

Series: The Church — A People with A Purpose

Title: The Light of the World

Text: Philippians 1:27-30

Date: July 24, 2022

Verse 27

After commenting on his desire to stay alive and help the Philippians progress in their faith (Philippians 1:25-26), Paul transitioned to talk about what such progress would involve. In verse 27, he said, “Just one thing: As citizens of heaven, live your life worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or am absent, I will hear about you that you are standing firm in one spirit, in one accord, contending together for the faith of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27). The apostle wanted his readers to “live” lives “worthy of the gospel of Christ.” The language of the Greek New Testament was used in the ancient world to speak of how one “lived as a citizen” within the Roman Empire. It had the Greek word for “city” (*pólis*) at its root. Since the Philippi held Roman status, Paul’s readers were familiar with the meaning of his language.¹ Citizens of Roman colonies were expected to embrace Roman ideals. Though some existed as enclaves in the far-off reaches of northern Europe, North Africa, and the Near East, they were expected to abide by Roman customs and laws.

Paul’s language revealed that there is a code of conduct Christians are supposed to live by. Though they find themselves as temporary residents on Earth, their ultimate citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20-21). Consequently, they are to have a manner of life that reflects that citizenship. They are to embrace and embody the ideals of their heavenly homeland.

Used figuratively and spiritually, Paul’s language encouraged his readers to live faithfully as members of Christ’s kingdom. The intended meaning was for the Philippians to conduct themselves properly with reference to Christ’s Law. In regard to this matter, Paul used a present tense verb to emphasize the need for an ongoing, habit-of-life type of action. In addition, he used the middle voice to depict the need for personal responsibility in Christian living.²

Paul didn’t ask something of the Philippians that he didn’t do himself. In Acts 23:1, he used the same Koine Greek word translated lived in Philippians 1:27 to say, “Brothers, *I have lived my life* before God in all good conscience to this day.” As a Christ-follower, Paul gave diligent thought to his lifestyle. He was conscientious to live in a consecrated way. As a devout Jew, he was undoubtedly familiar with the Proverbs. He was surely aware of Solomon’s counsel concerning thoughtful living. The king once said, “The highway of the upright avoids evil; the one who guards his way protects his life” (Proverbs 16:17).

The apostle gave careful attention to his lifestyle and he wanted the Philippians to do the same. However, his concern wasn’t for a mere moral lifestyle. For him, the Christian life was to be regulated by gospel truth. He told his readers, “...live your life *worthy of the gospel*...” The gospel was the good news of Jesus. It was the message that revealed Christ lived and died to redeem God’s people from sin and all of its consequences (John 3:16). Since the gospel brought forgiveness of sin, God’s people were to aim to live free from sin. Then they would have lives that were “worthy” of the Christian message. Elsewhere in the New Testament, Paul used the same Greek word translated “worthy” in order to encourage Christians to live lives transformed by the gospel:

Therefore I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to *walk worthy* of the calling you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,

¹ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 450.

² Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 450.

making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:1).

For this reason also, since the day we heard this, we haven't stopped praying for you. We are asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, so that you may *walk worthy* of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God... (Colossians 1:9-10).

As you know, like a father with his own children, we encouraged, comforted, and implored each one of you to *walk worthy* of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory (1 Thessalonians 2:11-12).

The gospel is the the gold standard for Christian living. Since Christ died for sin, and since believers are dead to sin, God's children should flee sin. They should make it their aim to embrace the righteous standing they have received through Jesus' sacrifice.

Paul hoped his readers would continue to embrace such a standard of living, even though he was imprisoned. He perhaps feared some would have the "the cat is away, the mice will play" mindset. Knowing that their church planter wouldn't be around to observe their behavior, some may have felt free to continue with inferior doctrines (Philippians 3:2-6) and relational divisions (Philippians 4:2-3) that had hampered the church. Paul encouraged them to pursue gospel holiness whether he was present or absent. He said, "Then, whether I come and see you or am absent, I will hear about you that you are standing firm..." (Philippians 1:27).

Paul was sending Timothy to gather a report on the state of the church at Philippi. He wanted to hear good news (Philippians 2:19). He wanted to know that the church was still progressing despite his imprisonment. The apostle's admonition provided a reminder that Christian living is a full-time affair. There is never an offseason from the call to follow Christ. At all times, and on all occasions, mature Christians should be conscientious of how they live. A dark and fallen world needs the citizens of heaven shining the bright light of the gospel (Matthew 5:16).

In his encouragement for the Philippians to shine the light of Jesus, Paul called them to be committed to "standing firm in one spirit, in one accord, contending together for the faith of the gospel" (Philippians 1:27b). The word rendered "stand" strictly meant "to hold one's ground."³ It was a military term that depicted a foot soldier who refused to budge an inch or forsake his post.⁴ Used figuratively, it spoke of one who was fixed and immovable.⁵ Employed in a spiritual sense, it meant "to stand firm in faith and duty." It portrayed steadfastness in one's profession of faith in Christ.⁶

Paul's letters often contained exhortations for the type of fortitude he commended to the Philippians (1 Corinthians 16:13; 2 Thessalonians 2:15). Later in his letter, he would circle back around to this subject to tell the Philippians, "So then, my dearly loved and longed for brothers and sisters, my joy and crown, in this manner stand firm in the Lord, dear friends" (Philippians 4:1). In doing so, he employed the same Greek term that appears in Philippians 1:27. It seems Paul knew the Philippians were timid and weak in their faith to some degree. Maybe they were standing up for Jesus as they should have been. Paul wanted them to become emboldened, to embrace a military-like steadfastness for the Lord.

In promoting the need for steadfastness at Philippi, Paul made reference to three means of such strength. First, he commented on the Spirit of God, saying, "standing firm in one

³ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 450.

⁴ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 450.

⁵ Louw and Nida, [CD-Rom].

⁶ Zodhiates, 1312.

spirit....” The apostle’s words were a clear reference to the Holy Spirit. When believer’s are born again (John 3:3), they receive a portion of God’s Spirit to live within their souls (Galatians 3:2). Through the Spirit’s presence in their lives, they possess an inseparable bond for fellowship (John 17:20-23). When believers live according to the principles and power of the Spirit, they produce great spiritual fruit (John 15:4-5; Galatians 5:22). In turn, their lives serve like trees of life, imparting spiritual life in a barren world of spiritual death (Proverbs 11:30).

Second, Paul made reference to Scriptural truth as a means of standing strong in a dark world. He spoke of the need for the Philippians to be of “one accord.” Some translations renders the apostle’s words as referring to “one mind.” In the Greek-dominated world, the “mind” referred to multiple aspects of human life — feeling, thinking, and choosing. It encapsulated all parts of the human psyche. In fact, the Greek word from which we get our word “psyche” (a root word for “psychology”) appears in the original language of our verse. The point for us is simple — Paul wanted the Philippians to be unanimously united in their affections, wills, and beliefs.⁷ The best way for the individual psyches of the church members to be tied together was for each to align his or her thinking with the Word of God. When each individual member of the body views the Bible as god’s source of absolute truth, the church experiences the type of unity that involves “one accord.” The early church exhibited such ones. Using the same language from our current verse, the book of Acts said, “Now the entire group of those who believed were of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but instead they held everything in common” (Acts 4:32).

Third, Paul saw Christian service as a third method for developing gospel steadfastness. He beckoned the Philippians to be engaged in “...contending together for the faith of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27). The Greek translated “contending tighter” were unique. It was a compound word compromised of two terms — one that meant “together” and another that meant “strive.” The second word in the compound word was the one from we we get our English word “athletic” (athlḗō). It was used of Roman gladiators or olympic athletes working together on a team in order to perform a feat of strength.⁸

Paul’s intent was to say that believers within local congregations are to work in tandem for the common cause of gospel advancement.⁹ Later in his letter to the Philippians, he would use the same language from Philippians 1:27 to reiterate this point, saying, “Yes, I also ask you, true partner, to help these women who have contended for the gospel at my side, along with Clement and the rest of my coworkers whose names are in the book of life” (Philippians 4:3).

Unity and steadfastness can grow when individual believers within congregations commit themselves to God’s Spirit, God’s Scriptures, and Christian service. Schismatic assemblies usually aren’t focused on the right type of things. Their divisions are usually the result of a compromise in one of the areas mentioned above. Usually they are more focused on personal agendas, preferences, and politicking over the Spirit, Scriptures, and service. Like never before, the world needs to see a unified church that stands together in the areas mentioned above. Such is the best way for the modern church to make a difference in the modern world. Paul’s words are true and trustworthy. The world will take note when God’s people show a selfless and unified front for the things of God.

Verse 28

To be strong, Christian congregations must be prepared to handle the attacks of a hostile world. Paul encouraged the Philippians in this regard, saying, “...not being frightened in any way by your opponents. This is a sign of destruction for them, but of your salvation—and this is from God” (Philippians 1:28). Notice that Paul’s concern was with his readers “being

⁷ Zodhiates, 1494.

⁸ Robertson, 441.

⁹ Friberg, Friberg, and Miller, 363,

frightened” by “opponents.” The word rendered “frightened” was used in the ancient world to speak of one being startled¹⁰ or thrown into terror.¹¹ It was sometimes used of one being intimidated.¹² Old documents from the first-century world used the term to speak of a timid horse.¹³ In applying it to the Philippians, Paul employed the passive voice. His syntax depicted an outside source outside invoking fear in the lives of his readers. Undoubtedly there were some individuals within Philippi who were putting pressure on the churching a way that generated fear.

Paul’s use of the word “opponent” makes it clear that the believers in Philippi faced some sort of opposition from some group of people. The language of the text is language that was used of ancient warfare. It depicted an adversary arraying itself in battle formation against a defending army.¹⁴ We don’t know who the adversaries were that Paul had in mind, but the Philippians certainly had opposition from someone.

The apostle’s words seem to indicate that some in Philippi were becoming timid in their witness. Threats and ridicule were making them quiet about their faith. Like young, bashful colts, they were afraid to charge out into the world. Paul wanted them to be bold. He told them to “not” be “frightened in any way by” their “opponents.” In the original language of the New Testament, he used a double negative. Such a grammatical construction makes for bad modern English, but it was permissible in Koine Greek. It was a means of applying appropriate emphasis to a prohibition. Paul employed the technique in order to strongly warn the Philippians against fear. They had no need to shrink back in cowardice because of the threats of their opponents. The gospel had called them to be bold for Jesus. It is worth noting that Paul encouraged such boldness earlier in his letter (Philippians 1:14).

Paul provided a rationale for why the Philippians didn’t need to fear. He said, “...This is a sign of destruction for them, but of your salvation—and this is from God” (Philippians 1:28). The word translated “sign” is one that was used in the ancient legal system to speak of a piece of evidence in a court of law.¹⁵ According to the apostle, the hostility of the Philippians’ opponents was proof that such individuals were under the judgment of God. Their attacks were like pieces of incriminating evidence in a court of law, providing proof that they didn’t really know God. The fruit of their lives made it apparent that such individuals were doomed for judgment. Paul used a word translated “destruction” that was used elsewhere in the New Testament to speak of the second death that awaits all of those who are outside of Christ (Matthew 7:13; 2 Peter 3:7; Revelation 17:8, 11).

Paul wanted his readers to be wise and bold. They had no need to fear their antagonistic adversaries. By their opposition, such individuals revealed that they were unregenerate. An eternal hell awaited them. What did it profit the Philippians to shrink back in science because of such individuals?

In addition to being a proof of their adversaries pending judgment, the opposition the Philippians faced was also a proof of their salvation. Born-again believers are guaranteed to face blowback from fallen society. Christians shouldn’t invite the attacks of the enemies, nor should they unnecessarily stir up opposition and persecution. However, they should stay aware that the darkness always hates the light (John 1:4-11). In fact, something is wrong when the world doesn’t criticize the church. If God’s people never face opposition, such is actually a

¹⁰ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 450.

¹¹ Zodhiates, 1252.

¹² Friberg, Friberg, and Miller, 338.

¹³ Robertson, 442.

¹⁴ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 450.

¹⁵ Robertson, 442.

tell-tale sign that they are guilty of compromise. Jesus said, “Woe to you when all people speak well of you, for this is the way their ancestors used to treat the false prophets” (Luke 6:26). Our Lord never promised a life of ease for His followers. He didn’t teach them how to avoid persecution; instead, He taught them how to handle it in a healthy way. At the end of the famous Beatitudes, He said, “You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me. Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:11-12). If we want to be strong gospel witnesses in our world, we must be aware of such realities. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we must exhibit a fearless stand for the truth of Christ.

Verse 29

In verse 29, Paul continued his discussion about the opposition the Philippians were facing. He said, “For it has been granted to you on Christ’s behalf not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him” (Philippians 1:29). Interestingly, the word translated “granted” had the Greek word for “grace” at its root. Paul’s word usage was intentional. He meant to convey the idea that God’s grace was at work in the midst of the Philippians’ pain. Because the Lord uses trials to accomplish His purposes, one can view even things like persecution as being a gracious gift from the Heavenly Father. Because of these things, one has translated Paul’s words in Philippians 1:29 as saying, “God has granted you the high privilege of suffering for Christ.”¹⁶ Another has rightly observed that “...suffering on behalf of Christ is one of God’s gifts to us.”¹⁷

It is worth noting that the word translated “suffer” in Philippians 1:29 was as also used in the New Testament to speak of Jesus’ suffering (Matthew 16:27; Luke 2:15). Paul wanted his readers to know that it would have been foolish for them to expect to go without pain in life. If Jesus suffered because of His message and ministry, shouldn’t disciples expect the same suffering to some degree? Indeed they should. It is for this reason that Jesus once told His disciples, “If the world hates you, understand that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. However, because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of it, the world hates you. Remember the word I spoke 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” (John 15:18-20).

Verse 30

Paul concluded his discussion concerning persecution by saying, “... since you are engaged in the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I have” (Philippians 1:30). The Philippians knew good and well that their beloved founding pastor had encountered various hardships in ministry. When he first visited Philippi in order to plant a church there, he was beaten and imprisoned (Acts 16:19-25). He mentioned the ordeal when writing to the Thessalonians. In his own words, he said he was “treated outrageously in Philippi” (2 Thessalonians 2:2).

Since the establishment of a local congregation in that city, Paul’s trials had continued. He mentioned such things back in 1:12. As he penned his epistle to the Philippians, he was actually imprisoned (Philippians 1:13). He had definitely faced a “struggle.” The Philippians had been eyewitnesses to his trials when he was in Philippi, and they had received report of his more recent struggles. Quite likely, Epaphroditus had told the church about Paul’s imprisonment when he delivered Paul’s letter (Philippians 2:25-30). Consequently, Paul was able to stay “you saw I had and now hear that I have.”

Why did Paul share about his difficulties? Was he driven by self pity? Did he crave sympathy? Did he selfishly attempt to compare his trials to the ones Christ endured

¹⁶ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 451.

¹⁷ Zodhiates, 1468.

(Philippians 1:29)? No. Paul's intent was to encourage the Philippians. Though they had "opponents" (1:28), they weren't alone. Both Jesus and Paul had suffered for the gospel as well. Knowledge that their Lord and their founding pastor had been through tough times should have emboldened the church. The enemy wants to make God's children think they are alone when they face hostility from the world. Remembering the way Jesus and His messengers encountered resistance should promote endurance in the Christian race (Matthew 5:12).