

Philippians 1:27-30

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[0:00] Please take out your Bibles and turn with me to Philippians chapter 1. For quite a few weeks now, we've had a pop in the sound system, and it's only one.

John and I were up here on Friday trying to diagnose it, and we could not recreate it, no matter what we tried to do. We couldn't make it happen again, but this past Monday I had the opportunity to go to a conference in Atlanta, at a well-funded, a well-equipped church, and I was so encouraged. The same thing happened to them. In fact, I went and told the sound guy, I know you didn't do anything wrong, but I just want you to know that I was encouraged, because that happens to us sometimes, and it's quite all right, isn't it? Wake you up a little bit.

Our text for today is Philippians chapter 1, verses 27 through 30. Before I read it, let me remind you, beloved, that this is God's word to us. It was written for his glory and our good, so we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and to obey its commands.

Beginning in verse 27, Paul writes, This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation and that from God.

[1:36] 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. Engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

The gospel, or good news, of Jesus Christ is truly good news. It is the greatest declaration that this world has ever heard.

It is the news that people who have rejected the good reign of the creator God and deserve eternal death can be made alive because of the perfect life and substitutionary death of Jesus Christ.

Jesus lived the life required by the law of God, a life that we could never and will never live, so that in him we might be counted as righteous.

Jesus died the death that we deserved. He bore the wrath of God that was due to us, so that in him we might have all our sins forgiven.

[2:46] For those who believe the gospel, we add nothing to the equation of our salvation but our unholiness.

We only bring our sin. It is God who does the saving. He justifies. He redeems. He adopts.

And he does not do this on our merit, but on the merit of Christ. We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

So, in that sense, salvation is free. Paul wrote in Romans chapter 6 and verse 23, For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

But, in another sense, it is costly. You see, when Jesus becomes your Savior, he also becomes your Lord.

[3:51] You cannot separate out the true. And those who are, in fact, in Christ Jesus will willingly follow him wherever he leads.

Where is it that our Savior and Lord leads us? He leads us to radical self-denial and to suffering.

Let me show you some parallel texts to this one. Mark chapter 8, verse 34 and following. Jesus said, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

The cross is not a place of mild discomfort. The cross is a place of death. Verse 35, For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the Gospels will save it.

It's a costly call to follow Jesus. John chapter 15, beginning in verse 18 and following. Again, here, Jesus says, If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.

[5:06] If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own, but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world,

therefore, the world hates you.

Remember the word I said to you, a servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.

I think a lot of people today think subconsciously that they are greater than their master. Those who follow Christ follow him wherever he leads.

Radical self-denial and suffering. If we are to receive the free gift of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, it is going to cost us everything.

But beloved, this is a trade worth making. It is far more excellent to give up everything that we might gain Christ.

[6:15] Jim Elliot very famously said, I hope that this quotation popped into your head as I said those things. Jim Elliot, if you don't know, was one of a couple of Christian missionaries who were martyred in an effort to preach the Gospel to the Harani.

Somebody's going to correct me on that. People of Ecuador. He said this, he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

If we are going to answer the costly call of the Gospel, we are going to need a robust theology of suffering.

I am so grateful that the Bible is not silent on this topic. I am thankful that we did not have to have some grand wisdom to think that we needed to prepare the church for suffering, but the Bible does it for us.

And as we open it and read it and get into it and teach it bit by bit by bit across the years, I am grateful that we have some foundation for this in the life of our church.

[7:27] The Bible instructs us again and again in this matter. You cannot be a reader of the Bible and not see that it is teaching Christians how they ought to suffer.

So with all this in mind, let's study today's text in the following simple outline. Two main points.

Number one, the consistent conduct the Gospel demands.

And number two, the togetherness the Gospel affords. And of course, I've got some sub points, but the consistent conduct the Gospel demands.

The togetherness the Gospel affords. So number one, the consistent conduct the Gospel demands. And we see this in verse 27.

Paul begins this section by telling the Philippians that they must live in a manner consistent with the Gospel. He begins the sentence with the word only, which means that if they are recipients of the good news, then they have no latitude but to live in light of it.

[8:40] Our lives are meant to model the message that we have embraced. We began by absolute surrender to Christ. We threw ourselves on His person and work.

You become convicted of your sin and you see it in the light of God's holiness. You know you have a huge problem. You know you need a Savior. And if this is true of you, you throw yourself the mercy of God found in the person and work of Christ.

We asked for it. We said, Lord, I know you're merciful. I know you will supply it in Christ. And with that kind of abandon, we must continue.

His phrase then, only let your manner of life. Let your manner of life is a single Greek word. You could also render this conduct yourselves.

Greek allows for a high level of nuance. I'm grateful for a lot of things in my life. One of the things that I'm thankful for is that I don't have the task of translating the Bible from Greek into English.

[9:52] I'm glad that there are more brilliant men than I that do this work. And in this case, there's a single word that they expand out in one case into two words and the ESV, which I'm looking at now, into five.

There's a lot of nuance that Greek allows for. And so there's some things to point out about this particular verb. I'm going to do it fast and not be nerdy about it.

First, it's in the present tense, which means the exhortation is always active. It's not a one-time thing. It's an ongoing, continual thing.

It's a now and forward thing. It's in the middle voice and it is second person plural, which means it's an exhortation for every believer.

It's always active and it's for every believer. Steve Lawson, who's a contemporary preacher and commentator, said this. This could be translated this way.

[10:54] It's a grand expansion. He wrote this. Live consistent with the gospel always.

Take action with this, all of you, and that is God's command. Live consistent with the gospel always. Take action with this, all of you, and that is God's command.

So the command to only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ is a command for every believer always. And Paul emphasizes this by saying so that whether I come and see you or am absent, we are to live in a manner consistent with the gospel consistently all the time.

We are supposed to be doing this work. Beloved, obedience is never optional. We are not saved by our works.

We're saved by the work of Christ. We're not saved by our works. But people who have been saved by the works of Christ work to live lives of grateful obedience.

[12:07] We're called to holiness. We're meant to be putting off our old selves and putting on our new selves, this reality of who we are in Jesus. We're supposed to be growing in that truth.

We've been set free from bondage to sin. Do we believe that? We no longer have to by the power that Christ provides by his spirit.

Sin. And we can grow in holiness. Paul had observed this reality with the Philippian believers, right? He's not rebuking them here.

He's actually encouraging them to press on. And we see this in Philippians chapter 2 verse 12, the first half of it. He says, therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence, but much more in my absence.

And then he tells them, continue, work out your salvation with fear and with trembling. We are meant to live lives that respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[13:13] God secondly, the togetherness the gospel affords. The togetherness the gospel affords. The gospel of Jesus Christ does not save us to solitariness, but saves, purchases us a people.

We're not saved by ourselves. We are saved as individuals, but we are saved as a people. it's an imperfect people, but it's a people who are meant to be a wonderful grace to us.

If you've been here for very long, you have heard me said, the more I mature in Christ, the more I recognize my great need of the church. I am not outgrowing you.

I'm growing in my realization of how much I need you. What a grace you are to me. And it troubles me that there are so many people in our day that seem to mature a bit.

They seem to understand some of the commands of Scripture. They seem to see a healthy picture of what the church might look like, and they get frustrated and they abandon church altogether.

[14:24] Other than lending that maturity and helping people see and grow up in faithfulness to Christ, they dip out altogether. And again, and again, and again, I see these people no longer mature, and in fact, in many cases, regress as they deny themselves the grace that can be given to them in the life of a church.

We are an imperfect people, but we have a God who works mightily as we meet together. We have noted over the past few weeks that Paul's letter to the Philippians is deeply personal.

This letter does not contain rebuke, he's not writing to correct anything, but only encouragement.

Recall Philippians chapter 1 verse 3 through 5 where he wrote, I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

Paul is so encouraging toward them. But even when Paul was writing to rebuke, he also found opportunity to encourage, to be grateful for the church.

You begin to read Paul's letters in this way. I mean, he's really harsh things, but he is so positive about the people that he's writing these things to.

[15:55] And Paul wrote a scathing letter to the Corinthian church, which purposed to bring them some harsh correction, right? They were an absolute mess. They were allowing for unrepentant, really gross unrepentant sin.

They were factitious. They were dividing over silly things. I follow Paul. I follow Apollos. They were unloving toward one another. They were proud. But listen to Paul's opening words to them. First Corinthians chapter one beginning in verse four. Sounds a little familiar to our Philippian text. He wrote, I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and knowledge even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you so that you were not lacking in any gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ who will sustain you to the end guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God is faithful, by whom you were called into fellowship of his son Jesus Christ our Lord. He's going to spend some chapters telling them all the things that they did wrong but he begins in this way. Why was Paul so positive about a people who were such a mess? Because Paul gloried not in them but in the God who had saved them.

[17:24] He had given evidence God's grace to them and so therefore he was thankful for them. Further Paul knew what wretchedness he had been saved from.

He called himself the chief of sinners. So he was humble and he bore patiently with the sinfulness of others. I wonder how different the church might be if we became more concerned with our own sinfulness and less concerned with the sinfulness of others.

Not unconcerned but less concerned. More concerned with our own sinfulness and less concerned with the sinfulness of others. Perhaps we would see clearly to take the speck out of our brother's eye if the plank was removed from ours.

I think the church would look so different if we extended the kind of grace to others that Christ extends to us.

So the gospel affords us this togetherness. It brings us together. Let's look at some ways that it does that. So here's your sub points. Number one, the gospel affords us togetherness in standing firm and striving for the faith of the gospel.

[18:45] Standing firm and striving. Again, verse 27, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

Standing firm means to be stationary, to be unmoved. This is a Greek military term commonly used of the front line.

It pictures a soldier not being pushed or swayed, but holding his position. He's got a spot to stand in where he will not be moved.

Sometime ask Clay about Roman military tactics. I'll spare you my horrible. He'll enthrall you with it. I'll bore you with it. But they were trained for a position.

And if they gave up their position, it all fell apart. The tactic totally fell apart. They had to stand firm. They had to stay in their spot.

[19:50] They didn't do it alone. They did it shoulder to shoulder to shoulder. Striving is from the Greek. Here I go.

Sunathleo, I think, from which we get the words athlete or athletic. It pictures a maximum effort.

If we were running a race, this would be a word that would help us think of sprinting, not jogging.

This is maximum effort. Standing firm and striving together.

What are we to stand firm and strive in? One spirit and in one mind. Paul uses these two phrases to express the entire inner working of a human being.

We are to stand firm and strive with all of our being. And don't lose that we're meant to do so together.

[20:54] William Hendrickson, a 20th century New Testament scholar, wrote of these two words, the unity here envisioned is one of striving and struggling side by side like gladiators.

against a common foe. We don't need to stand firm and strive if there's not something to stand firm and strive against.

There's a foe. There's a common foe because we're meant to stand firm and strive for the faith of the gospel.

So anything that is pressing against is a foe to the faith of the gospel. It's what we're meant to stand firm and strive together against so that we're doing it for the faith of the gospel.

Paul here is referring to the objective truth of the gospel. We're to stand firm and strive for the apostles teaching, Acts chapter 2 and verse 42, for sound doctrine, Titus chapter 2 and verse 1, and for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints, Jude chapter 3.

[22:10] Now as an aside, this is not found in our text, I think the church in our day is going to need to learn, so expect this coming in the coming months, how to do theological triage.

I know that most of you don't work in an emergency room, maybe one of you does, but if a bus full of people were in an accident, all of those people would be in various conditions as they're rushed into the emergency room, and what doctors, sometimes charge nurses do, is they very quickly do triage, they establish who is most severely injured and who is less severely injured, so they can address the needs of the room.

That's why if you've ever broken your arm and gone to the emergency room, you sit for hours, because you're alright, you're going to be okay, they're going to take care of you, if you go in with a one-hoe-two fever, they're going to make you sit for a really, really long time, but somebody with a bullet wound is going to get rushed into the back, so this is what happens in an emergency room, triage, and we need to learn how to do that theologically, what are what are the things that first order issues for Christians, what are the things we're going to stand firm and strive together because they're under attack, it's those first, those primary doctrines that were meant to battle about, that's the stuff, all we've got to get in there, we've got to make sure the purity of the gospel is preserved, that's a fight worth fighting, right, that's a thing to die for, so many Christians today are in battles over tertiary issues, unimportant things, they don't matter at all, just embittered toward one another over stuff that does not matter, and there's a lot that matters in these first order doctrines, there's plenty for us to be standing firm and striving for, that stuff needs to be laid aside, so we're to do this work, this is an important work for us to be doing, and I'm going to take you to a parallel text, it's a bit lengthy, so if you'll turn there with me, keep yourself marked in

Philippians, go to Ephesians chapter 4, I'm going to read you 16 verses, I'm going to do it with some haste, with a couple little comments, beginning in verse 1, Ephesians 4, Paul writes, I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, similar language, yes, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, right, it's a unity that exists because we're in Christ, we have the spirit, therefore, and that's the thing we have to work to preserve, there is one body and one spirit, just as you are called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of all, who is over all and through all and in all, but grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift, therefore it says, when he ascended on high, he led a host of captives and gave gifts to men, and saying he ascended, what does it mean but that he also descended into the lower regions, the earth, he who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens that he might fill all things, and I love that parenthetical insertion because Paul just loves to speak about the glory of Christ, right, inserts that into the middle of this, verse 11, and he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers, I would argue, although not at length now, that the apostles and prophets, we have as a gift to the church in the form of the scripture, right, we've got the Old Testament and we've got the New Testament, we have people who are gifted in evangelism, who are meant to help all of us be evangelists, and we have shepherd teachers, pastors who shepherd the flock, for what purpose, why, why were the gifts given to the church, verse 12, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, your work, the work of ministry, for building up the body of

[26:26] Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith, the word there, the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, why, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro, standing firm, striving together, is the opposite of this, being tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes.

Together, together, we're meant to stand firm, together, we're meant to strive so that this isn't happening. How? Paul says, rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint

with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

So just picture, so the reason I pulled you there, you can go back to Philippians now if you'd like to, right? We are being exhorted to stand firm and strive together for the faith of the gospel. And Paul is using these strong, this really strong language, this military type of language, but how are we doing that, though?

How do we do that work? I think Ephesians helps us see it. Humility and gentleness and patience and forbearance and eagerness.

we're meant to speak the truth to one another. It's a much different picture of a lot of what I see going on out around us, the type of contention that we see happening around us.

[28:29] It's troubling to me and I hope it's not true of us. I hope it's not true of us. Paul goes on to say in verse 28, this is the second sub point, togetherness in sanctification.

He says, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. We don't have to rage against the machine because our God reigns providentially over the machine.

Right? We are secure in him. Paul says this is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation and that from God.

Beloved, as I made the point already, opposition to the gospel should be expected. Peter wrote 1 Peter chapter 4 verse 12, beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you as though something strange were happening to you.

Of course opposition comes to those who are followers of Christ because the world crucified Christ. 2 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 12.

[29:39] It surprises me how many Christ followers have never heard this verse. You can count yourself in a minority, I think, in a moment.

2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 12. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. And I don't find any wiggle room in that.

How do we escape that? By an overly strict definition of persecution, possibly. It's possible that we think of persecution only as being burned alive in a fire or being put in an arena with lions, which certainly is persecution.

Maybe that's the only way we think about it. I think we need to broaden the definition, though, to see that not being liked, being passed over for a promotion, having to leave a job altogether, being uncomfortable at a family gathering.

These kinds of things are a rejection of the gospel of Jesus Christ. For to be godly in this world, many are not going to want to hear what we have to say.

[30:52] I read it to you already, John chapter 15, verse 18 and following. Do we really think that we're greater than our master? I hope not.

I hope not. But Paul says that we shouldn't be frightened in anything by our opponents, and we should not be frightened because if God is for us, who can be against us?

If God is on our side, who cares what other people think? William Gurnall, who's a 17th century Anglican preacher, this is the quotation on your bulletin this morning, said, let your hope of heaven master your fear of death.

We have the promise of heaven if we're in Christ. God is our God. Why should you be afraid to die who hope to live by dying?

Paul says that the immovable nature of the believer's faith gives testimony to our God. It speaks to the guilt of our persecutors and it speaks to our confidence in our deliverer.

[32:06] Christians await an unshakable city and recognize that this world is not our home. This is temporary. This is fleeting.

This is not our dwelling place. I'm going to give you another long cross-reference. Return with me, if you will, to Romans chapter 8. I can't bear to begin reading this without finishing the chapter.

That's why this is a little bit long. You're likely familiar with verse 28. I think the college students right now are studying Providence and this is the theme, this verse for them as they're thinking about the life of Joseph.

Paul writes, and we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. And I think a lot of Christians then go, well, then I've got to

figure out, in all of the trouble that I have in my life, I've got to figure out what the good is that he's working.

No, you don't. Paul tells you. Don't be confused. Don't pull this out and misunderstand it. Right? What's the purpose? Verse 29, for those whom he foreknew, don't get distracted by these words, make your brain spin, those whom he foreknew, he also predestined for what?

[33:31] To be conformed to the image of his son. That we would grow up in Christlikeness. Isn't this what we've been talking about? This is what we've been talking about.

This together in sanctification, this suffering is about bringing about Christlikeness in God's people to the praise of his name in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Verse 30, and those whom he predestined, he also called, and those whom he called, he also justified, and those whom he justified, he also glorified. He guaranteed everything will come to pass, right?

Paul says, look, it's one, six, I'm confident of this, he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ. He's saying the same thing here, verse 30, what then shall we say to these things?

If God is for us, who can be against us? Who could be against us? Just to speak to our cultural moment, not the Democratic Party.

[34:34] Y'all calm down. If God is for us, who could be against us? He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

He gave us his son. Why would he not also give us all things? Verse 33, who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died. More than that, who was raised, who was at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us, praying for us.

Verse 35, who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

As it is written, for your sake we are being killed all the day long. We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

[35:38] For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Beloved, we have nothing to be afraid of. Nothing to be afraid of. And our lack of fear speaks judgment to those who are our persecutors.

God is for us. Who can be against us? And beloved, we will not persevere to the end, right? We will not press on all the way to the end in the faith if we don't do it together.

God supplies sanctifying power, helps us grow up into this Christ likeness. It is his provision, but he does so most often through graces.

That's how he grows us up. That's how he's working in us through his word, prayer, and the church. We are sanctified together. If we're going to stand firm, if we're going to strive, we're going to have to do it together.

[36:58] Third and finally, togetherness and suffering. verse 29 and 34 has been granted to you for the sake of Christ. You should not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Salvation and suffering are inseparably bound together. Spiritual conflict is a sign that we are identified with Christ.

It's a sign that people know that we are identified with Christ, right? The gospel has an enemy in the world. Paul was imprisoned for the very faith that he is exhorting the Philippians to stand firm and to strive for.

He's riding this very lever from imprisonment for that faith. And he says that it has been granted to us, that it is given to us by God, that it's a gift from God.

That for the sake of Christ, you should not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake. Suffering for the sake of the gospel is a blessing.

[38:11] It's a gift given. Do you view it that way? Do you get all uncomfortable every time we talk about suffering? You're like, oh no, we're talking about suffering again. I think that most of us spend our time avoiding discomfort.

Maybe as the highest value, I'm going to do everything I can to avoid discomfort and to find comfort. Think about how much of your life is oriented around being comfortable and avoiding things that are uncomfortable.

Perhaps our lives are missing the joy that Paul calls us to because we have not suffered for the sake of Christ. This letter is full of joy rejoicing.

He is just overjoyed writing a letter from a Roman prison. Maybe we miss out on that. Maybe we don't really understand the goodness of Christ because we haven't really suffered for his sake.

I want us to have the faith that we can observe in Paul as he writes in Philippians chapter 4 verse 4 and following rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say rejoice.

[39:24] Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand. He is present. He is a help in times of trouble.

I want us to have the faith that we can observe in the apostles as they stand trial before the Sanhedrin as recorded by Luke in Acts chapter 5. When they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charge them not to speak in the name of Jesus and let them go.

Verse 41 does not tell us that they then went and made a woe is me post on all of their social media accounts. says this, then they left the presence of the council rejoicing, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.

It had been granted to them, been granted salvation, and they had been granted the opportunity to suffer for the sake of Christ. Beloved, our suffering puts on display the suffering of Jesus, a people who so love God that they will give up everything for him.

They'll pursue him through a costly call to give up what they cannot keep, to gain what they cannot lose.

[41:00] I want us to have this kind of faith, and I want us to have it together. The gospel demands a consistent conduct, and it affords us togetherness.

Let's pray together for the grace to obey all that our God commands.