

Philippians 1:27-30 Together for the Gospel

[27] Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, [28] and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. [29] For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, [30] engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

We don't need to change our fundamental characters to rally around a good cause. We see one, like St. Jude, and we gladly join many others to donate, or run, or volunteer. It is the common grace of God we see in this world that many people who have no hope beyond what they can see still contribute to a greater good, a good greater than themselves. The image of God is not silenced among the noisy throng of humanity. Though there's no saving merit in it, we can join with these image bearers to express selflessness and kindness for whatever need is facing our world, and as believers we can do that for God's glory. For that kind of cooperation we can be thankful.

ILL: In 1980, many of you remember it well—a group of 20-somethings held up their bottles of Coca-Cola to the tune of “I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing.” (Quote lyrics¹)

As good as that sounds and as much as that might warm or move the hearts of many, such a utopian desire cannot be fully realized by the sharing of a cold drink or even a good-will marathon with a great cause. More is needed to hear harmony in the world. More is necessary for peace. And more is essential for the sustaining of these. A sweeter and deeper community of cooperation does endure in our world today, and Paul lets us in on this sweet cooperation which is found around the gospel of Christ. It's sweet because love is governing the relationships, and it's deep because it's rooted in the Trinity itself. This is a love that's focused on Christ whom God sent to save and of whom the Holy Spirit is always underscoring.

After Paul gives his perspective on the current situation at Philippi in verses 12-18, and after he expresses such confidence in God and what lies ahead for all the saints in verses 19-26, God offers a word of instruction through Paul to these brothers and sisters. And here it is again...*In the face of opposition, we are to strive daily, in concert with one another, to show the worth of Christ and His gospel.* It's a call to narrow the gap between their belief and behavior; to make good on the creed they profess with the conduct they display.

First we note in our text...

I. The Sole Command to Obey

27 Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ...

¹ Google, <https://goo.gl/ZguX54>

Our manner of life, our conduct, the way we speak, carry ourselves, how we behave in the presence of evil, in the presence of power, in the presence of the needy. It's as if Paul is paring things down to this one thing: Whatever exudes from your life, don't misrepresent the grace and kindness and service and courage and teachings of this One person and this One person's great saving mercies, Jesus Christ.

Paul is not saying that your manner is winning you worth with God—no! Not at all! He is saying that based on what has been won for you by Christ, live in that light, live in that truth. This phrase “*your manner of life*” was often used in connection with expressing citizenship.² There's probably a seasoned pastor watching on live feed right now who is seeing that word, *πολιτεύεσθε*,³ which is the where we get our words *politics* from. This is a plural verb—only *let your manner*, together, all of you reading this letter. As the idea of politics would convey, it speaks to those in any given country that are being governed, and those people are called citizens. Remember how Matt led us in thinking about Philippi as a min-Rome. That's how it was viewed in Paul's day. And when we understand that in light of Paul's comment here, we make the connection that just as when people met citizens in Philippi, they would be tasting a little piece of Rome, in like fashion you believers, when people encounter you together, there should be a flavor or foretaste left with them that your citizenship belongs somewhere else, not just Philippi, but heaven itself, and that your Lord is someone else, not Caesar, but the LORD Christ. Paul's juxtaposing the elevated status of Philippian citizenship in a Roman kingdom with a greater citizenship of believers to an unshakable kingdom. He's not throwing away the importance of one, only to exalt the other, but he is reminding them of their identity and their sure place while they live in this world. He'll tell them later that “*our citizenship is in heaven.*” Our lives under the rule of King Jesus will always trump our lives under the rule of the executive, judicial and legislative branches of this or any country. It doesn't negate those, and I think a lock-tight argument could be made that our heavenly allegiances only strengthen our citizenship here.

The central point is, we have a particular kind of life to live in Christ—one where together we make the gospel visible to the world.⁴ And that begs another great question, “O God, can we really live in such a way that Your gospel is perceived, expressed, exalted, esteemed, better understood?” We know that much of what we call evangelicalism, we have to admit, has an homely look about it. We have these curves and slants of antinomianism and legalism, culture warriors and KJV only Biblicists, entertainment-soaked worship styles and worship expressions that make Ezekiel's dry bones look spirited. To the untrained eye, T.D. Jakes and J.D. Greear are thick as thieves, which only exacerbates how others view Christians around the world. The raw truth is that there are a lot of things wrong with the church, with genuine believers. The deal in our salvation was not to rid us of all fallenness and weakness, but that through them God's power and sufficiency might be evident. But the answer to the original question, “Can I live to display the gospel?” is yes, or else why the command? God has given us what we need to live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, beginning with that very gospel that grounds our lives and energizes our joy. So, what is that manner?

II. A Sturdy Obedience to the command

² D.A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: A Study of Philippians*, 67.

³ Greek New Testament, esv.org

⁴ Mark Dever, *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible*.

27 ...so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, [28] and not frightened in anything by your opponents.

A. Stand in solidarity, untied to a personality

Paul essentially makes his presence extraneous. Wherever I am, no matter. What matters is how you are navigating through life in whatever circumstances you find yourself in.

ILL: That's what a parent does, right? Our hopes in raising our children is that when the day comes when we are not with them, we want to hear often that our children are standing firm and confident in the gospel. I'm living in these thoughts right now. Many of you have lived in them already. But as a parent, I don't necessarily want my life and personality to dominate my children, but that they might be led by Christ, finding in Him deep things they can never discover in me or Jessica. Finding in Him a greater Father, a remarkable Savior, a Helper, a strength-giver, and a God who is ever calling them to tie their lives to other believers—wherever their feet land.

This is what Paul is saying—I know I brought you the gospel of truth, and that you have learned the gospel way from my life and teaching, but whether I come to you or am absent, I want to hear that, as you are being opposed by the unbelieving world, you are standing firm together. And we need the solidarity called for if indeed opposition is inevitable. Who charges an army alone? Or what country goes into war without allies and support from other countries? It is arrogant and lazy to think that we can mosey through this life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ without the joy, the instruction, the accountability, the comfort, the encouragement of God's people. Like a wall of defense against the enemy, bricks erected side by side, we stand. This metaphor *stand* was often used for soldiers who were not to budge one inch from their post.⁵ We stand with one another and our post is the gospel life that accords with the gospel message. With a defensive stand, there is an offensive display as well. We don't just stand, we...

B. Strive together for unity centered on the gospel

ILL: It reminds me of an offensive line of 300+ lb. sweaty lugs all moving in the same direction, driven to one overarching purpose—score touchdowns. Though the left guard may be from Hawaii and come from a rich family and the right guard grew up on the west side of Chicago in abject poverty, here they are, undergirded with the same purpose, propelled to the same end goal.

This is a good picture of the church. Contending as one man, we're on the move. We have purpose. A great commandment and a great commission to observe; a Christ to proclaim; a church to love; a holy life to live. The walls that once existed between us—you're in that tax bracket and I'm nowhere close, you're from a respected family and I'm not, you're type 5 on the enneagram chart and I'm definitely not that, your pigment is that and mine is not—in reality these walls crumbled at the true sight of the Savior. Sometimes we want to live as if these wall still exist, but in truth we must consider them rubble in our Savior's wake. Now we're striving side by side as we move to a glorious end—to glorify our Father in our manner of living, for the faith of the gospel.

⁵ Tony Merida, *Christ-Centered Exposition*, 77.

These two phrases *stand firm* and *strive together* have a unifying point—both are done *for the faith of the gospel*. Alec Motyer brings it in tighter when he writes, “Remember what God has done for you; live and grow together in the good things which are your common possession in Christ.” The gospel unites us. In it, we are more like magnets than a bag of marbles.⁶ There are not just objective realities that we share—Christ is King, He finished the work of redemption at the cross, heaven is our true home, He will come again for us. There are subjective realities that draw us together—His Holy Spirit is in all of us, we know His fatherly provisions, we have essentially the same testimony (we were dead, now alive; lost, now found). We share an internal unity, and we’re to be refreshed in that and seek to walk in that.

Part of the sturdy obedience to this one command is not just standing and striving together, but we’re to...

C. Be courageous together for the truth

“...standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, [28] and not frightened in anything by your opponents.”

We’re not just living in the gospel and telling the gospel to those who are nice to us, we’re to seek to live courageously in the face of opposing forces. Specifically, this text is addressing their fear. There were enemies of the church in Philippi. Who were they? We know that chapter 3 tells us about the “*dogs...evildoers...mutilators of the flesh...who walk as enemies of the cross...and who set their minds on earthly things*”—these were most likely the Judaizers.⁷ Judaizers were Jews who maintained that strict adherence to the law of Moses was necessary for salvation. Was this them? It could be, but the bare number of Jews present in Philippi coupled with a local distaste for the Jewish community takes the nose off of that trail.⁸ It’s probably more likely that the pagan neighbors to these Philippians were feeling the heat of their counter-cultural Christianity. In mini-Rome, where pride was prized and virtuous even, the church exhibited humility. Where existing for the next coin and swindling your neighbor was as common as traffic on the Bosphorus straight, the church lived contentedly and honestly. Light met darkness, which did not comprehend it, and so, as has played out millions of times in our world, hostility was the response. So Paul writes, don’t live in a state of alarm. Be courageous. The word *not* is emphatic here in the original, “No! No! Don’t be frightened in anything.” Of course, the church has borne examples of lily-livered⁹ saints, but she has her champions too! Daniel, the 3 Hebrew men in the fire, the prophets to name a few. But as the Old Testament shows us the courage of individuals primarily, the New Testament shifts to this cooperative synergy. The gospel is the new binding agent of the church and filtering all of life through it, we simply have nothing to fear at all. When the LORD is working in us and

⁶ Ibid, 77.

⁷ Peter O’Brien, NIGTC, 153.

⁸ I think this because of what we see in Acts 16. There’s no mention of a synagogue in Philippi, which may or may not be convincing, but there’s also a telling comment in 16:20 that seems to communicate that the local authorities weren’t too familiar with the Jewish diaspora. Other solid commentators seem to think along these lines as well. The case presenting a low number and a low esteem for them causes me to tie the bow on this issue, though it’s not a tight one.

⁹ During the period of the Reformation, an English phrase “lily-livered” was bandied about. The idea was that the deep red organ inside of us called the liver was the place where courage was located. Lilies carried a pale complexion. So to call someone “lily-livered” was to charge him/her of being pale with courage, a coward (<https://www.etymonline.com/word/lily-livered>).

strengthening us, we are not frightened of anything. Anything. Why is that? Because the worst that could happen to us here will turn out to be an entrance into the best thing over there!

Being in public work, one tends to hear the same phrases over and over in general conversation. “Hey, how are you?” “Well, I was better but got over it,” or, “Better than I deserve,” or, “Fat and happy.” One response is always met by me with a kind of sadness for the person who says it, “Well, it’s better to be on top of the ground than under!” That is a no-hope reply, isn’t it? Maybe a deeper investigation of that slightly comical saying might uncover a baseline fear as well. Before Christ comes back, if this mass is under the ground, thank His majesty, I’ll be in His presence awaiting the final resurrection! There’s no need for fear if the gospel is our hope and life. Judgment is wiped away in Christ, all His celestial enemies are fighting a finished battle, and all of our seen enemies could only benefit from our courage. Why? Because in that courage they can see people who do not fear rejection—they are fully accepted and adopted in Christ; and they see a church who does not fear failure—we’ve already failed miserably at pleasing God, only to be found and given mercy and forgiveness unceasingly at the cross! And all these truths are corded together and made stronger when we are seen to be a community of people that love the same gospel, extol the same Christ, boast about the same grace, hold to the same scriptures.

Paul is writing these with equal force, standing firm in one spirit, striving with one mind and not being frightened by gospel enemies—these are the ways we manifest lives worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then Paul states that in living like this, the air of understanding is made clearer. Showing our citizenship, couched in opposition, rooted in Christ’s Lordship creates...

III. Signs of Obedience

End of verse 28, ***“This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.”***

What does your obedience mean when you stand in the truth, undeterred and courageous in the face of God’s enemies?

A. *Destruction*

Our obedience is a sign of destruction for those living apart from Christ. Unbelievers are headed towards a destructiveness they can’t really, fully perceive, and I’m not completely convinced that we as Christians give ourselves over to ruminating on the coming destruction as often as we should. When we consider the finality and the unrestrained power of the *wrath to come*¹⁰, horror stories in this world (and there have been countless) they will always bow to the Day when Christ comes in the clouds. He will split the sky, see through every hidden thought, judge all hearts, divide all peoples, and send unbelievers to their spiritual deaths of darkness and agonizing fire. God Himself will destroy—and our obedience is a clear sign of that destruction. Unbelievers that know our congregation will not be able to say, “I knew nothing of Your ways or Your Son’s ways,” because the glory of Christ was displayed before them as we lived gospel-trusting lives in love and mutuality. And with God, we find no pleasure in His judgment of the wicked. Paul will write later in this letter, *“For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as*

¹⁰ I Thessalonians 1:10

enemies of the cross of Christ.” Notwithstanding, our obedience is a sign of every unbeliever’s coming destruction.

B. *Salvation*

There are no tweeners when it comes to the kingdom. You are either on a path of being destroyed, or on a path of final salvation. As Jessica quipped to me when I read her this passage, “The fruit is either rotten or it’s sweet.”¹¹ As you know, that is an allusion to Jesus’ words about good trees and bad. The Philippian’s good fruit of solidarity and striving and courage was an insignia of their current status in Christ and their hope for what was to come. The Lord was communicating that though the hostility and antagonism of these Philippian neighbors persisted, the church needed to be encouraged that their continued faithfulness was a sign and pledge—you will be saved, you will be rewarded, endure to the end and you will see why it was all worth it.

It’s hard to look around and keep this in view. I believe the opposition to all that we hold closest to us is growing in our culture, and seemingly in our world. Maybe I am a hostage of my times and the persecution of the early church has failed to rattle me sufficiently, or what happened to our forefathers in Europe as they bore the truth in martyrdom has failed to do the same, or even what is happening to our brothers and sisters today in other gospel-hostile countries. Yet as the gospel spreads and increases more and more, going to nations and tribes and tongues, resistance and neighbor-hate must be expected and considered as something different from the lost world. This leads us to...

IV. A Spectrum of Gifts

When you think of spectrum, you’re thinking of a range, a scope or scale where one thing is here and the other is over here. Well, if these gifts were to be talked about in terms of taste, one we consider sweet and the other, bitter.

[29] For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake,

Belief is God’s gift! We hold this dear and with grateful hearts. We are saved by grace through faith and that not of ourselves. Paul has just said as much—***This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.*** Amen. Yet the surprising and often perplexing truth Paul mentions here is that suffering is also a gift from God.

Now, before we get into Refutation Mode,¹² let’s consider what Paul is saying from a doctrinal standpoint. Belief in the truth is a gift from God intended to change us, and so is suffering; it’s the same kind of gift. The casserole I had last night was from the Lord. He gives to all their food in due time. He gifted my family with that, but it is not a gift that fundamentally changes my

¹¹ Sometimes she’s better than the commentators.

¹² Alan Jacobs, *How to Think*, 18. Jacobs writes about a man listening to a lecture he didn’t like, “After the first few minutes of the speaker’s lecture, Fried had effectively stopped listening: he had heard something he didn’t agree with and immediately entered Refutation Mode—and in Refutation Mode there is no listening. Moreover, when there is no listening there is no thinking...it is to say, in effect, that you’ve already done all the thinking you need to do, that no further information or reflection is required.” Perhaps you will not be in RM by the time you get to this point in the sermon.

personhood. Like salvation, suffering is *that* kind of gift from God, and as such, it's a gift that we need to humbly receive at His hands and as a part of His wise plan. We may not see the far tops of God's scaffold, but because history and His Word tell us so, we can trust Him while we're under construction. D.A. Carson sums it up well,

This is not the way we normally think of suffering, not even the suffering of persecution. But that is what Paul says. If their salvation has been secured by the suffering of another on their behalf, their discipleship is to be demonstrated in their own suffering on His behalf...In what sense could it be said of us that we follow Jesus Christ, if there is no cross-bearing in our life?¹³

If Golgotha, the very worst injustice, if that place became a divine factory where grace was produced for billions, what of our own sufferings? Do we think that our sufferings, struggles are fit for no purpose in the Potter's hands? No, we must not think this way. Hold on, brothers and sisters. We are God's handiwork, not byproducts of whatever is disturbing our minds or our bodies.

Conclusion

This one theme is on Paul's heart, that their whole lives count for Jesus Christ. South Woods, let your manner of life—your standing together, your striving together, your collective courage, all rooted in the gospel—be found worthy of that glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The call to obedience is set before us clearly in this text, and that obedience will count for something. God will be honored, the world will be put on notice, our lives lived in communion with God and in community with His people will assure us in the face of opposition that God is for us, which matters most. Believers have always lived in a world opposed to their God and His gospel. Let's embrace all that the Lord has for us, church—his sweet wisdom of salvation, yes, but His bitter wisdom in governing us in the valleys and dark places. These Philippians needed to hear where they stood, Who they stood upon, Who stood in their place, and Paul tells them to be ***engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have***. He was not instructing them from a theological palace of luxury but from a prison, which served to advance the gospel. The struggle was real, but the Savior gave a greater significance to Paul in life or in death.

Can you say that? To live is Christ, or to die is gain? Can you really say that you are standing firm with those next to you, striving together for gospel reasons, courageous together in the face of opposition? Are you willing to humbly receive whatever noise or ridicule or persecution as a normal, providential reality?

¹³ D.A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: A Study in Philippians*, 69.