

**Text:** Philippians 1:27-30

**Title:** Conduct Worthy of the Gospel

**Truth:** Our church must be unified and ready to face difficulties for Christ.

**Date/Location:** Sunday January 2, 2022 at FBC

## Introduction

Paul switches gears from his situation (1:12-26) to the Philippians' circumstances (1:27 and following). In the earlier section, Paul expressed confidence that he will not be killed by the authorities and will have an opportunity to continue his ministry travels and even visit with the Philippian church. This is all good because it means fruit for his labor. If that does not work out, he will depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

The next verses say that in Paul's absence, the Philippian Christians are to live in a way that matches the gospel they profess.

### I. Unified Gospel Conduct, v. 27

A. Regardless of when or whether Paul comes to Philippi (since it might be a little while, if ever), he wants them to conduct their lives in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ. This is a broad statement that encompasses a lot of "spiritual territory." To live worthy of the gospel is, in short, to live righteously as an ambassador for Jesus in your world. This is because the gospel calls us out of darkness to be a special people for God who proclaim his praises (1 Peter 2:9) and to do good works (Titus 2:14).

Conduct unworthy of the gospel of Christ is impermissible. You cannot say that you are a follower of Christ but then not in fact follow Him. In other words, it must be that "your yes means yes and your no means no." You are a person of integrity. What you say you believe and practice you do your best to believe and practice, rather than being a hypocrite. Isaiah 29:13 talks about people who draw near to God in words, but their inner desires are far from God. Jesus echoes this in Matthew 15:7-9 about those who teach for doctrines the commandments of men.

B. If the Philippians lived with sincerity and genuineness, Paul would see or hear from afar of their conduct and he would be

encouraged that they were progressing in joy and faith (v. 25). They were to do this in two specific ways:

1) UNITY: standing fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel – v. 27;

2) COURAGE: not being terrified by their adversaries – v. 28.

C. The general idea in the first of those two points is unity of goal, purpose, mind, and affections for the gospel of Jesus Christ. Lifestyle in that direction is then an obvious follow-on to the shared mindset.

Underlying this is that the believers in Philippi continued to persevere in the faith—by personal faith, sound belief, and good works. Good works as I am understanding them here are somewhat narrowly focused on the gospel ministry of the church.

On top of that sound foundation, Paul is calling for us to be *unified* in our lives in the church. The church is set up to be a light to the world (Philippians 2:15) but it will not shine brightly if it is not working together carefully for the faith of the gospel.

A lot of resistance to what God wants will dim our light. Each of us needs to be forbearing, forgiving, willing to bend to what Scripture teaches so that we can accomplish this God-ordained unity which is established by the Holy Spirit and must be maintained by diligent attention in the church (Eph. 4:3).

D. An implication of this is that we need to have an agreed-upon direction toward which to point ourselves. Our church's doctrinal statement and constitution is that common shared direction. Our church covenant is one section of the constitution, and we should revisit it regularly to remind ourselves of what we strive together for the faith of the gospel. Our worship services implement that doctrine and practice in part. But also, we need to have a common desire and way in which we work to bring outsiders *into* the faith and then the church. And we also need to have a common shared practice about how we interact with one another in love, in mutual admonition, encouragement.

## II. Courage in the Face of Opposition, v. 28

A. The second point that Paul wants to see operational in the church is that we would not be afraid of adversaries. The opposition may bring inconvenience and suffering. But we are not to be afraid of it. The man who fears the Lord does not fear bad news. Instead, his/her heart is steadfast, trusting in God (Psalm 112:7).

A fearful attitude is opposed to a faithful attitude. The focus of fear is self and the party inducing the fear; the focus of faith is outward, toward the object of faith, which is God. We could say that what you fear the most will be demonstrated through either faith toward God, or fear toward man.

B. Why not to be afraid? For one thing, suffering imposed by humans can only go so far. Matt 10:28 says that we should not fear those who can kill only the body. But after that, there is nothing more they can do since we will depart and be with Christ. For another thing, mankind is not to be feared as much as the living God (Heb. 10:31). We should fear God, because he can kill the body and *also* consign us to eternal punishment—or provide eternal rescue from unrighteousness.

C. The "not being frightened by your opponents" is a two-fold sign or proof of the just work of God. I take it that the last phrase, "and that from God" refers to both the salvation and the perdition.

1. On the one hand, the fact that the Christians are not frightened at persecution forms a proof to the persecutors that they are in big trouble. Perdition means destruction. They are destined for destruction because of their unrighteous activity. That the church does not fear them means that there is something bigger than the persecutors that the church fears/believes. That something bigger is God, with whom the persecutors will have to deal in due course. From the unbelievers' perspective, the lack of fear in the Christian is a sign or proof, an *omen*, an ominous indicator of something bad to come.

2. Patiently taking suffering without being terrified is also proof of faith, and thus of God's just work of providing salvation to those who truly entrust themselves to their Savior Jesus Christ. The

believer's perseverance shows his/her faith, and God promises salvation to those who exercise faith.

### III. The Explanation of Suffering, v. 29-30

A. This Christian mindset on suffering is important to consider. We are not speaking about suffering in general which all people endure because of our cursed world, but about suffering specifically for Christ. Note that verse 29 has "on behalf of Christ" and "for His sake," twice emphasizing that our suffering is connected to Christ. It is not just run-of-the-mill suffering.

B. We are to expect suffering because Jesus suffered (1 Peter 2:21, John 15:20). 1 Peter 1:11 adds the idea that suffering is the pathway to glory for Christ, and it is the same for us as believers.

We should remember that there is a special blessing given to those who suffer for righteousness (Matt 5:10, 12). There are also here-and-now benefits to suffering, in producing patience and holiness that we would not otherwise gain if everything were smooth sailing.

C. But in our text specifically, there are two explanations given for the suffering: one has to do with the Philippians connection to Christ; the other with their connection to Paul.

D. We are to expect suffering because God has granted it to us. Verse 29 lays this out clearly. Suffering is a "grace gift" of God (NRSV translates this as God *graciously granted you the privilege*). It is something freely given by God. It is a good thing, not a bad thing God counts His people worthy to suffer for his name (Acts 5:41). God not only gives us the privilege to believe in Christ, but also to suffer for his sake. The grace of belief brings with it a relationship with Christ; this relationship causes the world to hate the believer; then the believer faces suffering as a result. So, it is a good thing to have a personal relationship with Christ, but it brings some inherent liabilities with it, from the perspective of our relationships in the world.

The notion that we have been given to believe and suffer "on behalf of Christ" is somewhat puzzling. One dictionary says that "on behalf of" means for the benefit of or in the interest of, or it

means as the agent of. Christ suffered on our behalf; now in a sense we suffer on his behalf. He suffered so that we could have eternal life; we suffer so that His name can be spread abroad.

Note that God has **given us the privilege to believe** in Christ. That is a gift. God also granted us the **grace of repentance** that leads to life (Acts 11:18).

- E. We are to also to expect suffering because God's other servants, like Paul, were experiencing the same type of conflict. Perhaps governmental pressure for emperor worship would soon be coming to the Philippians, basically in the same way that Paul was suffering. In addition, the Philippians had seen Paul's suffering firsthand (Acts 16:19-24; 1 Thess. 2:2). And they presently are hearing about his suffering as a prisoner in Rome (1:13). Believers should expect to suffer like their partners in the faith, but the comforting thing is that they are together in the suffering, not isolated from one another. And even if not suffering together, we must regard ourselves as having a kind of solidarity with those who are suffering and remember them in their suffering (Col. 4:18, Heb. 13:3). The Philippians already were partners with Paul in his gospel work, as well as in his chains (Philippians 1:7).
- F. We may wonder why we haven't experienced such sufferings. Or maybe we worry how we will handle suffering when it comes. Or maybe we feel guilty that we have not suffered but know that we should have. We should pray that any Christian who is suffering will do so in the way Paul tells us here.
- G. If we truly stand fast in one spirit, strive together for the faith of the gospel, and are not intimidated by the persecution of unbelievers, we will probably face more suffering for Christ!

## Conclusion

Paul's hope is not only that the church would be of like mind and working together for the gospel, but that also they would not be frightened or intimidated by their adversaries. Paul's command in verse 27 is to have our conduct be worthy of Christ's gospel. Part of worthy conduct to be unified, and part of it is not to fear

adversaries. This should be our aim whether our spiritual overseers are looking on at the time or not.

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