

A Call for Unity

Philippians 1:27-30

Philippians 1:27-30: *“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.”*

Background Notes

In verse 27, the Greek word that is translated “conduct” in the New King James Version (above) is translated “conversation” in the King James Version. It is a word that has to do with “citizenship,” and comes from the same Greek word that is used in Philippians 3:20, *“Our citizenship is in heaven.”* So Philippians 1:27 could very well be paraphrased as: “Do your duty as a good citizen.”

Most likely Paul used this word because Philippi was a Roman colony, and many of the Philippians were Roman citizens. Everyone understood the many privileges – and also the responsibilities - of Roman citizenship. So Paul exhorted the Philippian believers, as “citizens of heaven,” to conduct themselves in a manner that was worthy of the gospel of Christ. And if they were going to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, they must be **unified**. They must stand fast in **one** spirit with **one** mind striving **together** for the faith of the gospel.

Remember that Epaphroditus had come from Philippi to Rome, where Paul was under house arrest, with a gift of money from the church at Philippi. Epaphroditus had told Paul both the good news and the bad news. The good news was that they were a growing church and a “giving” church. The bad news - or sad news - was that there was a growing problem of disunity within the church. It seems that the disagreement was not a major doctrinal question, but we don’t know what the problem was.

One of Paul’s reasons for writing to them was to help heal the rift before it grew larger. Throughout the book of Philippians, there is an **emphasis on unity**. Here in this section, it’s hard to miss the **emphatic exhortation** for **unity**. God wanted to see unity at Philippi, and He wants us to enjoy unity in our churches today.

Doctrinal Points

1. Unity in Christ is a sign of God's salvation.

Let's follow closely what Paul said in verses 27-28: *"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, 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."*

The adversaries (v28) were likely the general population of Philippi. They had thrown Paul and Silas into prison ten years before, when the church was founded (Acts 16).

In verse 28, notice that "something" was a sign, or a proof, or a token, or a demonstration that these adversaries were on their way to perdition or destruction – but the proof, or sign, or token was also a demonstration that the Philippians had salvation. What is that "something"? It was the Philippians' courageous **unity**! It was their **unified stand** for the faith of the gospel in the midst of persecution. It was their **united support** of the truth, embodied in the Christian gospel. That's why it was so important for the Philippians to maintain their unity.

This is still true today. **Unity in Christ is a sign of God's salvation!** Notice at the end of verse 28, it says *"and that from God..."* Christian unity is a sign from God of the believer's salvation.

Not only that, but unity among Christians is a sign from God that the enemy forces are fighting a losing battle, and that they're on their way to destruction. That word "perdition" or "destruction" does not mean annihilation or loss of being, but rather "loss of well-being." There is a hell for the enemies of God.

It's important to recognize that *unity* does not mean *uniformity*. We don't all have to think exactly the same way on everything! That would be uniformity. But the Lord does not call us to uniformity. We can have different opinions and tastes and preferences - one example would be Christian music. We can have differences in tastes, but we must be unified in purpose. And we should be united in willingness to support those whom God has placed in leadership positions within the church. Unity in Christ is a sign of God's salvation.

2. Suffering for Christ is a sign of God's favor.

"Wait a minute!" you say, "Suffering is a sign of God's favor? I know God allows suffering, and God can use suffering to accomplish His purposes. But is it a sign of God's **favor**?"

Well, look at verses 29-30: *“For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.”* That word “granted” (v29) comes from the same word as “grace” or “favor.”

But notice now – and this is important – these verses are speaking of suffering for **Christ**. We’re not talking here about sinus headaches or arthritis. No, the emphasis here is on the suffering we go through because we dare to identify ourselves with Christ. Paul had experienced this kind of suffering at Philippi when he preached the gospel there, and now he was suffering for Christ in Rome (v30).

“For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.” That’s not just Paul’s message to the Philippians - it’s God’s Word to us as well! Suffering for Christ is a sign of God’s favor. Maybe our suffering will not be physical persecution. Standing up for Jesus Christ where you work, or taking a stand for Christ in the college classroom may involve suffering for Christ. Even sickness in the line of duty can be classified as suffering for Christ. In chapter 2, we’ll see that Epaphroditus was suffering illness for the sake of Christ.

But let’s go back to suffering those sinus headaches and arthritis. When you have painful conditions like sinus headaches or arthritis (or whatever), if you endure without complaining for the sake of Christ, and for the testimony of Christ, and to glorify Him, then that is suffering is for the sake of Christ. And Romans 8:17 says that if we suffer with Christ, we will be glorified together! Suffering for Christ is a sign of God’s favor.

Practical Applications

1. Do you want the “prosperity gospel” - or Paul’s gospel?

You know what the “prosperity gospel” is, right? It says, “You’re a child of the King, so you should live like a king! God wants you, as a Christian, to be wealthy and healthy and prosperous. Suffering? That was just for the early church - we’ve come a long way since then!” That’s the kind of teaching you hear from prosperity gospel preachers - and there are a lot of preachers pushing the prosperity gospel today. But **Paul’s gospel** was **not** a prosperity gospel!

Paul’s gospel is found in verse 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.”* And Paul’s gospel is what God’s Word teaches. 2 Timothy 3:12 says, *“All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”* Well, that’s Paul’s gospel and what the Bible teaches, but it’s not the prosperity gospel. Do you want the prosperity gospel or Paul’s gospel?

A Christian can choose to buy into the prosperity gospel, and may not have to suffer, but here’s the point: everyone who wants to live a **godly** life in Christ Jesus **will** suffer persecution. So we should be concerned if life is going too smoothly,

and ask ourselves: Are we really living a **godly** life in Christ Jesus? Are our lifestyles pleasing to our Lord? Are we standing up for Christ in the office, in the neighborhood, or in the classroom?

God has many reasons why He allows us to suffer for Christ. In reference to our Lord Jesus, Hebrews 5:8 says, *“Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things that He suffered.”* This verse doesn’t mean that the Lord Jesus was ever disobedient! No! It means that as the perfect Man, He learned and experienced the meaning of obedience. He continually obeyed the Father’s will, in the midst of suffering at the hands of man. We, too, learn obedience through suffering. This is just one of the reasons why God allows us to suffer for the sake of Christ.

Some Christians have the idea that they’ll follow the prosperity gospel and enjoy life here on earth, and then when they get to Heaven then they’ll be willing to suffer for Christ. Sorry - the privilege for suffering for the sake of Christ is now. There’s no suffering in Heaven. Do you want the prosperity gospel - or Paul’s gospel?

2. Let’s fight together - not fight each other!

Verse 27 once again: *“stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.”* That phrase “striving together” is just one word in the Greek language. It’s a word that would be used for a team fighting together in a contest, like a football game. That’s the concept that God wants to get across to us – that’s how we should stand together for the faith of the gospel.

We should fight together as a team – and we shouldn’t fight each other! If team members begin to fight each other instead of fighting together, they will lose – and that’s for sure.

Jude 3 tells us to *“contend earnestly for the faith.”* We can’t do that if we’re constantly nit-picking and sniping at one another. Let’s fight together - not fight each other!