

## Reflections on Philippians 1.27-2.4

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### Day 1

**Learn:** Prayerfully read Philippians 1.27-28. Paul has one request [though really it is a command]: they are to live in a manner worthy of the gospel. In your salvation, God justified you [declared you to be legally righteous in his sight] by imputing [accounting] to you the righteousness of Christ. Paul says believers should live up to that righteousness we have been given, that we should strive for experiential righteousness to match our imputed righteousness.

**Reflect:** Are there any “little” sins in your life which you tolerate? Are there any negative character qualities which you have not eradicated because you think they are part of who you are? What is the implication for those sins and those sinful characteristics from this command to live worthy of the gospel of Christ? Are you a bit lax about living for Christ and pursuing the gospel mission? If you were living worthy of the gospel, would you be doing more to share the gospel truth with non-believers and to teach, mentor, and encourage those in the church? Pray about what adjustments you need to make and ask God for empowerment to make them.

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### Day 2

**Learn:** Prayerfully read Philippians 1.27-30. The Philippians were facing social pressure from two groups, Jewish legalists who were encouraging them to buy into false teachings and Gentile pagans who were persecuting them for turning away from the emperor cult to worship Christ. Paul says the Philippians must live worthy of the gospel by standing firm in unity for the gospel and not being alarmed by those who were opposing them. They were to stand firm in “one spirit,” with one mind contending for the faith of the gospel. This is military imagery: they were to hold the line, empowered by the Holy Spirit and united in their plan and purpose, drawing strength from each other as they contended for the faith together. They were not to shy away from the opposition: the Greek word for “intimidated” or “frightened” here was used to describe a horse which got skittish in battle.

Usually a horse gets frightened when it is surprised. We are not to be surprised when people come against us for our beliefs. We should expect opposition as a part of the Christian life! Paul says it is a sign of our salvation and of the spiritual ruin of our opponents. Then he says that God, for Christ’s sake, gave us the grace *gift* of not only believing in Christ, but also of suffering for Christ! Some gift! The Philippians had seen Paul suffer by being persecuted, seized, publically accused, stripped, beaten with rods, thrown in jail, and run out of town [Acts 16], and now they knew he was in prison in Rome. Paul is telling them this is not shameful abandonment by God, it is an expected result of standing for Christ, and our response should be to continue to stand firm for Christ [1.27-28], confirming and defending the gospel of Christ [1.7]. Suffering for Christ is part of being saved; being opposed and thus suffering for the gospel is a part of being a Christian. For Christ we were saved by grace and for Christ we are allowed to suffer by grace to bring Christ glory!

**Reflect:** For Christ, we are to go beyond believing, even beyond obeying, all the way to suffering. Consider for a moment, what do you think about this gift of suffering? Are you suffering at all for Christ? Is there any “push back” from non-believers in your life, does your faith make anyone uncomfortable? We are not suggesting you be pushy or obnoxious about it, but if everyone in your life knows you are a Christian, you can count on some people shunning you or speaking against you. As you love your opponents anyway, as you peacefully forebear their slights, as you endure in faith and obedience even when it is hard, you make a powerful witness for Christ.

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### Day 3

**Learn:** Prayerfully read Philippians 2.1-4. Paul explains more about how they are to live worthy of the gospel. He begins with four “if” statements. In Greek, it is clear that the assumption is that all four of these things are true, so the readers should do as Paul asks/commands. Is there any encouragement or comfort in Christ? Yes. Our salvation in Christ gives us hope even when we are suffering. Paul was in prison, possibly on his way to execution. But he never gave up hope, because he knew he was right with God through Christ, and therefore he knew he could serve Christ even in prison and his death would bring him to Christ’s presence in Heaven. Is there any loving solace in Christ, the comfort provided by love? Yes. God’s love lavished on those in Christ provides solace amidst our suffering. Paul teaches there is real comfort offered by God in our times of struggle; if we turn to him and depend

on him, he will lift us up. Is there spiritual fellowship or spiritual partnership in the church for those who are in Christ together? Yes, we have a strong bond of love and unity that grows as we live for Christ together and we build each other up, and this spiritual fellowship helps sustain us in times of suffering. Is there fellowship with the Holy Spirit? Yes. Those who are saved in Christ enjoy spiritual unity with God to empower us through our times of suffering. Is there affection and sympathy for those in Christ? Yes, those saved in Christ receive constant affection and sympathy from God and from each other in the believing community as the body of Christ, and this also helps sustain us in times of suffering. All these are divine gifts through Christ, and thus certainties. Since these things are true and shared by all believers, therefore Paul says the Philippians should obey his command to complete his joy.

**Reflect:** Which of these four truths has an impact on you, and why? How could you better realize these things in your church experience, what might you need to do to make that so? How can these truths help when you are suffering? Could you be encouraged even just by knowing God provides these things?

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#### **Day 4**

**Learn:** Prayerfully read Philippians 2.1-4. Paul says they can complete his joy by being of the same mind [or thinking the same thing]. Paul wants them to have unity about the gospel and purpose in life. He gives four ways the Philippians could live out this unity. First, they are to have the same love together which God has shown them through Christ. This is a love that is sacrificial, humble, and unconditional. Second, they are to be united in spirit. This was a Greek phrase [literally “one soul”] meaning to have a harmonious relationship. Third, they are to have one purpose. Based on what we have learned so far, Paul wants them to live for Christ, to be image of Christ, righteously reflecting and representing God, and reproducing God’s image through pursuit of the gospel mission. Fourth, they are to put aside selfish ambition and vanity, to adopt humility, such that they treat one another as more important than themselves, being concerned about each other’s circumstances or interests, not just their own.

**Reflect:** How would life be different if everyone loved one another with Christ’s kind of sacrificial, unconditional, and humble love? When you love someone like that, what sort of things would you do *for* them? What sort of things would you not do *to* them, that you might do otherwise? How could we in the church look out for each other’s circumstances? What would that mean? How would it be different than regular society? What might you do to better show how important others in the church are, and that you are obeying this command?

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#### **Day 5**

**Learn:** Prayerfully read Philippians 1.27-2.4. The Greek word for “conceit” or “vanity” in 2.3 is formed by putting together two Greek words which mean “empty glory.” If we are motivated to glorify or boast in ourselves, that glory is empty glory, without substance. Selfish ambition reflects our self-interest and self-promotion at the expense of others; it reflects our values and behavior as fallen flesh. To have unity and generosity, believers must stop thinking in such ego-centric ways, which are divisive and self-oriented.

Humility was not admired in ancient Greek culture. The word almost never occurs in their literature, and when it does it is meant as a weakness or sign of lowliness. Paul’s view is different. From his Jewish upbringing, he knows that God humbles the proud, but exalts the humble. Read Proverbs 11.2. The proud will walk by human reasoning [bottom line] and thus disgrace themselves by not honoring Christ; the humble will seek out God and his ways [top line] and gain wisdom from God’s revelation. If we humbly acknowledge we are mere creatures, fallen into sin, unable to be righteous without Christ, in need of God’s salvation and empowerment through gifts of grace we do not deserve, then we trust in God instead of ourselves, we submit to Christ and follow his example, and we allow the Holy Spirit to win over our fleshly desires, so we learn to value others and minister to others instead of promoting ourselves and our own interests. In this letter, Paul will describe the humility of Christ, our true hero whom we should emulate. If we are humble, we will not act out of selfish ambition or empty conceit, rather seeking to value others above ourselves, to bless them even if we have to sacrifice, to take care of their needs as well as our own.

**Reflect:** Would others say you were humble in the way described in this passage? Or are you proud, filled with vanity or conceit and selfish ambition? Pray about improving in this area. Can you identify one aspect of life in which this is especially your weakness? Talk with a spiritual friend or mentor about it.