

**Conducting Ourselves in a Manner Worthy of the Gospel
(Evangelism and the Church)
Philippians 1:27-30
Part Three**

Over the last several weeks I have tried to use the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11 to challenge you as the disciples of Christ to commit yourselves to being personally involved in world evangelization. The world is responding in many different ways to address the issue of terrorism and I am encouraged by the cooperation our government is receiving, but all of these efforts whether economic, diplomatic, or through the use of the military will not address the problem at its heart. We alone as the disciples of Christ, armed with the gospel of Christ, are the only ones who are truly able to root out the evil that is in the heart of man. Again I would like to use the present passage that we are studying to continue to drumbeat.

The Philippians knew how to live in a manner worthy of their Roman citizenship. Paul in Phil. 1:27-2:18 is now exhorting them to live in a manner worthy of their heavenly citizenship. If we fail as Christians to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, then we have failed to walk in a manner worthy of our heavenly citizenship. Certainly, Paul did not want to be guilty of this. And he did not want the Philippians to be guilty of this and therefore he gives them this wonderful exhortation at the beginning of Philippians 1:27, "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ." This exhortation was followed by an explanation of what he means by this, which goes all the way down to Phil. 2:18. There are three basic components that Paul lists that make up conduct worthy of the gospel of Christ. Three weeks ago we introduced to you the first component.

The citizens of heaven should conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ by standing firm in one spirit and one mind. Let us read Phil. 1:27-30 "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel; (28) In no way alarmed by your opponents - which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. (29) For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, (30) experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me." Paul in these verses acknowledges that the Philippians are being opposed by various adversaries. Paul acknowledges that they are suffering as a result of this opposition. But he exhorts them, as the citizens of heaven, to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ in spite of the opposition and in spite of the suffering, by first of all standing firm in one spirit and with one mind. In order to describe ourselves as standing firm two things need to be present.

In order to be described as standing firm, we must be striving together for the faith of the gospel. What does the passage say? "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear of you

that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel.” We concluded, in light of the immediate context, that striving together for the faith of the gospel should be understood as striving together to advance the gospel.

What is the work that Christ has given to the church in this world? The church is to strive together to advance the gospel. No Christian is excluded from this work. The whole of the church is expected by the Lord to be involved in this work. There is no adequate excuse for any of us not to be involved in this work. We know the need that exists in the world, we have the answer to that need, and the Lord expects us to do all that is within our power to get the message out.

What should our expectations be as we commit ourselves to this work of striving together for the faith of the gospel? As we strive together for the faith of the gospel, which is a reasonable and necessary work, we must also understand that it involves hardship (2 Tim. 2:1-3). This means that we must be willing not only to give up the basic comforts of life in our service to Christ but that we are also willing to suffer persecution.

This leads us to the second thing that needs to be present in order to be described as standing firm. In order to be described as standing firm, we must in no way be alarmed by our opponents (Philippians 1:28). Let us read Phil. 1:27-28 “Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; (28) in no way alarmed by your opponents - Suffering hardship as a good soldier does not only communicate the willingness to sacrifice the pleasures and comforts of this world, but it also involves a willingness to suffer opposition. It means that we are willing to hang tough as we continue to faithfully proclaim the gospel of Christ.

As good soldiers of Christ, it is not a matter of whether opposition will occur but rather when will it occur and how severe it will be. If we are in fact seeking, in light of our commitment to Christ, to stand firm in one spirit and with one mind striving together for the word of faith, opposition is inevitable. But if we would continue to stand firm in the midst of that opposition, our composed perseverance in proclaiming the gospel of Christ communicates loud and clear to us the true condition of our persecutors, which is that they are damned. And our composed perseverance in the midst of opposition while communicating the gospel of Christ also communicates loud and clear to us that we are saved. What did the verse say, “In no way alarmed by your opponents-which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you.”

My hope for this message is that we will be able to see persecution for the sake of Christ in a very friendly light and, rather than finding ourselves retreating from the threat of persecution, we might even find ourselves welcoming it.

Let us go back to V. 28 where we left off. Paul finishes V. 28 with the phrase “and that too from God.” Paul is obviously referring to something that has come from God. What is

the “that” which has come from God? Because “that” is in the neuter case, it is most likely referring back to the whole of the preceding verse. In other words, it is God who sends the persecutions they must undergo, the solid resistance with which they must confront them, and the assurance of both their salvation and the destruction of their adversaries. This is what Paul is referring to when he says “and that too, from God.”

Christian people need to see the hand of God in their lives. Christian people need to see the hand of God in every aspect of their lives. Christian people need to see the hand of God even in their sufferings. This is very important for us to understand. Do you believe this? Hopefully you do. Romans 8:28 tells us “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” What does God work together for good? all things. Does this include suffering? Of course. And it is suffering that Paul chooses to focus on in V. 29.

We must be careful at this point not to make conclusions about suffering which are false. When God initially created Adam and Eve and placed them in the garden and declared that all of his creation was good, was there any suffering? And the answer is no. There was no suffering because suffering in and of itself was not good. Suffering did not come into this world because it was good, but rather suffering came into this world because of sin and this makes man and not God responsible for the suffering that we see in the world (Genesis 1-3).

The Lord made it very clear to Adam and Eve that if they transgressed his laws and ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that they would in fact die. But they failed to heed God’s word and they ate of the fruit of the tree and as soon as they ate of the fruit of that tree they spiritually died and were cut off from God. They emotionally began to experience the feelings of guilt and shame. Physically, their bodies began their slow march to physical death. But worst of all, their sin affected their descendants. Romans 5:12 says “Therefore, just as through the one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.” What does this mean? It means that since all of Adam and Eve’s descendants became sinners, they do what sinners do, and that is to sin and when they sin it causes more suffering. Who was responsible for the evil that we saw on Sept. 11th? Was it God or man? Man was responsible for the evil.

But even though the terrorists must take responsibility for their evil choices, those events will in no way disrupt God’s plans in respect to our lives. In fact, they will only serve to advance the plans of God in respect to our lives. In effect, the tragic events of Sept. 11 are being guided by the hands of God even though we cannot hold Him responsible. Again what did Romans 8:28 say? “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” How many things? All things! Does this include suffering? The answer would have to be yes! And therefore we know that even terrorist attacks and terrorist threats will ultimately serve all born again believers. Evil can never defeat the purposes of God.

I am sure that you are familiar with the story of Joseph. Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers. He was unjustly accused of a crime in his master's house. He was thrown into prison and languished there for many years. All of this was at the hands of sinful men. But God's hand was at work in all of this to accomplish his purpose for Joseph and ultimately the nation of Israel. How did he do this? God used all of these terrible circumstances to ultimately make him the second most powerful man in all of Egypt and to place him in a position to preserve his entire family. And when he finally came to a face to face encounter with his brothers whose sinful action of selling him into slavery started this incredible series of events, what did Joseph say to them in Gen. 50:20? "And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive."

Suffering is a gift to us because God uses suffering in our lives to accomplish his eternal purposes for us and His church. This is true of all suffering. There is not a single tear that we shed, as those who are called according to His purpose, which does not in some way contribute to His eternal purpose for our lives. And this can be a tremendous encouragement for us.

Even though what I have shared with you is true, the suffering that Paul has in mind in this passage is more specific. And the blessedness of that suffering is also more specific and highlighted. The suffering that Paul is speaking about is being given a place of honor. What is the specific form of suffering that Paul has in mind? It is suffering that comes to a believer as a result of their service for Christ. Paul looks upon suffering for the sake of Christ as a trophy to be displayed on the mantel of our faith. Let us go back again to the passage and see what I mean. Let us begin by reading V. 28 and then we will connect it to V. 29 "In no way alarmed by your opponents - which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. (29) For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake." What kind of suffering is Paul talking about? He is not talking about the difficulties that come into our lives because of a tree falling across our car or a physical affliction brought on by some kind of virus. This is talking about the difficulty that comes upon our lives as we seek to be obedient to Christ. Seeking to live out the truths of God's word, especially the suffering that comes into our lives because of our faithful proclamation of the gospel of Christ.

Though all suffering could biblically be considered a gift from God, it is only suffering that comes to us because of our service to Christ that is specifically highlighted in the Scriptures and given a place of prominence. Why is this? Suffering for the sake of Christ is highlighted because it is our composed perseverance in the midst of opposition for the faith of the gospel that declares so forcefully that we are the children of God. Suffering for the sake of Christ is highlighted because it is the means that God uses to assure us that we are saved (Philippians 1:28). Remember what Paul had said earlier in V. 28 "in no way alarmed by your opponents which is a sign of destruction for them, but of WHAT? for you SALVATION."

Paul compares our suffering for the sake of Christ to a gift from God. Let us look at the word “granted.” The word “granted” (CHARIZOMAI) means ‘to give freely or graciously as a favor’. What has been granted to us so graciously by God? The verse says to “not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.” Paul viewed the Philippians suffering in the cause of Christ as a gift from God.

God is described frequently in the Scriptures as bestowing upon his children unimaginable blessings in Christ. Let us read Rom. 8:32 “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give (CHARIZOMAI) us all things?” Let us also read 1 Cor. 2:12 “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God.”

Now let me ask you this question, “How many of us, when reading these verses and thinking of all the things that God might be prepared to graciously give us in Christ, would think of suffering for His sake as one of those blessings?” But this is exactly how Paul would have us think in light of Phil. 1:29. Not just a few select Christians but this is how he would want all Christians to think. This is how he would want every person who has exercised faith in Christ to think. There is a direct corollary between having believed in Christ and suffering for Christ. What does V. 29 say? “For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.” This gift of suffering for the sake of Christ is not simply available to a few Christians but to all Christians. If we will strive together with our brothers and sisters in Christ for the faith of the gospel, opposition will come and when it comes you need to look at it as a wonderful and gracious gift from God.

Kyle and Carson just celebrated their 4th birthdays, and they received presents. They did not go out looking for them but when their birthday gifts were handed them they became extremely excited. This is how Paul viewed his sufferings for the sake of Christ. It was as if he had the opportunity through these sufferings to have the genuineness of his faith confirmed.

Let me read for you Romans 5:3-5, “And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; (4) and perseverance, proven character; (5) and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

Christians need to keep this truth in the forefront of their minds. Why? If Christians fail to appreciate the fact that suffering for Christ is a gracious gift from God, they will inevitably be led to make bad decisions when it comes to how they are going to serve Christ. Viewing suffering for Christ as a gracious gift from God may be difficult to accept, but it certainly is taught in God’s word and we must accept this truth if we are going to make good spiritual decisions.

Paul then goes on to V. 30 and he says, “experiencing the same conflict which you saw in

me, and now hear to be in me.” Paul in this verse is simply appealing to his own example in order to encourage the Philippians to stand firm. As Paul continues to view his sufferings for the sake of Christ as a gracious gift from God making it possible for him to continually prove to himself and others that his faith was truly living, he appeals to the Philippians to view their sufferings in the very same way.

CONCLUSION

We have begun to consider what it means to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. It is composed of three elements. The first element involves us standing firm in one spirit and one mind.

If you are here this weekend and would want to think of yourself in fact as doing this, it would mean that you see yourself as striving together with your brothers and sisters in Christ for the faith of the gospel. In other words, we are striving together with our brothers and sisters in Christ to advance the gospel.

If you do this you can expect opposition, but rather than being alarmed by that opposition, rejoice knowing that in your faithful proclamation of the gospel God is extending to you as a gift the opportunity to have your faith tested and found pure.

May God give us the grace to see suffering for the sake of Christ as a gracious gift from God.