

The Letter to the Philippians

Lesson 8: Conduct Worthy of the Church Philippians 1:27-30

This portion of the letter marks a turning point. Paul is now going to shift his attention over to the Philippian congregation. As I've said before, Paul had a special relationship with these saints. The Philippians were a matured congregation when compared to the other congregations surrounding them. Their maturity led to a deeper relationship with Paul, and a more devoted relationship. They prayed for each other fervently, they supported Paul financially, and they laboured together for the advancement of the gospel. But like any congregation, this Philippian bunch had their issues, and Paul was ready to instruct them.

If you remember from the last lesson (assuming last lesson ended last week, and not five minutes ago), Paul was confident that he was going to remain with them because it was more necessary for them. These people needed direction, they needed encouragement, and Paul wasted no time in getting to work. At the beginning of verse 27, Paul says, **“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent...”** He adds the word ‘only’ for emphasis, as if to say “One thing to remember”, “Primarily”, “Of first importance”, “Above all”, let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Conduct matters, how Christians conduct their lives is important, and Paul is encouraging that they (and we) live a worthy life. He will spend the next chapter expanded the importance of godly conduct, listen to this preview in 2:14-16, **“Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labour in vain.”**

This main emphasis of this text is ‘conduct’ (in the ESV translated ‘let your manner’). In the Greek text, verses 27-30 is not four sentences, but one. The verb ‘conduct’ (Gr. *Politeuomai*) carries the basic meaning of being a citizen, but by implication, being a good citizen. MacArthur writes concerning Paul’s analogy of good citizenship in relation to their present culture and way of life, *“Roman society, like Greek society before it, was highly community-conscious. The individual was subordinate to the state, and a person’s skills, talents, energy, and endeavors were devoted first of all to the interest of society at large. It was not a coerced subjection, as in modern totalitarian states, but was based on a willing sense of interdependence in which citizens took great pride. A responsible citizen was careful not to do anything that would bring disrepute on his city. And he tried always to be considered an honourable citizen, so that he would never be removed from the list of citizens. Paul may have had that sense of dedication in mind in using the term (let your manner be worthy). If the citizens of Philippi were so devoted to the honor of their human kingdom, how much more should believers be devoted to the kingdom of Christ?”*³⁶

What a challenge that poses to me in my spiritual walk, and I hope it is to you too. We ought to be a single-minded people, who are solely committed to serving our great God. We cannot be a people interested in serving two masters. Whether that one master be God, and the other be money, or popularity, or comfort, it cannot be done. Jesus said, **“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”** (Matt. 6:24) Paul agrees, and so he says to the Philippians that their conduct

³⁶ MacArthur, John, *New Testament Commentary: Philippians* Moody, 2001 (p. 84-85)

matters. We ought to live our lives to match our standing as citizens of Heaven, we ought to live like that today. There is a debate amongst theologians as to what Paul's intentions were when he wrote verse 27.

I will give you one contrary interpretation to verses 27-30. Bruce Winter³⁷ has argued that Paul is not speaking about our heavenly citizenship, but is rather speaking towards our civic responsibility as Christians in our respective communities. Gerald F. Hawthorne got it right I believe when he combined these two arguments, saying that Paul was speaking to the dual-citizenship that each Christian holds. He wrote, *"To live as citizens in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ means to live as 'a good citizen of an earthly state' and 'as a good citizen of this new state,' the heavenly commonwealth."*³⁸

After Paul's imperative to live worthy lives, he says, **"so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit."** Paul isn't sure if he'll survive this imprisonment, but he is definitely expressing his intentions to come and visit the Philippians if it be the Lord's will for him to do so. But Paul wasn't sure of where God would take him after his release, and so assuming that he could not get to them, (in a timely manner) he wanted them to know that he would get word about their well-being and progress in the faith. Paul wasn't trying to intimidate them, but he did want them to know that he would always be concerned for them, and looking out for them. As Christians, we need this type of accountability. We've all known Christians who have distanced themselves from the people of God, and what happens? When people separate themselves from the church, and have no Pastor or Deacon or Mature Christian leading them, when that person no longer has anyone to be accountable too, doctrines slip away, morals erode, and good works stop. Paul recognized this about even the most serious of believers. Christians, all Christians, need to be accountable to one another, and Paul wanted them to know that he would hear about them, one way or the other, and he cared. So that we don't get the wrong idea, Paul mentions in the next chapter (2:19) that he expects to be cheered by the news that he'll get concerning the Philippians and their service to the Lord.

Three Aspects of their Lives as Dual-Citizens

Paul mentions three aspects of their conduct that we will examine in some detail now, and they are: (1) **that you are standing firm in one spirit**, (2) **with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel**, and (3) **not being frightened in anything by your opponents**. Failure to fulfill any of these three obligations would be a failure to be a good heavenly citizen.

#1 Looking at the first, "standing firm" means "to be firmly committed in conviction." It's one thing to claim allegiance to a cause when there's virtually no threat in doing so, but when your life is on the line, when death is a real possibility, the pretenders go home. Paul's first point in being a good citizen then, is to be ready to stay committed to the end, even if that means your death. Jesus said to count the cost in Luke 14:25-34, and listen to the total commitment that Christ requires in Matthew 16:24-26. There's a reason why passages like these and many others are recorded, and that's because being a Christian is never easy. You might be thinking, *"I've been a Christian all of my life, and I've never faced any persecution for my faith."* If that describes you, then I may be thinking, *"You've never totally committed yourself to the faith."* Jesus said, **"And you will be hated by all for my name's sake."** (Matthew 10:22) Paul said, **"Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."** (2 Timothy 3:12) If the Word of God tells us that persecution will come if we live as we ought, then it will come, so count the cost. Paul tells them in our text to stand firm, and in the same sentence he tells them that there will be opponents (28), that they will suffer (29), and have conflict (30).

³⁷ Winter, Bruce, *Seek the Welfare of the City* Eerdmans, 1994 (p. 85)

³⁸ Hawthorne, Gerald F. *In the Form of God and Equal with God* Westminster John Knox, 1998 (p. 56)

He doesn't mention at this point who the opposition is, or what the suffering will be for them, but he does mention that suffering will happen, and that needed to be considered when choosing to stand for Christ. The opposition that all Christians will face is a calculated attack by the enemies of Christ to cause divisions within the body, and weakness where there should be strength. Hansen writes, "*Christians must not flee, compromise, give in, back down, or be divided when they face hostile opposition. The command to stand firm was 'used to indicate the duty of a soldier in battle, or to describe the taking of a position vis-à-vis that of an adversary.'* Like soldiers on a battlefield, they must not yield an inch or ground no matter how hard their adversaries press against them."³⁹ Paul states the importance of standing firm again at the close of the letter in [4:1](#).

The text in verse 27 again says "**that you are standing firm in one spirit.**" There are again two interpretations as to what the word 'spirit' means, and with my commentaries standing opposed to each other, I must choose between the two. Boice, Martin, and Hansen all argue that Paul is referring to standing firm in the Holy Spirit, while MacArthur and Calvin speaks of having a unity of spirit between believers (believing the same things). I must admit, I'm not smarter than any of these five men, but I must choose which interpretation makes the most sense to me in light of the passage at hand. In this instance, I have chosen to side with MacArthur and Calvin. While the other three men have intelligent answers, and scriptural citations to make their point, their reasoning doesn't seem to make grammatical sense to me. Even the ESV translation backs up the 'spirit' as being the spirit of men, and not the Holy Spirit. Note how the ESV capitalizes 'Spirit' in 2:1 when it wants to distinguish between the two.

Paul is referring to unity when he speaks of '**standing firm in one spirit**', but he mentions the unity in a two-fold way. He mentions that we stand firm in one spirit, and then secondly he mentions that we strive forward with '**one mind**'. There is a poetry, a symmetry in the repetition of the word 'one' that I believe links the mind, the understanding, the thought process, to Christian unity. The spirit here speaks to the believers' understanding, being a compilation of all of the doctrines of the Word of God, which shape a persons' thinking into Christlikeness. There was a time in my life when all of my thoughts were held captive to this world, when my every philosophy stood at enmity against God. But God, through His Word, has given me a new mind, and a new heart, to understand His ways. I now think and live much differently than I did back then. The most fascinating truth of the Church of Christ is that it is made up entirely of individuals who have come from a myriad of cultures and educations, who now live as one body under Christ. The Church is now a body of members who stand united around Jesus Christ, and who believe all of the same things from the same Word, together.

#2) Paul mentions that we "**with one mind [strive] side by side for the faith**". The intention here is to take what we know collectively, and live it out corporately for the advancement of the proclamation of the gospel. The one must come before the other, and that is how they are related. Not only must the Church work together, but before it can work together it must understand together. We see this example in one instance in the book of Acts. Right at the birth of the Church, after Peter's sermon had finished, the Holy Spirit worked in the hearts of many people who repented and believed the gospel. Those people became united in spirit, (yes, by the Spirit), but nevertheless united in spirit (understanding). And the immediate outcome of this unity of understanding was a unity of work in furtherance of the gospel. [See Acts 2:44-47](#)

The first aspect of being a good heavenly citizen was to be ready to stand firm in the faith. The second aspect is to be unified both in our understanding and our work going forward. Unity was so important to Christ, that He said, "**A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have**

³⁹ Hansen, G. Walter, *The Letter to the Philippians* Eerdmans, 2009 (p. 96)

loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35) Let’s look at what Jesus said later in His High Priestly prayer in John 17:21-22. When Christians are fighting with each other, unity is lost.

Lastly, Paul says that we should strive together with one mind ‘for the faith of the gospel’. Some people, like Euodia and Syntyche (4:2) were fighting *against* each other in that church, Paul is commanding them to instead fight together *for* the faith of the gospel. The Gospel is always at the heart of the matter for Paul. He was concerned with the advancement of the gospel in 1:12-13 in his own life. He was concerned that the gospel go forth even from those who were preaching from bad motives. (1:14-18) Now he is concerned with the unity of the church, so that as a body, the message of the gospel went out clearly.

We must remember that we **“are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.”** (Matthew 5:14) We are here to proclaim a message, and that message cannot be known apart from an understanding. We are meant to be on display to the world, not stuffed into a closet. As we live and move and breathe, much opposition will come our way. We will be attacked both individually and corporately by atheists, feminists, humanists, and many other ‘ists’ sprinkled with a few ‘ics’ and ‘isms’. Our options while under attack will be to go away silently, or remain strong in the faith, trusting in God for the effective advancement of the gospel. We will be slandered and ridiculed at best by these groups, and we must be **“prepared to make defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.”** (1 Peter 3:15) But we will also be attacked internally. The attacks that come from within the church are the most dangerous because they’re subtle. If the understanding of the members of the church is immature, than the doctrines by which the body lives by sway all over the place. History has proven many times over that even those churches who were planted strong and healthy can be destroyed in a few short generations by a lack of biblical knowledge and unity. When a local body no longer can distinguish biblical doctrine, it leaves the door wide open for cultural philosophy and scriptural contortion to creep in. It’s so dangerous when the false teachers of the world can twist a Christian into a pretzel doctrinally, it’s exponentially worse when the church has fallen and invents its own false teachers.

At no time in the history of the church has its members been as unlearned and split up as it is today. Local bodies all over the world are led by **‘ravenous wolves in sheep’s clothing’**. (Matthew 7:15) This is why it has always been important, but maybe never more important, for those true sheep in the church today to be shining examples of unity both in mind and outreach. We must know the faith, we must keep the faith, and we must guard the faith. At the close of Paul’s first letter to Timothy, he said, **“O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called ‘knowledge,’ for by professing it some have swerved from the faith.”** (1 Timothy 6:20)

The Church is to strive forward in one mind for the proclamation of the complete gospel. Many churches in an effort to be culturally relevant or ‘loving’ have reduced the gospel to believing a few facts about Jesus with optional repentance. This poor attempt at popularity for the ‘advancement of the gospel’ actually goes against the Bible that they hold in their hands. MacArthur says, *“It is encouraging that biblically grounded, carefully reasoned, and theologically sound expository preaching is making a comeback. But, by and large, most evangelical worship services, Sunday school classes (including adult), youth meetings, and other activities are designed primarily to emotionally gratify those who attend. God-focused, reverent, and thoughtful worship, coupled with serious instruction, exhortation, and correction from the Word, is rare.”*⁴⁰

⁴⁰ MacArthur, John, *New Testament Commentary: Philippians* Moody, 2001 (p. 93)

The Church has devolved since the Reformation time. We were once a group of people who sat under the meaty, weighty preaching of the Word for hours at a time, feeding insatiably from the Word of God, now into a religion of people who come to church once in awhile, if they feel like it...oh, and keep the sermon short and inoffensive please! We need to resolve to be a people who love the Word, and love the God of the Word, and live by the Word of God.

#3) Last, Paul gives one more aspect of their conduct in verse 28, **“and not being frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.”** Paul speaks of their unity in standing firm, with one mind, this time from a negative aspect. The first two aspects being positive (things that they should do), this one being negative (something they shouldn't do). Paul says that they shouldn't be frightened, the Greek word used for the verb “being frightened” is *pturo*, and it is used only here in the NT. The definition of the word has to do with horses in the midst of battle. We've all at least seen a movie scene with a horse kicking about and running frantically out of fear. Paul is using that picture, and warning the Philippians to remain unified in one mind and spirit, so that no one loses their footing in the midst of the upcoming battle.

It's not that there might be a battle on the horizon, it was certain. Persecution was coming. These believers were going to suffer for their faith, some with their lives. The forces that were going to come against them, and some already had, were strong. At very least these believers were going to lose relationships, and the ability to live and function freely in their communities. Paul commands them to not be afraid, to line up alongside each other and fight the good fight of the faith. He encouraged them to stay true to Christ and His Word even with the possibility of torture and death, just as Christ did. It was because of the Word that this persecution was coming, so Paul encourages them to keep preaching the Word. Don't run away, don't back down, don't compromise, don't concede anything.

They were sending a message to their opponents by holding to these three aspects of a worthy life. Paul said that by doing so, it was a **“clear sign to them of their destruction”**. Signs are important, we use signs all of the time. Once you've driven down the same road a few times, you learn to navigate around an area without using signs, but when you're traveling in a new city, you'd be lost without signs. Signs point to the reality of a situation. When you see the sign that points west, you haven't reached your destination yet, but you know that if you go west you'll get there. Signs give a message that points to the truth. So, Paul is commanding them not to be afraid (stand firm with one mind), and he adds that regardless of the physical outcome of the suffering, it is all a sign of the believers' salvation and the opponents destruction. IOW, the persecution only reaffirmed the validity of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This persecution wasn't random, it was calculated, this was a planned attack from the prince of the power of the air, to silence Christians and instill fear into any who might believe in Christ. You've heard it said before that no one is violently angry at Santa Claus, or the Easter Bunny. It's foolish to be angry at something that has never been real. Yet people are violently angry at God, they live at enmity against Him, and they want to silence His message through His messengers at all costs. Paul says that your suffering only affirms their destruction, meaning their eternal punishment.

But, not only did their suffering prove the truth of the opponents destruction, Paul also said that it proved the validity of their salvation. Quite the opposite of the ‘health, wealth and prosperity’ gospel of our generation, we are never promised those things in scripture. The one thing that we are promised in scripture, if we follow Christ, (outside of the internal joys of doing so) is tribulation. So, this sign is twofold. When a believer gets to the point of persecution, the opponent reads on the sign “destruction”, and the believer reads, “You've done well, good servant, I am with you till the end of the age, you are in My hand.” Persecution shouldn't confuse believers, or cause them to shrink back, or alter their course. Paul says, if your faith has brought you to the battle, you're on the right path, look at the sign, don't buck

now, stand firm. He finishes verse 28 by saying that this sign is “from God”. That is to say that this two-fold sign is from God, He is the one sending the clear message to both parties involved.

He then says in verse 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.”** The Greek work for ‘granted’ is *charizo*, which can be understood as ‘giving freely, or graciously’. It almost sounds strange to read that God is graciously giving believers the gift of suffering! But while it is not God who is taking pleasure in this suffering, He is still the source of life, the One who lives and breathes in His children, and He will strengthen them to endure. Notice how Paul connects God as the one who stands behind the faith of His children and their sufferings. To paraphrase he says, “God has been gracious to you [granted to you]...that you should not only believe in [Christ], but also suffer because of your faith in Him.” It is because of God alone that we have been born again (1 Peter 1:3), repent (Romans 2:4), are adopted into His family (Ephesians 1:5), and unified into His body (John 17:20-21).

Not only have we been united with Christ in Heaven, which is God’s gracious gift, but God, according to verse 29, is graciously uniting us together with Christ in suffering. Paul touches on this just a few verses later in 2:8 when he says, “And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Believers are united to Christ in His death, not just in the sense of justification, but perhaps even with their own lives. Jesus said in Matthew 16:24, **“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.”** Christ said this knowing full well the persecution that would come upon those who would follow Him. This persecution looked like nothing more than destruction to their opponents. The persecutors saw these believers as pitiful fools who had wasting their time and thrown their lives away over offensive myth. **“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”** (1 Corinthians 1:18) To them, the suffering was destruction, but to the Philippians, it was salvation. Not to be confused that they were somehow saved by the work of suffering, as many religions practice similar things even today. They weren’t saved by suffering or even dying, but they were to recognize the unity that they shared with Christ at that moment. That same Christ who likewise died for the same gospel, and who lives with them and is for them at that moment. This suffering was the direct result of letting their **“manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ”** (v. 27), the suffering was the signpost which should have encouraged them that Heaven was near.

Now that Paul had encouraged them with their unity to Christ in suffering, he finishes chapter 1 by touching on their unity to him in suffering. Verse 30, **“engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.”** Paul says that the Philippians *saw* his conflict, and I think it would be interesting to note a few NT examples of that. He makes mention of it in 1 Thessalonians 2:2, and there is a detailed account of his suffering in Philippi in Acts 16:16-40. This account from Acts is definitely what Paul is referring too when he mentions the sufferings that they would have seen, and the suffering that they would have now heard could be referring to word of mouth, but probably refers to what they have just read in the letter. The Philippians were aware that Paul was suffering unjustly for the cause of Christ. And as Hansen concludes, *“Paul was aware that this struggle made suffering inevitable and might in fact bring his own death and that of his partners under the Roman powers. But his letter assures them that suffering for Christ was the way to advance the gospel (1:12), the way for Christ to be exalted (1:20), the way to experience God’s grace (1:29), and the way of Christ Himself, who humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! (2:8)”*⁴¹

⁴¹ Hansen, G. Walter, *The Letter to the Philippians* Eerdmans, 2009 (p. 104)