness? Who is led astray, and I do not burn with anger?

Acts 8

PERSECUTION SCATTERS THE BELIEVERS

A great wave of persecution began that day, sweeping over the church in Jerusalem; and all the believers except the apostles were scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria.2 (Some devout men came and buried Stephen with great mourning.)3 But Saul was going everywhere to destroy the church. He went from house to house, dragging out both men and women to throw them into prison.

Acts 9

SAUL'S CONVERSION

1 Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord's followers. So he went to the high priest.2 He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains.

3 As he was approaching Damascus on this mission, a light from heaven suddenly shone down around him.4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?" 5 "Who are you, lord?" Saul asked. And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting!6 Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." 7 The men with Saul stood speechless, for they heard the sound of someone's voice but saw no one!8 Saul picked himself up off the ground, but when he opened his eyes he was blind. So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus.9 He remained there blind for three days and did not eat or drink. 10 Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord!" he replied. 11 The Lord said, "Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you get there, ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying to me right now.12 I have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming in and laying hands on him so he can see again." 13 "But Lord," exclaimed Ananias, "I've heard many people talk about the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem! 14 And he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest everyone who calls upon your name." 15 But the Lord said, "Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel.16 And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake."

17 So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."18 Instantly something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized.19 Afterward he ate some food and regained his strength.

SAUL IN DAMASCUS AND JERUSALEM

Saul stayed with the believers in Damascus for a few days.20 And immediately he began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is indeed the Son of God!" 21 All who heard him were amazed. "Isn't this the same man who caused such devastation among Jesus' followers in Jerusalem?" they asked. "And didn't he come here to arrest them and take them in chains to the leading priests?" 22 Saul's preaching became more and more powerful, and the Jews in Damascus couldn't refute his proofs that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.23 After a while some of the Jews plotted together to kill him.24 They were watching for him day and night at the city gate so they could murder him, but Saul was told about their plot.25 So during the night, some of the other believers lowered him in a large basket through an opening in the city wall. 26 When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to meet with the believers, but they were all afraid of him. They did not believe he had truly become a believer!27 Then Barnabas brought him to the apostles and told them how Saul had seen the Lord on the way to Damascus and how the Lord had spoken to Saul. He also told them that Saul had preached boldly in the name of Jesus in Damascus.

28 So Saul stayed with the apostles and went all around Jerusalem with them, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord.29 He debated with some Greek-speaking Jews, but they tried to murder him.30 When the believers heard about this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus, his hometown.

Acts 11

25 Then Barnabas went on to Tarsus to look for Saul.26 When he found him, he brought him back to Antioch. Both of them stayed there with the church for a full year, teaching large crowds of people. (It was at Antioch that the believers were first called Christians.) 27 During this time some prophets traveled from Jerusalem to Antioch.28 One of them named Agabus stood up in one of the meetings and predicted by the Spirit that a great famine was coming upon the entire Roman world. (This was fulfilled during the reign of Claudius.)29 So the believers in Antioch decided to send relief to the brothers and sisters in Judea, everyone giving as much as they could.30 This they did, entrusting their gifts to Barnabas and Saul to take to the elders of the church in Jerusalem.

Acts 22

1 "Brothers and esteemed fathers," Paul said, "listen to me as I offer my defense."2 When they heard him speaking in their own language, the silence was even greater. 3 Then Paul said, "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, and I was brought up and educated here in Jerusalem under Gamaliel. As his student, I was carefully trained in our Jewish laws and customs. I became very zealous to honor God in everything I did, just like all of you today.4 And I persecuted the followers of the Way, hounding some to death, arresting both men and women and throwing them in prison.5 The high priest and the whole council of elders can testify that this is so. For I received letters from them to our Jewish brothers in Damascus, authorizing me to bring the Christians from there to Jerusalem, in chains, to be punished. 6 "As I was on the road, approaching Damascus about noon, a very bright light from heaven suddenly shone down around me.7 I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' 8 "'Who are you, lord?' I asked. "And the voice replied, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, the one you are persecuting.'9 The people with me saw the light but didn't understand the voice speaking to me. 10 "I asked, 'What should I do, Lord?' "And the Lord told me, 'Get up and go into Damascus, and there you will be told everything you are to do.' 11 "I was blinded by the intense light and had to be led by the hand to Damascus by my companions.12 A man named Ananias lived there. He was a godly man, deeply devoted to the law, and well regarded by all the Jews of Damascus.13 He came and stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, regain your sight.' And that very moment I could see him!

14 "Then he told me, 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and hear him speak.15 For you are to be his witness, telling everyone what you have seen and heard.16 What are you waiting for? Get up and be baptized. Have your sins washed away by calling on the name of the Lord.'

17 "After I returned to Jerusalem, I was praying in the Temple and fell into a trance.18 I saw a vision of Jesus saying to me, 'Hurry! Leave Jerusalem, for the people here won't accept your testimony about me.'

19 "'But Lord,' I argued, 'they certainly know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you.20 And I was in complete agreement when your witness Stephen was killed. I stood by and kept the coats they took off when they stoned him.'

21 "But the Lord said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles!'"

Acts 26

2 Paul said, "I am fortunate, King Agrippa, that you are the one hearing my defense today against all these accusations made by the Jewish leaders,3 for I know you are an expert on all Jewish customs and controversies. Now please listen to me patiently!

4 "As the Jewish leaders are well aware, I was given a thorough Jewish training from my earliest childhood among my own people and in Jerusalem.5 If they would admit it, they know that I have been a member of the Pharisees, the strictest sect of our religion.6 Now I am on trial because of my hope in the fulfillment of God's promise made to our ancestors.7 In fact, that is why the twelve tribes of Israel zealously worship God night and day, and they share the same hope I have. Yet, Your Majesty, they accuse me for having this hope!8 Why does it seem incredible to any of you that God can raise the dead?

9 "I used to believe that I ought to do everything I could to oppose the very name of Jesus the Nazarene.10 Indeed, I did just that in Jerusalem. Authorized by the leading priests, I caused many believers there to be sent to prison. And I cast my vote against them when they were condemned to death.11 Many times I had them punished in the synagogues to get them to curse Jesus. I was so violently opposed to them that I even chased them down in foreign cities.

12 "One day I was on such a mission to Damascus, armed with the authority and commission of the leading priests.13 About noon, Your Majesty, as I was on the road, a light from heaven brighter than the sun shone down on me and my companions.14 We all fell down, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic,

'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is useless for you to fight against my will.'

15 "'Who are you, lord?' I asked.

"And the Lord replied, 'I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting.16 Now get to your feet! For I have appeared to you to appoint you as my servant and witness. You are to tell the world what you have seen and what I will show you in the future.17 And I will rescue you from both your own people and the Gentiles. Yes, I am sending you to the Gentiles18 to open their eyes, so they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Then they will receive forgiveness for their sins and be given a place among God's people, who are set apart by faith in me.'

19 "And so, King Agrippa, I obeyed that vision from heaven.20 I preached first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that all must repent of their sins and turn to God—and prove they have changed by the good things they do.21 Some Jews arrested me in the Temple for preaching this, and they tried to kill me.22 But God has protected me right up to this present time so I can testify to everyone, from the least to the greatest. I teach nothing except what the prophets and Moses said would happen—23 that the Messiah would suffer and be the first to rise from the dead, and in this way announce God's light to Jews and Gentiles alike."