

Subject: A Christ-Honoring Church
Scripture: Philippians 1:27-30

The church has the unique privilege and responsibility to represent Christ in this world. When Christ ascended to heaven forty days after His resurrection, His physical body went to heaven where he is today. There He is seated at the right hand of the Father waiting until His time to come to earth again for His church. But while Christ's physical body is in heaven, He has a spiritual body on earth called the church. The church is called the body of Christ, the spiritual body. As His spiritual body on earth the church is to reflect and represent Christ faithfully.

The focus of the letter now shifts from Paul and his circumstances to the Philippian church and their circumstances. Paul was concerned that their conversation or conduct (lit., citizenship) would be worthy of the gospel of Christ. "Worthy" (*axios*) means equal to or balancing out with something else. It is the same word found in Ephesians 4:1.

Ephesians 4:1 *I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.*

Their conduct should match their calling. Their lives should be consistent with the gospel they believe, teach, and preach. Their conduct should honor the gospel whether Paul was with them or separated from them. It was important for them to be faithful whether Paul was present or absent.

Philippians 2:12 *Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*

Someone wrote this poem entitled, *The Gospel According to You*: "You are writing a Gospel / A chapter each day / By the deeds that you do / And the words that you say. / Men read what you write / Whether faithless or true / Just what is the Gospel / According to you?" You should realize that your life is the only Bible some people will ever read. Paul reminds the church at Philippi of three things that are true of a church worthy of the gospel of Christ, one that truly honors Christ.

1. A Christ-honoring church STANDS TOGETHER FOR THE GOSPEL

Their conduct should exemplify unity. They would not be able to stand the pressures and adversities of life alone. They must stand firm and they must stand together. During the early days of American history Benjamin Franklin famously said: "Men, we must hang together or we will all hang separately."

This is a true spiritual unity. It is unity of spirit and mind. It is based on what they believe and how they think about spiritual things.

Some of the posts and comments on Facebook refer to the division that COVID has brought to our world and even in the church. That ought not to be. How could our different opinions about COVID be more important than our united convictions about CHRIST? The only reason it has divided some people is because they think more about COVID than they do about CHRIST.

Ephesians 4:1-6

2. A Christ-honoring church STRIVES TOGETHER FOR THE GOSPEL

Paul changed the analogy from soldiers standing firm at their post to a team striving for victory against the enemy. The one thing that binds believers together is the gospel. The faith of the gospel is the body of Christian truth we believe and have in common. These are the essential truths worth standing for and dying for.

Philippians 1:5 *For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.*

1 Corinthians 15:1-4 ¹ *Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;* ² *By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.* ³ *For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;* ⁴ *And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.*

To “strive together” implies that we face opposition. Because of the gospel we have enemies to fight. This world is not only unchristian; it is anti-Christian. In Phil. 1:7 and 1:17, Paul mentions the “defense of the gospel.” This implies resistance and opposition to the truth. He also mentions “enemies of the cross” in chapter 3, which likely refers to people inside the church who posed as believers and may even have been leaders.

Philippians 3:18-19 ¹⁸ *(For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ:* ¹⁹ *Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)*

3. A Christ-honoring church SUFFERS TOGETHER FOR THE GOSPEL

Paul calls on them to be courageous. “Terrified” was a word used to describe horses that were frightened or spooked into a stampede. These believers should expect opposition and not be scared by it.

A. Suffering for Christ’s sake is a proof of salvation

Persecution is promised to those who live for Christ.

2 Timothy 3:12 *Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*

On the other hand, it is a proof that God's enemies will be destroyed and eternally lost (perdition, destruction).

B. Suffering for Christ's sake is a privilege of salvation

Suffering for the sake of Christ is a special honor.

Matthew 5:11-12 ¹¹ *Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.* ¹² *Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*

Acts 5:41 *And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.*

1 Peter 3:14-16 ¹⁴ *But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled;* ¹⁵ *But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:* ¹⁶ *Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.*

The verb "given" (granted) is related to the word for grace. Christian suffering is a gift of grace that brings eternal reward (1 Pet. 4:13). They would share in Paul's suffering (Acts 16:19-40). Satan wants believers to think that we're alone in the battle. Be encouraged to know that other believers are suffering for their faith just like you (1 Pet. 5:8-9).

William Hendriksen mentions five blessings that come to believers when we suffer for Christ and the gospel:

- 1) Suffering brings us closer to Christ.
- 2) Suffering gives us assurance of salvation.
- 3) Suffering will be rewarded in heaven.
- 4) Suffering may be the means of leading lost people to Christ.
- 5) Suffering leads to the frustration of Satan (Book of Job) and the glorification of God.

Are we willing to suffer and pay a price for Christ's sake and the gospel? Or are we willing to worship and serve Christ only if it doesn't cost us anything? A faith that doesn't cost you anything isn't worth anything.

A Christ-honoring church...

- Stands together in the gospel
- Strives together for the gospel
- Suffers together for the gospel

Christ expects and deserves for the church to honor Him. He paid too high a price for the church to be complacent and indifferent.