

Gospel Friendship | Paul's Letter to the Philippians

The Charismatic Church (and the OTHER Spiritual Gift)

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5.25.14

Philippians 1.12-26

What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice,¹⁹ for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,²⁰ according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.²² But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose.²³ But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better;²⁴ yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith,²⁶ so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.

²⁷ Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will 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.

We're looking at an ancient MISSIONARY LETTER, *St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians*. AND we have called it a "letter of influential friendship".

And, as such, it's instructive to us modern South Floridians because, for a variety of reasons we're facing a kind of friendship crisis. People are, in some ways, *more connected than ever before* – by technology – but in other ways we're isolated and alone...Even the modern emphasis on spirituality stresses that each person makes his/her own formula. There's no shared creed or set of beliefs or traditions – "I decide the approach that works for me" ...and, that means, I really can't practice spirituality with others...

But friendship, as we've seen, is utterly NECESSARY to the practice of Christian Spirituality. It can't be done alone. THERE ARE shared beliefs/traditions/practices. Paul's letter really demonstrates that.

Today, *we start to look* at the influence part of this "influential friendship" letter. A secret Host has gathered together a community of friends – we didn't choose the friends; they were chosen for us. AND these friends WILL influence one another. It may not be perfect influence; it WILL

NOT be perfect influence. We will sometimes hurt one another, disappoint, even betray one another, BUT BECAUSE we trust this Secret Master of Ceremonies (*this invisible Host*) – we stay at it for God’s glory and for our own mutual benefit. It’s a *benevolent INTERDEPENDENCE* planned by the God Who chose us for one another.

Today, Paul, the friend, influences his friends in the direction of consistency. He calls them to live worthy of the gospel. How can he do that? *How would YOU feel if a friend urged YOU to be worthy?* (Is that a friend you’d want to have?) AND LET ME ASK YOU: ARE you worthy? Are you striving for it? Consistent? Are you measuring up? And, measuring up to WHAT?

Let’s look at: 1) The Call to Worthiness 2) Worthiness As Decree and Demand 3) The Practice of Gospel Consistency

Here’s the start of the influence (v. 27) – “ONLY conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ”.

Are you worthy? Isn’t that one very real fear that non-Christians have about coming INTO the church, that someone is going to ask that question? And not just the church – there’s some element of this as any person contemplates entering ANY new society or community or club or group. It may be a travel club and you may think of yourself as “well-traveled”. You may have 6 nations in your passport... but you fear that all the other members have at least 15... are you a worthy traveler?

He wants to ask the girl to the prom...but ...is he worthy? She wants to submit her resume’ but will she be ridiculed? Does she measure up? Are we good enough for this company of people? Do you measure up as a mom? (only two weeks after Mother’s Day and you’re already wondering!)

Do I measure up as a pastor? Don’t you think I ask that? And what if the whole congregation shouted out with one voice, “No!” – I might be reduced to a pile of ashes...

And don’t we all exert a LOT of energy trying to prove that we do indeed belong in this office or this classroom or this relationship or ...this church?

Don’t we find ways to slyly insinuate into conversations our credentials – where I’ve been and who I know and what I’ve done and how I’ve been recognized and where I’m from and who are my parents and what they’ve done ...and on and on.

Paul is actually going to discuss this at length in this very book. How he was once, himself, obsessed with his own credentials with demonstrating to others and to himself and to God that HE was worthy?

And ISN'T the gospel, the way of grace, the fulfillment of the LAW – isn't the good news of Jesus Christ SHOUTING to us to stop trying to measure up and stop trying to prove your worthiness and instead "Rest upon and receive the worthiness of another"?

And the answer is – yes!

Why then is Paul telling his friends to measure up – if he knows that his own credentials have failed him and ours have failed us too? AND when a friendship or (even worse!) a community of friends begins to assess each other's "worthiness" to determine who measures up – that relationship or community is on the fast-track to fear and insecurity and dead religion like we see in the Pharisees.

In fact Paul will say in the very clause, "so that if I come and SEE you or remain absent." And Paul will point out here and again in this letter (2.12) that this kind of "accountability" is a community-killer. It turns churches into cannibalistic tribes. He'll tell the Galatian churches, "But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. (Gal 5.15)"

So why this word – this mandate, "ONLY conduct yourselves worthy of the gospel"- "ONLY" as if nothing else mattered.

But a few facts clarify what Paul means and WHY he counts it of solitary importance. First, the command itself is a rare word; it literally means, "to live as a citizen". It's not about doing one's civil service but to live consistent with a political order, to live under the sway of a kingdom. And Paul is saying, "your friends and neighbors are constantly reminding you that YOU live in the greatest country, the greatest and most powerful EMPIRE there ever was – the kingdom of Rome... but I'm telling you that you ALSO and primarily and even ONLY live under the Kingdom of God.

Live constantly in light of this 'gospel' this Good News that God has won! Live consistent with that. Make it factor into all your decisions –

And when you find yourself, unworthy and that really bugs you, hear the words that are sung by the mysterious beings (ten-thousands of ten-thousands) day and night around the throne of God saying, "*Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.*" (Rev 5.12)

"Worthy is the Lamb" is the answer to all our fretting, the answer to our self-condemnation, to the world's condemnation, to the devil's accusations, to the just charges of God's own law that I have broken again and again – WORTHY is the Lamb!

Paul would publically correct Peter (at the church picnic in Antioch) for Peter's racism (when he was afraid to be seen hanging around Gentile Christians) and Paul would say, "Peter was not walking straight with the gospel". In other words, he was acting as if God's kingdom hadn't invaded and won the victory of grace OVER RACE!

And this is what Paul means here – live in line with the truth that says, "I have NOT lived up to God's commands but WORTHY IS THE LAMB!"

See this is a worthiness that is decreed by God. It's pronounced or declared – that's the gospel/good news. It is God accounting to me what I do not deserve – the beauty and goodness and truth of Jesus Christ is declared, by God, to be mine and all my UNWORTHINESS and shame and sin is declared His. He became responsible for it – took the blame – was counted unworthy for me. It's declared, decreed by God. An alien righteousness as Luther called it – it comes NOT by my effort and worth but by Jesus Christ's obedience and sacrificial death. It's given to me by God's decree.

But that's not the end of the story: this worthiness is decreed but also demanded. In other words, God declares me worthy and beautiful and spotless but also commands and enables me to BECOME what He declared me to be.

In some ways THIS is the whole meaning and purpose of the Christian life – becoming in practice what God has declared me to be (2x). The way the Gospel works is to declare us something and then it commits to make us what we are declared to be.

When I was in elementary school I got a really cool ID Bracelet (they were the in thing in our school). Well suppose that bracelet not only declared my identity but also determined my identity.

Imagine if you were given a bracelet that said "Hero" or "Conqueror" or "consistently loving" or "audaciously obedient" or "stunningly courageous"

See when this passage calls us to "stand firm IN this faith" THIS IS the worthiness of which Paul speaks – i.e. a steadfast refusal to boast in one's own worthiness but instead to boast ONLY in the alien right-ness of Jesus Christ.

Later in ch. 3 Paul warns against people who mix human effort into this equation – who try to claim some worthiness of their own and then lord it over others.

Alright, let's spend these last few minutes to suggest how standing firm in this faith – how INSISTING on the worthiness of Jesus Christ as your verdict/decreed – how standing in that leads to the Practice of Gospel Consistency.

The way our character (not just behavior) but the way our motives and desires change in this Gospel Way always involves the power and influence and work of God's Spirit received by faith and often involves a number of secondary factors ("means") including suffering and prayer.

Here Paul says (back in v 19) "through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ". The Spirit is always involved and the prayers of friends are OFTEN involved. This is a great encouragement to know that we – in this chosen group of friends – are actually helping each other toward the destiny God has for us by praying. Paul is totally relying on the "choreography" (Gk.) of the Spirit but somehow the Spirit's work in Paul's life is in harmony with the prayers of Paul's friends. (Again, please get in some group at St. Andrews where people pray for one another and share their struggles together a home group; v.27:"striving together").

And there's quite often suffering involved. When Paul says in v. 19 that your prayers and the choreography of the Spirit will work this out for my deliverance, Paul uses the word "salvation". Most scholars say Paul is actually thinking of God's renovation of Paul's character (not his rescue from prison).

Paul is probably quoting from The Book of Job (ch.13) where Job was reflecting on his own inner change under God's hand. In other words, Paul is saying, "God the Spirit is going to turn this suffering into beauty in my life." He's going to use what Matthew Henry called "God's strange chemistry". He will add suffering, and prayers and the Spirit will convert it into love, and holiness and courage and beauty in Paul's life.

At the end of this text (29) Paul speaks of two spiritual gifts. The one is faith and the other is suffering. These have been "granted" to you, says Paul. The word is "charismata" – and there is a segment of the church that calls themselves the "Charismatic" church...because they believe in the gifts of the Spirit – but it would be good to talk more about this gift – "it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake".

It's a gift – it's a gift I don't really want (to be honest) and it's not that ANY one wants to suffer... the gift IS that the Spirit works His strange chemistry in the midst of suffering. What ought to just discourage or even harden us can be changed by the Spirit to bring Christ's salvation into my heart, my marriage, my work, my friendships, my neighboring – being in the grace Kingdom has a greater practical impact because the Spirit turns trials to gold. This is how the declaration of worthiness becomes the actual practice of love and consistency.

And the reason God does this (through suffering) is that the renovation project He is carrying on in me is much deeper and profounder than I had ever imagined.

Our old friend C.S. Lewis reflected on it – we know, when we are first converted that what we're in for some changes. We'll have to give up some bad habits...have to start attending

church...and we sort of copy the Christians around us (which doesn't seem too hard) and then we think, "OK – I've changed! I think I'm good to go!"

But we always underestimate the change and also misunderstand the nature of it. We think God is going to turn this shack into something actually livable (just barely livable) but in fact He's turning it into a palace where He Himself intends to live! He goes after our motives and desires... and is actually rebuilding me from the basement to the roof!

And THAT'S why suffering is necessary. God is perfecting His image in us; the shack becomes a palace.

Lastly, a reminder – this is a Missionary Letter – we're part of a worldwide movement/mission ... like it or not we're signed on to HOPE for the promotion of this gospel all over the world. For US this means, for instance, celebrating with Stephen Atkinson/the Saunders and serving our Jewish friends the real beauty and fruit of Judaism.

And, it means celebrating with the Misomalis as they move to Malawi in Jesus Christ's name.

AND also being aware of and really identifying WITH our brothers and sisters all over the world who are experiencing a kind of opposition much closer to that endured by the early Christian Church – the plight of the suffering/persecuted church is real.

And it may be our prayers and the choreography of the Spirit that will work their present suffering into beauty and depth and holiness.

As we sing this closing song – if we'll sing as members of the Global Body of Christ – it'll really change how we sing it. Let's pray and then sing.