

“The Epistle of Joy (Part 5—Philippians 1:27-30)”

Sometimes the Christian life gets hard and things don't turn out as we had hoped they would. But even when trials and hardships come, **it's worth it to live a worthy life!** That's Paul's message to the Philippians in today's text: *“Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel,”²⁸ and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God.²⁹ For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,³⁰ having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.”* (Philippians 1:27-30 NKJV)

Paul's inspired words in this passage can be captured by the following four statements. **First** of all, this passage teaches us to ***conduct ourselves like Christ***. Whether things go well or bad, we need to *walk the talk* and *live up to who we are in Christ*. While we live here on earth our lives should reflect the fact that we are citizens of heaven. As citizens of heaven living on earth our duty is to *walk in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ!* We need to *live worthy of the Gospel* by being a credit to the message of Christ. Let us be people of whom others say, *“If that's what a Christian is, then I want to be one, too.”* Let's never turn people away from heaven by the way we live on earth.

Second, this passage teaches us to ***cooperate without compromise***. We are to stand side-by-side with fellow-believers; shoulder-to-shoulder. When we stand together we can deflect the arrows of the enemy. The devil is all about dividing, separating and turning people against one another. Let's never give the devil a foothold to wreak his divisive havoc in our midst. Let's be quick to forgive, and trust again, and keep short accounts. Let's work well with other members of our “Christian team,” so God's will can be accomplished on earth as it is in heaven. Let's recognize how much we need one another, and let's keep one another encouraged as we fill our different roles in the Body of Christ. Let's stand fast in one spirit with our fellow team members in Christ, and all go God's direction together.

Third, this passage teaches us to ***be courageously confident***. When you do God's work, God's way – you will be attacked. But Paul tells us not to be terrified by our adversaries. Don't be alarmed or jumpy when you face opposition. Remember, when you're on God's side, you're on the winning team, even though there are fierce battles to be fought. Don't be discouraged by opposition, instead, expect it. Actually, if people are not opposing you because of the Gospel then there might be something wrong. As a true believer you will have enemies, but don't be terrified by them.

Finally, this passage teaches us to ***contend with conflict***. Paul tells us in Philippians 1:29 that we have been graciously granted two things: salvation and suffering. If our salvation has been secured by the suffering of Christ on our behalf (and it has), then our discipleship is to be demonstrated in our own suffering on His behalf. Don't be surprised by fiery trials but rejoice as

you share Christ's sufferings (see 1 Peter 4:12-13)! Realize that you are not alone in your pain and suffering. The particulars and the intensity might be different, but every believer is struggling in some way. *Before a young lady went to Iraq as a Missionary she counted the cost. She left a letter with her Pastor which read: "You're only reading this if I died." After she was martyred, he read the letter which included gracious words to family and friends and this simple summary of what it meant to her to follow Christ: "To obey was my objective, to suffer was expected, His glory my reward."*

Discussion Guide/Action Steps

1. Are you living like Christ?
2. Are you living on earth like a citizen of heaven?
3. If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?
4. Are you an answer to Jesus' prayer that believers would be one?
5. Are you preparing yourself for opposition by expecting it?
6. Do you recognize suffering as a gift from God?