

# Philippians 1.27-30 Sermon / COB / 09.04.16

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## Introduction

- † **[1: Title]** I have something special to share with you today... that God the Father has given you a wonderful gift, a gift by grace, a gift given to you to please Christ, and that gift is called... “suffering.”
- Now be honest, do you wish you had gone to another church this morning? Would you rather be home watching Joel Olsteen on television? Hey, there are preachers out there who will tickle your ears and tell you what you want to hear; our goal, however, is to teach the Bible.
- † But I agree with you, this is a strange teaching. What kind of gift is suffering? Can you picture Mark giving this gift to Denise for their anniversary? “Here, Honey, I got you this gift...” The first year is paper, the thirtieth is suffering. Or how about for birthdays: Sandy says, “Jeremy, I know you asked for a car for your sixteenth birthday, but your father and I got you the gift of suffering instead. Someday, when you’re older and have kids of your own, you will see this was for the best.”
- It is hard to think of suffering as a gift; if it is a gift, it stinks, right? Well, that’s the “bottom line” human reasoning view, anyway. Let’s see what we can learn from God’s revelation, so maybe we can start thinking more “top line.”

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## Exposition

**[2: 1.27-28]** **Philippians 1.27-28 NET: Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ so that— whether I come and see you or whether I remain absent—I should hear that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, by contending side by side for the faith of the gospel, and by not being intimidated in any way by your opponents. This is a sign of their destruction, but of your salvation— a sign which is from God.**

- † Over the past few weeks, we have learned from Paul’s example how to live as a Christian: Paul identified himself as a slave of Christ, who – no matter what his circumstances – would do the work of Christ, trust in God and his plan, walk by faith and obedience, and be willing to sacrifice and suffer for Christ and the gospel mission. Now he tells his readers to join him in living worthy of the gospel.
- Do you realize, this is the first actual command in this letter? Paul has taught several things about Christian living, but this is his first command to the Philippians.
  - In 1.26, Paul just said he would return to them someday. He says, “I will see you soon and we will rejoice together, *only*... What’s that “only” tell you? There is something he wants from them. He says, “**Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel...**” As their mentor and teacher and spiritual father, he expects them to do their best to live worthy of the gospel.
- † **[3: righteousness]** The gospel is the good news of Jesus the Christ, the savior God promised to the Jews. This gospel teaches us that Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sins and to set us free from the control of sin and evil. The gospel tells us that God justifies us, which means he declares us to be legally righteous in his sight, as he imputes or accounts to us the righteousness of Jesus. All this is a gift from God [the kind of gift we like to get!], a gift of grace – unmerited favor – which we receive through faith that the gift is real, that Jesus is who he said he was – the Son of God and Messiah-savior – and that he did accomplish what he promised on the cross.

- Paul has already reminded them that no matter what is happening to them, they are saved “saints” or holy ones in Christ, and he is going to explain salvation in more detail later in the letter. Here, he reminds them that they were saved by the true gospel of Christ, so he exhorts them as believers, to live up to that righteousness which they have been granted.
- † **[4: hold the line]** Living worthy of the gospel means living up to their imputed righteousness [the righteousness God gave them], it means living out experiential righteousness.
- How well are you doing this? Are your schoolmates or coworkers shocked at your purity, at your unbending righteousness and morality? Or are you worldly enough that you blend in fine?
- † If the Philippians were to live righteously, in a manner worthy of the gospel, that would affect how they dealt with the pressures coming upon them. How so?
- Paul says they are to stand firm, in unity for the gospel [the true gospel, which Paul preaches], and not be alarmed by those who are opposing them. We will see in a moment that the Philippians are starting to suffer, but they are not to allow opposition – whether pagan persecution or cultic false teachings – to sway their resolve or unity for the gospel.
- † **[5: intimidated]** In v.28, “being intimidated” translates the Greek verb *πτόρω*, which was used in ancient Greece to describe a horse that shied in battle. Paul is telling them to not be intimidated or frightened by those opposing them.
- Why not? God’s perspective of their standing firm in the face of opposition is that it is a sign of Philippian salvation and of the spiritual ruin of their opponents. The fact that we suffer opposition yet stand firm for the faith is a sign of our salvation! It verifies our faith is real and allows us to glorify Christ as his witness. This is God’s gift to us.
  - We do stand firm, because we learn to expect such opposition, so it will not cause us to doubt or feel intimidated when it comes, we will not get skittish like a horse in battle. You know how if a bug drops down on you, you react with surprised panic? Well, if you expect that bug to come down, you calmly step out of its way and then squash it.
- † **[6: one spirit]** They are to stand firm in “one spirit.” Paul might mean that they were to stand firm empowered by the Holy Spirit; or that they were to stand firm in unity of purpose, drawing strength from each other in the body of Christ as they would contend side by side for the Christian faith. Really both of these are necessary.
- Standing firm and contending side by side is military imagery. When LeeAnn was on her missions trip, I watched the miniseries *Band of Brothers*. Any of you ever see that show? It follows an army airborne company in WWII. At one point, they are surrounded by Germans in the forest outside of Bastogne. It is winter, they are spread too thinly, they have few supplies, and they are constantly being shelled by artillery, but no matter what, they are to hold the line! If they don’t, the battle is lost, for them and for the allied armies.
  - **[7: square]** That’s what Paul says to the Philippians: hold the line! Stand firm, in unity, contending side by side for the faith of the gospel. Picture a battle in which the cavalry is charging a group of soldiers. If the soldiers kneel in a square, with their bayonets or pikes pointed out, then they will win, the horses will shy away, they cannot break the square. But if any of the soldiers lose faith in the cause or the plan, if they break and run, then the square breaks and the cavalry slaughter them all.

- The Philippians can succeed in their battle only if they are empowered by the Holy Spirit to be united in spirit about the plan and purpose of the gospel. They cannot hold the line if they are fighting against each other, having lost their unity, which seemed to be happening in Philippi.
- † **[8: destruction]** In 1.28, “destruction” is the Greek word ἀπώλεια, which meant destruction or utter ruin. These opponents are not believers in the gospel of Christ, so they face utter ruin.
- The question is whether this refers to the pagan Gentile persecutors or to the Jewish cultic legalists who were arguing that righteousness before God had to be earned. Paul’s antagonists in this letter are the cultic legalists with a false gospel; but in a moment, he is going to talk about the Philippians suffering in ways they saw him suffer, which was by being persecuted, arrested, beaten, and run out of town, so probably here he is referring to the pagan persecutors.
  - **[9: 1.27-28]** Paul has given the Philippians his example before and now in Rome: no matter what he is suffering, he continues to confirm and defend the true gospel and to do the work of Christ. They should follow that example and stand firm for the faith. The combination of persecution and deception were causing internal discord in the church. Not being intimidated by their opponents is one way they can stand firm in unity of one spirit.
  - How prepared are we for this? We have to be sure of our beliefs, of what is the true gospel and what are true Christian doctrines derived from that gospel. There is a Canadian pastor named Tim Challies who creates quizzes on the internet, which my friends repost on Facebook. Each quiz is about thirty questions: thirty questions about the trinity, thirty questions about Christ, thirty questions about God’s revelation in scripture. Do you think you could get perfect scores? That’s what we need, for *you* to get perfect scores! [plug upcoming classes]
  - To be prepared we also have to have strong relational trust if we are to contend side by side. That is why I encourage you – yes, study scripture at home and in our classes, but also – participate in one of our small groups, so we learn to stand firm for the faith *together*. Paul is not telling the Philippians to contend for the faith on their own, as individuals, is he? No, he says they must contend side by side, standing firm in one spirit, with one mind.
  - It goes against our rugged American independence, but you cannot be a good Christian on your own. Fulfilling your obligations to Christ requires full participation in the church, serving and loving on one another, working together to share gospel truth, worshipping and learning together, and contending side by side for the faith of the gospel.
- † **[10: citizens]** One more thought... if you use the NLT, in v.27 it says **“you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ.”** The Greek verb is πολιτεύομαι, which means “I lead my life,” but it had connotations of citizenship duties, of corporate responsibility.
- It is sufficient to translate that they should live up to the gospel they have accepted, but it is not inappropriate to elaborate about what kind citizenship they would have. The NLT is an interpretive translation, so it tries to explain what Paul meant.
  - Paul probably chose this word because the Philippians had such a fierce pride about their citizenship in the Roman empire. Most of the people living there were the families of former soldiers, and the city was an official Roman colony with special rights. So Paul used words that would mean something to these people. As scholar Gordon Fee wrote, “As Philippi was a colony of Rome in Macedonia, so the church was a ‘colony of heaven’ in Philippi.” Think about that, we are a colony of Heaven in Parkesburg, so we should live as citizens of Heaven.

**[11: 1.29-30]** Philippians 1.29-30 NET: For it has been granted to you not only to believe in Christ but also to suffer for him, since you are encountering the same conflict that you saw me face and now hear that I am facing.

† The NET changed the beginning here. Word for word, it says, “because to you it was freely given in behalf of Christ...”

- The Greek verb *Χαρίζομαι* means “to give freely”; it has the same root as the word for “grace.” Both our faith in Christ and our suffering for Christ are divine gifts to us in behalf of Christ. Let that sink in a moment. For Christ, God gives us faith in Christ and gives us suffering for Christ. Standing firm for the faith amidst opposition is a sign of our salvation and a witness for Christ.

† From Acts 16, we know what they saw Paul suffer when he was in Philippi: being persecuted, seized, publically accused, stripped, beaten with rods, thrown in jail, and run out of town.

- **[12: suffer]** For Christ, they are to go beyond believing, even beyond obeying, all the way to suffering, just as they know Paul has suffered. Public identification with Christ in a world hostile to Christ brings this suffering. Their partnership with Paul in the gospel mission brought them the same suffering as Paul experienced.
- In the Roman empire, only the cult of the emperor and recognized ethnic religions had legal status and protection. Christianity was not recognized at this time, and the Christians in Philippi had faced persecution since the church started, especially because they would not participate in the activities of the emperor cult.
- That believers should expect to suffer, particularly by persecution, is an important theological point in this letter, because it seems likely the Philippians were wondering if they were cursed or not physically delivered from their struggles by God because God was judging them as not being righteous enough.
- But their suffering is not a sign of defeat or of God’s judgment. In fact, such suffering for Christ is part of being saved. Such suffering is a divine gift! For Christ they were saved by grace and for Christ they are allowed to suffer by grace! This is part of their witness for Christ and a sign that their salvation is real.

† How willing are you to suffer for Christ? I asked earlier whether your schoolmates or coworkers were shocked at your purity, shocked by your unbending righteousness and morality, or were comfortable with you, because you act worldly enough to blend in fine.

- If you are cussing, gossiping, excluding others from your clique, you’re not doing much to live up to the gospel, to represent yourself as a citizen of Heaven. If you waste your money and your time going along with the fads of the world, if you dream their dreams and live for their goals, you are not representing Christ, you are not defending our faith.
- I knew some teenagers in a youth group in Florida, who started a sexual purity pledge; then they gave up their spring break to serve in an inner-city homeless shelter; and in the worship service, they sat up front, raising their hands and singing passionately; those people impressed me. My pest control company in Florida changed its name to Good News Pest Control, and changed their website to stress Christian ethics, and put a gospel tract on the back of their business card; those people impress me.

- Where are you at? Do you want to belong to the world, or do you want to be a citizen of Heaven? Make your declaration! Today is the day! Choose to represent Christ in your daily life, to represent Christ to everyone you know, and be willing to suffer for it, to suffer the loss of friends, to suffer in your business or career, to suffer ridicule and scorn, be willing to suffer for Christ and his gospel.

† **[13: 2 Timothy]** Open up your Bible to 2 Timothy 3.12. This is a verse we all should memorize so we are not surprised when opposition comes. This is from another letter written by Paul, to his disciple Timothy. We heard last week how important discipleship is in the church. That's why we encourage you to participate in classes and small groups, to allow us to pour into you, so you can pour into someone else.

- **2 Timothy 3.12 [NET]: Now in fact all who want to live godly lives in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.** Paul wrote this to Timothy to guide him in leading a church under the New Covenant with God. Are we still in the church age today? Are we still under that New Covenant? Christ has not come back yet to end this dispensation, this time period? Then is there any reason to think this teaching will not be true for us?
- Paul said, all who want to live godly lives in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. All. So, by the rules of logic, if you are not being persecuted, then your desire to live godly, to live righteously, is not strong enough and thus you are not living godly enough. If you truly seek to glorify Christ in every aspect of life, you will attract opposition from those who do not know Christ.
- At a party recently, I met several people, who all were friendly. But one of them was shocked later to learn I was a pastor, and after that she would not talk to me or even look at me! One of my best friends as a young man now barely talks to me, because I started walking with Christ. Expressing my beliefs in the workplace has caused me a great deal of trouble over the years. If you want to live godly lives in Christ Jesus, you will be persecuted; maybe not beaten with rods, let's hope not, but you will attract opposition.
- If you are living worthy of the gospel, if you are living righteously, then the people you know will be shocked by your purity, by your unbending morality. Paul challenges us to adopt God's perspective on life, to embrace our suffering for Christ. If we are not suffering we are doing too little for Christ, because we are not attracting opposition, and we are not sacrificing our comforts and leisure to live with purpose.
- **[14: blank]** Scholar Steven Runge wrote, "As long as we insist on viewing the world through our own perspective – with comfort, security, and happiness as the benchmark – we will never accomplish what God desires." I yearn to accomplish what God desires of me! Do you? Can you honestly say that? Maybe today, you need to say that. In the time between the sermon and taking communion, maybe this is what you need to get right with God, that you do want to accomplish what he desires of you, that you do want to live for Christ and represent Christ here, that you do want to live righteously, to live worthy of the gospel, and that you are willing to sacrifice and suffer whatever it takes. Choose today to live for God, instead of yourself.