

Philippians 1:27–30 (NKJV)

27 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.

Philippi was an interesting city. One of the first things you would have noticed if you visited the city was their sense of **nationalistic pride**. They were a **favored city** by the Roman government. At one point, all of the citizens of Philippi were granted Roman citizenship. This was a huge deal back then. It would be similar to being a US citizen in an **unfriendly territory**. While you as a human being might mean nothing to the leadership in that country, messing with you would give that country more trouble than it is worth. By messing with you they bring on the wrath of the US. You hold political clout. The fear that the Philippian rulers showed when they realized that Paul was a Roman citizen on his first visit shows us just **what a big deal** that was.

So the Philippian culture was very proud of their **political** status. As a result they boosted emperor worship to a **whole new level**. And anyone who did not get with the program was likely to be punished. All citizens in certain settings were required to say that the **current emperor was lord**. It would be kind of like us singing the national anthem or the pledge of allegiance to the flag. I assume there still is such a thing... Anyway, Naturally that posed a big problem for the Christians. They could not say it. Only **Jesus is Lord**.

You and I have discussed how far our loyalty to the civil government should go. We all have different levels of patriotism. And as long as it remains in the boundaries of what scripture says, we are to live with those differences in love. But what the Philippian civil government was demanding was passing **all the limits** to which a Christian could **faithfully submit**. The Roman government was demanding worship. So the Christians were in a tough spot.

Now what does that have to do **with us**?

The issues **we face now** and that are **likely to grow** are **not** ones demanding patriotism. Our pressures are fomenting in the mixing bowl of humanism. And they are being carried by the media industry, the corporate world, the education system and the civil government. Romans 1 does not predict **what flavor** the

craziness will break out in, but it assures us that all the **craziness** is the result of the **rejection of God**.

Now as this craziness grows it is easy to cross over the line and think, woe is us. How horrible this thing will be for **our future** and for the future of **those we love**. Well it may be true that those in all kinds of power will **demand** that **we cater** to their man made rules. It may well be that when **we tell the truth about what God says** we will face costly repercussions. There is no sense denying that or pretending that **it may not, at some point**, happen.

But we will see this morning **how Paul** describes it. And it may be very different from **our** first reaction. So this passage will be **very relevant** for the world we live in. Paul is going to teach us how to react to the craziness and evil.

Let's look at our text.

27 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,
Paul starts with the word "**only**".

And with that word he begins to **give us homework**. Up until now we are learning from Paul's **example**. And in his **prayer** we also learn from his **theology** and his **mindset**. He shows us how to look at the world from a perspective that lifts us above our selfish world view. He is looking at the world through what is **happening with the gospel**. He knows we do cannot live on this planet in a way where our highest priority is **our comfort** or **pleasure** or **security**. It is not that God does not want to supply those things for His children. He will. Those things are all **infinitely** in store for us. So it is not like we are called to live stupidly. We are looking out for our long term gain. But our temporary worldly gain is not the focus now.

Paul tells us that he both hopes to **see** the Philippians and even before he does he is likely to **hear about them** from Timothy. Now he moves into what to do now, in the meantime.

Basically he is saying, no matter what happens to Paul, and no matter what happens at all, don't let that move you from these things. This is the "**only**" Paul wants us to get.

We all need "**only**"s in our lives. It is a description of those things we should make sure **to do** and **be**.

***What would your only's be? A good exercise this week might be to make a list of what "**only's**" a person would observe in us if they watched us for a week.

What are the things that we do no matter what. Make that list and compare it to Paul's only's and see how they compare.

And later in the week ask, what is one thing I can change that would **walk more worthy of the gospel** as Paul describes it. Just one thing. And then do it.

Now what is the first only for Paul?

let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ

We do not get the full impact of this in English. The Greek word for **conduct** really means to **live as citizens**. Then immediately we are drawn to

Philippians 3:20 (NKJV)

20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

This gives us a very rich imagery. And it would be especially meaningful to the Philippians. He is telling them that all the world around them is **proud** of their **national** citizenship. They have **that joint fellowship**. They go by their rules. They try to fit in. They benefit from the privileges. And they worship their leaders.

Well guess what. You have a **different citizenship**. You have a **heavenly** citizenship. Live like it. Instead of the kingdom that has **Nero** as lord, live in the Kingdom that has **Jesus** as Lord. Live your heavenly citizenship **worthily**. And live **worthily** of the **gospel of Christ**.

Again Paul points to the bigger perspective. It does not matter, at the end of the day, how many people you have convinced to **respect** you or your **views** or your **humor** or your **personality**. We spend a lot of effort on that. But it does not matter. What matters at the end of the day is what happens with the gospel.

Now based on how Paul uses this word, and the way he interchanges concepts, where one place he may say **gospel** and in another place with the same phrase he may say **heaven**, or **kingdom**, we get the idea that he uses the word "Gospel" he is talking about more than just the **stated message** of how a person enters into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. The Gospel is used more broadly here.

What Paul is talking about is living in such a way that **this message** permeates every area of the world **geographically** and every area of our life **spiritually**. It is bigger than the **words** of the gospel. It is living for the **impact** of the gospel in people's lives. In non believers, bringing them to salvation. In believers it is sanctifying them every day. So it cannot be reduced to an **evangelism campaign** or a **missions campaign**, though it may include them. The gospel is used, as far as I can tell, as the **Word of God having complete rule in its citizens**.

I say all this because I don't want us to limit the word "gospel" to just the words of the message of salvation. This gospel affects all of life.

*****So we should walk as citizens of the kingdom of Christ in a way that points to the value of God's word in everything we do. That is what it means to walk worthy of the gospel.**

We should see our most important civic duty as taking care of those things that are most important to King Jesus's interests.

Continuing in verse 27:

so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs,

Here Paul throws in his intentions and the truth that we can never be too sure of how things will work out. Maybe he hears from them in person. Maybe he hears of them through a messenger. But he wants to, and most surely will, hear of how they are living. And when he hears, he wants to hear a good report. The good report he wants to hear follows in verse 27.

that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel,

Stand fast. This word was used of a soldier holding his position at all costs, regardless of how he feels, regardless of what it will cost him. Don't we all admire bravery in action?

I am guessing we have all heard of battles like the battle of the Alamo in San Antonio ending in March 6, 1836 where somewhere around 200 men held off an army of about 2000 men for 10 days. These men had little hope of living, but they continued to fight until their deaths. They stood fast. That is the meaning of the word.

Now Paul wants to hear that the Philippians are standing fast. Standing fast requires standing **FOR** something and standing **AGAINST** something. We are standing **for** all the priorities of the kingdom of God and are standing **against** everything that stands opposed to it. We stand **for truth**. We stand **against** lies. We stand **for** what God says. We stand **against** what the world says. We stand **for** virtue. We stand **against** dishonor. We stand **for** Spirit. We stand **against** flesh. We could go on and on.

But the point is we stand in this battle like a good soldier, taking on the struggle every day. And not giving up just because we are having a **bad day** or it is **more difficult** than usual.

In One SPIRIT

Many scholars interpret this to be one spirit with fellow believers. They say that one spirit and one mind are essentially saying the same thing. But there is no

good reason that it needs to be interpreted that way. The word **Pneuma** is rarely used in such a way in Greek or by Paul. There are many references that would give us a similar understanding that our standing fast truly needs to be in the **Holy Spirit**. **He** is the one that enables our spiritual walk. And if interpreted that way it immediately places God as both the **source** and the **reason** we so vigorously fight this fight.

with one mind

The word for mind is the word Psuche- which we get the word Psyche. It is often translated soul but here it most likely refers to **mind**. What we see here is when we all share the priorities of the Gospel, when we live worthy of the gospel, we are brought together into one Holy Spirit. Christ is not divided. We cannot come together into a **shared Holy Spirit** without needing to share **the priorities** of that Holy Spirit. That results in minds that are focused on the same goals.

I think the next phrase helps us understand what is intended.

striving together for the faith of the gospel,

The word for striving is the word we get athlete from. The striving is athletics. The picture is a bunch of athletes striving for **the same thing**, working together. We can easily picture a football team. If they all come together with nothing more important than **winning the game**, they play one way. But if they come together trying to perform their **personal best** so that they get recruited by another team, they may play very **differently**. Some come together for a **singular purpose**, a higher good. Others come together for **selfish reasons**.

We are to come together for this shared faith in Christ for **salvation and sanctification**. We are to be exercising great effort in using that which God has gifted us with. We are working out, in a corporate environment, for a corporate good of the Holy Spirit, which is synonymous in this instance with the faith of the gospel.

How do you view your Christian life? Do you think if you just wake up tomorrow and go through the motions of your day that spirituality progress **will just happen?** I do not see much evidence of that in scripture. Many of the imageries and commands seem to be couched in the assumption that it will take **great effort**. Maybe the state of the church today might have to do with the expectation that we have that this should **not be hard**. It is easy to believe that we will drift upstream instead of downstream. But that is not how it works.

Standing firm and **striving together** look pretty hard from what I can see.

Let's move on to verse 28.

28 and not in any way terrified by your adversaries

The word for terrified is a word that would be used for a spooked horse. All of a sudden they will just take off or rear up or do any manner of insane things because something took them off guard. I am sure Sarah could give illustrations of that.

Paul is saying here to the Philippians, don't let the enemies **spook** you. Don't let them **drive you to bad behavior**. Don't let them **shake** your faith. Don't let them have **any power** over you. While they may display that they have **power to harm you**, and that is 100% true, don't let that fact drive you to anything bad. He even says "not in any way". Might they scare us for the harm they can do? Might they intimidate us with the power they hold? Might we envision all kinds of bad things happening that we do not think we can handle? Paul says, don't give in to any of that nonsense.

How? **How can we avoid responding that way?** This is a question for us today. When we are being demanded to call men women, and women men, and not only to call them that but to **believe** it. These trends look like they will grow and be backed more and more by arbitrary authority. How can we not be spooked? This is a very relevant question. This brings us back to what I said at the beginning of this sermon.

How can we **not be distraught** about the power of our **earthly adversaries**? How can we withstand their wrath? How can we face it without being afraid? Well the **first thing** we need to remember is that **we are a citizen of heaven**. And **Jesus is the King** in heaven. And He has **all the power** in heaven and earth at His disposal. There will never be a successful coup against Him.

Also the kingdom we are citizens of will **inevitably prevail**. Maybe we will be a casualty in the battle. But nothing will **separate us** from the love of Christ. The worst that can be done to us cannot remove us from God's loving hand. Like Mark Heard's song says, "**Out in the eye of the storm the friends of God suffer no permanent harm.**"

And what we stand for is far more important than anything else this life has to offer. So our **position** is very strong. Even when our enemy is allowed to pull out all the stops.

But in verse 28 we are told 2 very important indicators in the struggle we are in. In world war 2 groups of English speaking soldiers would be given passwords that they had to say in order to rejoin their forces. They were often given a password that was very hard to say for their enemies without betraying their accent, even if they knew English. So saying it in English would portray they belonged. Saying it in German would expose them as being frauds.

When we stand for the gospel and refuse to be terrified it proves two things for two groups of people.

which is to them (the adversaries is) a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God.

When people stand against the gospel, when they are adversaries of the gospel, what they are proving is that if **they remain as they are** they are **damned**. They are proving something about themselves that is true. There is no Christian who can **stand against** the gospel. Even Paul, when he persecuted believers was in a doomed state. He was destined for hell if God had not intervened on his behalf. So opposition to the gospel is no small thing. Paul wants the Philippians to know how to read it. It isn't just a mistake. They are proving what kingdom they stand for.

Sometimes we see people who steadfastly oppose the gospel, even from inside the church. We need to be careful to see that the way God sees it. Those people are in grave danger. While we may treat them in a very loving fashion, we should warn them of the great danger they are in.

But if a believer is attacked by this culture, not just because they are odd or different but because they are that way because **they stand for the gospel**, if that happens we can rejoice for those folks because that is **proof of salvation**. When we inspire the hatred of the world for nothing but our love for God, we should **actually rejoice**. What we are seeing when we are made to suffer for believing the Gospel is wonderful proof that **we will live forever**.

And all of this is happening **by the hand of God**. We do not have to tell God about this to inform Him so He can make up his mind. He knows exactly what to make of it when we are persecuted. Those doing the persecuting are damned in their current state. Those being persecuted are very likely in the state of salvation.

Next comes the truth from Paul that fully answers our original questions. How can we **not be distraught** about the power to do harm of our earthly adversaries? How can we withstand their wrath? How can we face it without being afraid?

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,

Now the word for granted contains in the root word for grace. We can read this "for you have been graciously given on behalf of Christ. So this is coming to us on Christ's behalf. It is for Him and it is in his stead. He has given it to us as a gracious gift for us and it is given by Him and for Him.

Now when we read the first part we have no trouble at all. Christ has graciously given us **the belief** that will **save our souls** for eternity. We talk about that all the time. Yes that is a wonderful grace we say. And we are 100% correct. And every day we live we appreciate it more and more. And so we should. It is **too wonderful** to every fully explain with mere words.

Yes it has been **graciously given to us by and for Christ** that we would believe on Christ and be saved.

But in this sentence the “not only to believe in Him” is not the primary focus of this gracious giving. The real topic of the sentence is best understood by removing the phrase “not only to believe in Him”.

It would read like this:

29 For to you it has been graciously given to you by and for Christ to suffer for His sake,

This just does not seem to be a hot topic for a seeker friendly environment. What in the world is Paul trying to say? **It is a grace from God for us to face persecution for Christ’s sake?**

Yep. That is **exactly** what Paul is saying. But this isn’t exactly something new. We touched on it in the sermon on the mount.

Matthew 5:10–12 (NKJV)

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

We can never say “amen” to this in a fleshly earthly mindset. If Jon is living for Jon this is very bad news. But if Jon is living for the gospel, if I am living for Christ to be glorified in every circle, if this world is not my home. If Christ is preparing my home for me, there is nothing to stop me from being overjoyed to have this tiny chance to represent Christ by suffering what the world really wants to do to Him.

That is how Paul is encouraging these believers to face the persecution they are facing and will face.

What an amazing perspective. And yet it is all through the New Testament. Suffering for Christ’s sake, for His behalf, is a **blessing**. Those situations are God showing to us unmerited favor. It is a gift.

And it is amazing how many martyrs of Christ in history have actually faced their own deaths for Christ's sake exactly that way. This is not some kind of crazy thinking. It truly is a wonderful opportunity for any believer. I am afraid I would not see it that way. I fear I would back down. I hope not. But I have not faced this kind of thing.

Ultimately we will know how much of a priority the gospel has in our lives when we are **blessed with this gift**. I pray that we are prepared. I pray we get this in our heart of hearts. I pray we have learned to set our minds and hearts on things above and that we are not living for our benefit on earth. Lord, please prepare us to glorify you and rejoice in this kind of opportunity.

Is this what we would have expected from Paul to prepare people for hardship? Did we **see this coming**? Is this what **we would say** if we visit someone in prison for the gospel? Would we see that this is the best encouragement we could give?

There is so much to take in here. This is how to **comfort the persecuted**. Now granted there would be more to it than this. But this has to be the overriding focus. Persecution suffering is a gracious gift from Christ. It is an opportunity to serve Christ. It is every bit of grace that our salvation is. Wow

Now is Paul saying this from a distance. Has he ever walked in their shoes? If someone told me this out of the blue my next question would be, **can you prove it? Can you do it**. Don't tell me I should. **Show me how**.

And Paul says this:

30 having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.

Paul is telling them, I am telling you that **you can do this** because I have already been there. You are facing what I have faced and am facing right now. So this is not arm's length advice. This is up close and personal. Paul could say **rejoice like I rejoice**. It is amazing what we see Christians do when they are thrown in prison in the book of acts. They sing. And I'll bet part of what they sing are praises to God.

So as we face more and more pressure to **deny the truth of the Bible** by our culture and as our **enemies gain more and more power against us** in the civil government, we need to be incorporating what Paul is saying. If God chooses to **give us the grace of suffering in His name**, we must gain a perspective higher than ourselves, so **that joy** is what squeezes out of us. This persecution is not only a proof that we are saved but it is an opportunity for us to identify with Christ in His sufferings. It is a blessing.

If we cannot see how this can possibly be true, we need to keep coming back to this passage over and over again until we can.

We will only see suffering this way if we view life this way. Our lives must be dedicated to the Kingdom of God and what is best for Christ, what is most excellent, is what we need to strive for.

Going back to what Paul said last week- For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

***May our prayer this week be, Lord **glorify your name** and use me in that process in whatever way **glorifies you best**.