

Gospel Virtues

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Bible Verse: Philippians 1:27-28
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The concept, the thought, the theme of Christ as King and coming to adore him has consequences, I guess I would say as we begin here this morning, is that we are not meant to simply sing of these things and be moved for a moment, it's an entire faith response to Christ that this calls for, that we would truly adore him and worship him and live our lives for him by faith and in response to these things, and the life of faith is a life that brings certain virtues into biblical focus. Virtue is a word that is rapidly fading from the vocabulary of our sinful world. There's no love for virtue and so there's obviously not much need for the word virtue, but it's a word that we as Christians should not lose sight of because of what it communicates to us about the kind of lives that we live in response to the saving work of Christ in our lives. Virtue refers to behavior that shows high moral standards. Virtue refers to the moral excellence of right action and thinking, and virtue is a word that helps us think rightly about today's text which comes from the book of Philippians 1. I invite you to turn there with me as we return to Philippians to continue our verse by verse exposition of this portion of God's inspired word.

Philippians 1:27. You'll recall that Paul has expressed his love for the Philippians. Up until this point, he has been praying for them. He has reported to them on his personal circumstances in prison and he tells them that he's content to stay on earth even though it would be far better for him to be in heaven. He's content to stay because he knows that the continuation of his life will result in ministry that will benefit them. That's the first 26 verses of Philippians is 26 seconds. Now he pivots as we come to verse 27 and he addresses them and begins to give exhortation to them and we're going to look at the first two verses or the next two verses, I should say, verses 27 and 28, as Paul turns his attention now to the Philippians and what their response should be to the nature of the gospel.

Verse 27, he tells them,

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.

So Paul has completed his personal report and is now turning his attention to the Philippians. As he does so, beloved, just by way of preview for us here this morning, he is setting forth principles that prevail on Christian minds and Christian hearts throughout all of the ages. He's addressing them in a particular historical context, to be sure, but the virtues of which he speaks are to be those that mark Christian people throughout all of time, and that's what we want to consider here this morning, and here in these two verses Paul is giving a preview of things that he will be addressing in more detail later on. He gives a general assertion of what he wants in this portion of the text, and then later on in chapters 2, 3 and 4, he's going to develop the idea. So we're being introduced here in these passages to what Paul has in mind that he wants from the Philippians and what they need to hear in their particular circumstances, and because he's speaking about universal Christian virtues as he writes, he's giving us things that we need to hear as well.

I'm very excited to be able to share this text with you. I've never preached specifically on this text before and so it's a great privilege for me, as always, to be able to stand before an audience and open God's word. I still marvel at the blessing that he's given to me to do what I do, and especially to be able to do it with all of you whom I love and I know that I am the beneficiary of your love and care as well.

What does Paul say here and what is he doing? Paul is seeking to increase virtue in the lives of the Philippians in light of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. He says, "You have been saved by Christ. You have been saved by the glorious Christ." Christ came, Christ lived, Christ died, Christ rose again, Christ has ascended into the heavens and through faith in Christ, we enter into a shared union of all of the glorious benefits of his person, of his work, and of his future reign. We get to share in all of that and so our lives have been rescued from sin and damnation, sin and judgment, sin and condemnation, we've been rescued from that and set upon a path that leads us to heaven. We have been given every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, all of this in complete contradiction to our deserving. We deserve the judgment and condemnation. In its place Christ has lovingly given of himself to save us, to redeem us, to share his blessing and his very life with us in a way that we never deserved and never could have deserved and couldn't have even asked for. We had forfeited all claims on God and yet here we are in this realm of blessing.

Well, now what we find ourselves in, is that there is a life that is lived in response to that. There are virtues that flow from that and Paul makes this clear from the very start. Look at verse 27 with me here as he says, "Only," as a matter of first priority, direct your attention here and here only, he says, "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ." So he says, "In light of everything that you know about the gospel, understand that there is a life to be lived in response to it, and there is a life that alone is worthy of Christ in response to this. You don't become a Christian and continue living the same old way that you had before. Scriptures say that if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation. Behold, the old things have passed away. Behold, new things have come." And some of us, you know, especially if you come from a realm and a life like mine, you came from a realm of anger and conflict and you liked that, you liked engaging

the conflict and you thrived on argument and hatred, even, you know, and anger and bitterness and you nursed all that stuff, some of us did, anyway. Others were marked by fear and timidity and a total lack of purpose and reason for our existence and we just kind of meandered through life without any real sense of conviction. Well, beloved, what I want you to see is that when these truths take root in your heart and when Christ becomes preeminent as he does in the minds and the lives and the affections of his people, then there are certain internal characteristics, internal virtues that start to flourish in the mind of a true believer that start to govern his entire perspective on the way that he lives life, and his entire reason and motivation for why he lives life, and that is what Paul is appealing to as he writes here in these two verses that we're looking at.

Now I want to point something out to you by way of emphasis in Paul's writing that would not be evident as you're just reading the English text. You see that phrase "conducting yourselves in a manner," and then it says, "worthy of the gospel." Well, that "worthy of the gospel" in the original language is moved toward the front of the sentence indicating that it's where Paul's real emphasis is. He's saying, "Worthy of the gospel, conduct yourselves in response to this." And so it's not so much "live in light of the gospel," but "worthy of the gospel, live."

Well, what does that "worth," what is the gospel worth to us? What does the gospel call forth from us in virtue to live and what does the word "worthy" even mean? Well, beloved, just step back for a moment. Remember how precious Christ is. Remember how sweet and virtuous he is and how lovely he is in our affections, yet this Christ has saved us. The word "worthy" means to live in a way, worthy means "to do something in a manner that does honor to." Our lives are to give honor to the message that saved us. That means that we have to live distinct from the way that we lived as unregenerate, sinful, condemned people. We live in a distinct way, in a way that honors the message of the gospel, and that there should be – watch this – there should be a sense of integrity and consistency between what we profess we believe, what we say that we believe and the way that we actually live.

You know, we've all heard the critique that there's just hypocrites in the church. We've all heard that and people use that as a means to slander Christ. Well, that's not where we're going here today but just recognizing that what Scripture calls us to is a consistency that if we confess Christ we should live in a manner that is worthy of him; that there is not a distinction between our belief and our behavior. Those two are joined together in a very natural and organic way.

And so this is the life that is worthy of the gospel and he says, "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of it." Well, that phrase "conduct yourselves," it's from a word that expresses the idea of citizenship. It has the idea of functioning within a larger body with a sense of obligation. Citizens in a country have certain obligations and privileges that attend to their position, right? We are entitled to the protection of our government from evildoers, we have obligations as citizens to pay our taxes and to honor the laws, and what Paul is saying is that you are to live as a citizen like that in the context of the body of Christ, but it's not a matter of paying taxes or following laws that he has in mind here,

it's something else, there's a different kind of obligation that comes upon Christian people as they live as believers in the context of the body of Christ.

And oh, this is just so cool the way Paul brings this out. Now and I'm going to show it to you. You're saying, "I haven't seen anything cool yet." Well, it's coming. It's coming. Trust me. Now these readers, these Philippian readers would have been predominantly Roman citizens. That was a big deal in the first century, to be a citizen of Rome. Not everyone was. There was a pride in being a Roman citizen and so that word connoting citizenship in what Paul said would have resonated with them as he heard it, but as you consider the idea of citizenship, Paul in this letter is wanting them to think about a different way, not thinking about an earthly citizenship.

Look over at chapter 3, verse 20. Paul is talking to them about a heavenly citizenship. Philippians 3:20 says, "our citizenship is in heaven," our citizenship is in heaven, he says. We're living as citizens of a heavenly kingdom and what Paul is communicating in this passage is that there is a sense of privilege and responsibility that flows from that citizenship. We have privilege as being on the receiving end of the saving grace of Christ, we have responsibilities now to live within the realm that he has saved us into, and that is the virtue of which Paul is speaking to us.

Here's what I want you to think about increasingly in the coming days, beloved, is that it was a noble privileged thing to be a Roman citizen. Paul spoke about his Roman citizenship. Paul used his Roman citizenship as a basis to appeal to Caesar when he was being unjustly prosecuted, "I appeal to Caesar. I'm a citizen of Rome. You can't do this to me." And so there is the context that's taking place. What you and I need to increasingly recognize more and more, we could never think high enough thoughts about it, is to recognize that for Christ to call us into his kingdom means that we are on the receiving end of a noble calling. It is a noble virtuous thing to be a Christian. It is a position of honor. It is a position of privilege and therefore we rise to the occasion of our calling by living in a manner that is virtuous, that is living in a manner that is worthy of the calling that has been given to us so that the affections of our heart and what we respond to and what we value and what we live for and what we are willing to die for is changed and corresponds to the high glory that Christ is, and the high glory of having been called by him personally into his kingdom. So this noble calling, this noble position calls for virtue.

Look at verse 27 with me again as we keep the text fresh in our mind. Paul tells them, "Only," as a matter of first priority, "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ," and so that's what the general theme is, and then he's going to explain what it is, but first he needs to tell them this, he says, "so that whether I come and see you or remain absent." Remember, he's in prison. He's not with them as he's saying this. He's sending a letter to them to communicate to them and he doesn't actually know when he's going to be released, if he's going to be released. He doesn't know when he'll be with them, if he'll be with them again. He hopes to, he expects to but he doesn't know that as he writes this, and so there is a little bit of an air of uncertainty as he's saying these things to them. What he says to them is that, "You need to do this whether I'm with you or not." He says, "If I come and I'm with you, I want to see the fruit of this with my own eyes. If I

stay away, if the Lord doesn't release me anytime soon from prison, I want to hear about you, that you are responding to Christ in a proper manner so that I am secondary in this. You have a primarily vertical obligation to Christ to live in a manner that is worthy of the gospel that saved you." And so he kind of steps back, he recedes, as it were, into the background here and says, "The gospel is what you need to be contemplating and how you are to live in response to it. Maybe I'll be able to come, maybe I'll only hear about this through the reports of others but, beloved, either way, either way, you, my Philippian friends, you should be living in a manner that is fitting of the gospel of Christ."

Now if he had just left it at that, it would have been kind of general and it would have been a nice sentiment but it doesn't get down to particulars, does it? If I just say, "Go live in a manner worthy of Christ," you could all say, "Amen!" but then we're left with the question as you walk out and you think about it for another minute or two and the service is over, you go out scratching your head, "But what does that mean? How do I do that and what's the issue? What's the concern here?" Well, that's what Paul is going to lay out for us in the remainder of our passage here this morning, and he's setting forth two virtues that should mark the Christian life, two virtues that should mark the Christian life and that's what we're going to come through and, beloved, it may not be exactly what you expect. In fact, I would venture to say maybe for some of us that have been in our church, familiar with our teaching over the years, not all of this is going to sound new, but certainly in the realm of the predominant spirit that marks Christianity, I want to tell you that these two virtues would be foreign to the ears of most who hear that are used to the moralistic therapeutic deism that marks the teaching in most so-called Christian churches, of how God just wants to love you and bless you, and he's not placing any demands on you, and you just can go to him when you have a problem and he'll fix things for you. These virtues of which Paul speaks are completely incongruous with that mindset. They don't fit in that mindset at all that has this self-centered mindset that God exists to serve my needs, to make my life easy, and that's the purpose for which he exists, and so, God, smooth the path, spread out the rose petals in the aisle for me as I walk down this primrose path. Well, the virtues of which Paul speaks is that which is worthy of the gospel of Christ, is just in a completely different realm of that.

Now beloved, I want to encourage you, I want to ask you to think in those terms as we're coming here, and to not try to process what Paul says in this passage through that paradigm of what we've taught about in the past of moralistic therapeutic deism, and to realize that Paul's talking about something different. Paul's not talking about moralistic therapeutic deism, he's talking about the gospel. Those are two different things. They're mutually exclusive. And so it's important for us to set aside some of the things in our 21st century environment that have conditioned our thinking about what the Christian life is about, to set that aside, to come humbly before the first century text and say, "Okay, Paul, you tell me. You're the one that Christ appointed as an apostle. You're the one who represents Christ. You're the one speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. You tell me, Paul, what is worthy of the gospel. I'll take the posture of a student, of a disciple, of a learner here. You teach me, Paul. You teach me, Scripture, going all the way back to the spiritual realm. You teach us, Holy Spirit, what You want from those who know the gospel. You tell us what is worthy of the gospel."

With the question framed like that, we're going to see these two virtues that Paul lays out and the first one is this, it's the virtue of unity. The virtue of unity. This is amazing. Already you've contradicted the mindset of moralistic therapeutic deism. If you haven't heard those messages, they're available online at our website and you can find those, I'm not really taking time to define terms any more than that. Let's just put it this way, that self-centered approach to Christianity that God exists to meet my needs, as soon as you say that one of the primary virtues of Christianity is the manifestation of unity, you've immediately been lifted out of that realm because now you realize you're in the context of others and it's not just about you and it's not just about me. It's about this whole body into which we have been saved and there is this virtue of unity that flows that is worthy of the gospel and alone is worthy of the gospel.

So what does Paul say? He tells them that for the sake of the gospel, they need to be united with one another. Look at verse 27 with me again. Philippians 1:27, he says, "whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that," here's the content of the report that he wants back from them after they have responded to his letter. "Here's what I want from you. Here's what I want to hear about you. That," and then you see the content of that, "I want to hear that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." One spirit. One mind. This is in the context of a plural command. You don't see that so much in the English, it's very evident in the original language. This is a plural command. "You all, I want you all to be like this. You all need to be living with one mind, with one spirit." And he's speaking to this virtue of unity, speaking to what and defining what should be a preeminent mark of any local church anywhere that is under the sound of the gospel, that professes the true gospel of Jesus Christ, what should the Spirit of a body of believers, a local church, be like. This is important. This is what's worthy of the gospel. Paul is calling for a common commitment to truth, to Christ, and to each other.

There's a vertical dimension of a commitment to the truth of the gospel, of the Christ of the gospel, and then there is this common commitment to each other. You can almost think about it, if you like to think about things visually, it's shaped just like a cross, beloved. It's shaped just like a cross. It's vertical toward God and Christ and a commitment, an allegiance to the Christ who saved us and the biblical system of truth that communicates that to our hearts and to our understanding so that we can respond in faith. There's that vertical beam of unity and then there is this horizontal beam that stretches out pointing from left to right, from west to east, stretching out and encompassing the people of the gospel as well. So he's calling for a common commitment to truth and to each other. He's speaking about the whole matter of unity.

Now beloved, we have addressed together here at Truth Community Church the issue of unity on many many many different occasions. You can look for a message titled "Putting the You in Church Unity." You can look for my messages from Ephesians 4 that talk about unity in verses 1 to 3. I spoke about it recently in our series, our topical series on the church. We've talked about unity many many times. One of the reasons that we've done it is because it is a preeminent priority of New Testament Christianity and of what a

church should look like, a common commitment to truth and a common commitment to each other. So because I've addressed it so many times, I'm not going to belabor the point excessively here even though it's a great temptation to me to do so. I would love to just stop and preach, re-preach those four or five messages but that's not what we're going to do. We're teaching Philippians here today and so we're just going to address it in the context of Philippians.

Why would Paul speak to these people about unity? We've seen throughout our teaching on this epistle so far, that these people were sympathetic and loyal to Paul. They were genuine, true supporters of him. This is one of the warmest, most affirming, joyful epistles that he's written of the 13 that are left for us in the canon. So why does he even feel the need to make unity the first and foremost priority in what he's talking about? One spirit, one mind, what's the problem here? Well, even within a loving body of Christians like that, they were experiencing fractures in their fellowship and it's very evident.

Look at chapter 2, verse 1. You can see how much this is a burden on Paul's heart, chapter 2, verse 1, when he says, "Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion," he says, "make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose." Unity. Unity. Unity. Unity, beloved, he says to them.

Verse 4 he says, "do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." He anticipated and refuted moralistic therapeutic deism in one verse 2,000 years ago. It's not about you. You consider the interests of others as you move about in the realm of the body of Christ. You consider what others need. Don't be so selfish about it. It's not all about you. It's okay if you don't get everything that you want, the question is are you serving and being a blessing to others within the body of Christ.

In chapter 2, verse 14, you see him saying, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world." Why did he call them to unity in chapter 1, verse 27? Why does he emphasize one mind, one spirit? Why does he tell them, "Don't merely look out for your own personal interests but look out for the interest of others"? Why does he need to command them in a negative way? Why does he lay upon them this prohibition against grumbling and disputing? He was saying it because that was the problem and that was one of the problems in the spirit of the church, they were grumbling against each other, they were disputing with each other and it was harming the unity, it was bringing disruption into the life of the church.

And he even calls out people by name. Look at chapter 4, verse 1. Oh, I'm glad that I was not on the receiving end of this admonishment, to stand in the canon for all of time. Paul says, chapter 4, verse 1, "Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see," he loves them, he's not harsh or severe in what he says to them here. He says, "Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown," I love you so much. I'm so glad

you're part of my ministry, "in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved. I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche," two women, "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord." Oh man, can you imagine? They're sitting in the congregation like you're sitting here, there's a letter from the Apostle Paul being read, he's calling them to unity, and then he singles out two people by name and says, "Sisters, you need to live in harmony." That's why he's having to talk about unity throughout the letter, it's because there were divisions and two women in particular that seemed to have been at the root of a lot of it, if not all of it. And so he calls them out and he says, "I urge you to live in harmony together." Unity is a virtue. It is a Christian virtue. It is a virtue that is to mark life in the body of Christ so that when there is conflict, it needs to be addressed for the vertical sake of Christ and for the horizontal sake of one another.

Paul is telling them, go back to verse 27 of chapter 1 again. Let's just keep it fresh in our minds even as I read it many times throughout the course of the message. He says, "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." He's telling them that they need to stand with one another as a team as they contend for the faith. A team has to have a common plan, a common mind, each member executing his part for the greater success of the team. It's not just about one person on the team. If one person goes off track, it throws the whole team off. So you've got to strive together, Paul tells them, as you contend for the faith.

You see, this is more than just about you and me, isn't it? It's more than just about what we get out of it. There's something transcendent that existed before any of us were born and that will exist after we're gone. We're existing in this window of time to be working together as a team for the advance of the gospel, striving together for the faith of the gospel. It's bigger than any one of us. And so we submit, we subordinate our own interests, our own preferences sometimes, for the sake of the greater whole, for what works for the whole team and what works for the sake of the gospel.

When Paul speaks about faith here, he's not talking about our personal subjective exercise of faith, our own personal belief, he's using faith in an objective sense. The faith. The doctrinal content of biblical truth. Salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Based on the Scriptures alone. To the glory of God alone. That faith. And he says, "Beloved, you need to be unified, striving together for the faith of the gospel, for the proclamation of it, for the defense of it, for the advance of it, for your own growth in it. You need to be together."

Now, look, this all gets really really practical. Why was that aspect of it important? Why is that aspect of unity important? Why does he put unity, standing together and stopping the divisions, why does he put it in the context of the faith? The one true faith? Why is this his object as he writes? Well, beloved, again writing about things that transcend the first century church that are true in every age of the church, they needed to stand together in unity because there were false teachers lurking that were subverting and undermining the truth.

Look at chapter 3, verse 2. He says, "Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision." There were people in their midst promoting Jewish teaching, salvation by works, a legalistic approach to truth and to spiritual life. Paul says, "These guys are dogs. They're false workers. They're evil." And the reason that they needed to be unified together and to strive together for the faith of the gospel was because there were opponents, there were people that were striving against that so that the true believers needed to join together and repel that attack because what did Jesus say about a house divided against itself? What happens to it? It falls. Paul says, "You have a transcendent responsibility to join together, to be unified together because there are false teachers that are lurking and you need to be together for the faith of the gospel in order to protect the gospel and to see its advance."

Look at verse 18 as he says more about it. He says, "many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ," and he says there are many of them. This is a prevalent threat. This is serious. And he says, There's so many of them and it breaks my heart to have to say it. I get no joy out of this. They're enemies of the cross of Christ. They're headed for destruction. Their god is their appetite. They're full of shame. They've set their minds on earthly things." And Paul, so what you see as you read through just on the surface of the text of Philippians as he makes this appeal to unity, you see that inside the church there was division taking place and you see that they are dividing against themselves when there are false teachers seeking to lead people astray, to undermine the truth, the content of the faith, and if the gospel is obscured, if the gospel is denied, people get further confirmed in their lost estate. So Paul says, "You need to be unified. You need to set aside these petty differences. You need to set aside these selfish interests and concerns for the sake of the faith and for the sake of each other, and to realize that it's more than about what's your personal preference here."

So, beloved, coming back to what I just said, kind of hitting the reset button here, unity with each other, unity in the defense of the faith because there are threats to that that undermine things of eternal significance, and so we have to realize what the primary object and what the primary virtue is. And one of the things that you see in this, beloved, is this, is that the doctrinal content of a church's teaching matters. What a church teaches matters. It is important. It is significant in the eyes of God even if it is indifferent, a matter of indifference in the hearts of men who just wander in out of the street. People who are called by Christ and a body of believers that are called together, have to understand that the faith, that content of truth that draws us together, is something of supreme importance that we are to work together to protect, proclaim, defend and assert. That matters to God. Paul told Timothy, "Preach the word." Peter said to believers, "Grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ." You see, there's this knowledge, there's this understanding, there's this commitment to belief that is significant.

Now beloved, let me just make a point of personal application or present-day application here within the body of Truth Community Church and just point something out here. This is why, because the truth matters, this is why our church, Truth Community Church, has a

detailed Confession of Faith. You know, the approach of many is to have as general and broad a statement of faith as possible, leaving many many things open thinking that that will produce unity because a lot of people of different opinions can come together under one roof. That's not unity and that will eventually fall upon itself and fracture when people start to say, "Well, I believe in infant baptism," for example, "Well, I believe in believer's baptism. I believe that God sovereignly chose who would be saved before the foundation of the world. Well, I believe that man has the final say in his salvation." Now look, it's possible to draft such a vague, general statement of faith to paper over all those differences but that's not unity, that's not commitment to a common truth at all. No, unity is found when a church teaches in detail what the truth is, and membership and coming together is around a shared commitment to those truths so that we know what we stand together on. The content matters. We're not just teaching people, we're not trying to simply tell people to live better lives and to be good moral people in society and to raise your kids so that they don't get pregnant or get on drugs. It's a whole lot more than that.

So for the sake of unity, beloved, in our membership we require people to affirm what we believe. If someone doesn't believe what we teach, that's between them and the Lord, but it excludes them from membership in our church because we're not unified on what the truth is, and why would we be members together? How could we do that? And you see, unity, true unity, real unity, I'm finally getting to the point about the general statements of faith, real unity on matters of the truth comes from teaching and resolving differences, not avoiding them, not pretending that they don't exist or acting like they don't matter. That's not real unity anymore than if there's a problem in your home, you know, you can ignore it and avoid it but there's always that uncomfortable sense hanging in the air that something's unresolved here, right? You know what that's like.

Well, in the church, just multiply it by infinity. It's a lot more important because there's a lot more at stake and so we teach these things and we resolve them, we consider things and don't simply ignore them as if it doesn't matter. There's one faith and we're to strive together for it. That's the virtue of unity and as we do that, we love one another, we bear with one another, we forgive one another, we sacrifice for one another in the spirit of unity because we all understand individually what we profess corporately, that it's more than about one individual, it's about what's good for the common body which brings us to our second virtue for this morning, the virtue of courage. The virtue of courage. Look at what Paul says in verse 28, he says, "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."

Now biblical faith, I'm touching back, I'm toe-tapping back into the first point about unity for just a moment, biblical faith and relational unity in a local body are like light in a dark world. You know, where truth and love are truly being exercised, that shines like a light in a dark world that knows nothing about those things and, frankly, cares very little about them as well. Well, let me borrow something that I heard many many years ago and rephrase it just a bit. Do you know what the problem with light is? What's the problem with light in your backyard on a summer night? The problem with light is it attracts the bugs. It attracts the bugs. Godly faith and godly unity eventually bring opposition. It brings people to oppose it. You read through the life of the Apostle Paul and he was

constantly resisted by the Jews of his days. Jesus said, "If they persecuted Me, they'll persecute you." It is not an easy path to be a biblical Christian, it is not an easy path to be a biblical church for precisely this reason, it brings a realm of conflict to you from outside.

If you look over at 2 Timothy 3, you'll see something important, a text that shines light on this for us. 2 Timothy 3:12. Paul had just been speaking in verse 11 about the persecutions and sufferings that he endured and then he expands it and he says in verse 12, he said, "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." And he goes on to say, "But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." He says, "Everyone who wants to live for the truth is going to experience this to one degree or another, at one time or another." And he says, so he instructs Timothy in verse 14, he says, "You, however," when this happens to you, Timothy, "you continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

Beloved, persecution and difficulties come in the context of biblical living and in the context of biblical ministry. It is so crucial even in this moment for us to recognize that and embrace it and understand it because everything else that Paul says here in verse 28 flows from that recognition and that reality. This is why his next exhortation is so important because, look, the reality is that almost none of us like conflict, none of us enjoy the tension that comes from addressing divisive people or addressing error. None of us enjoy that so much.

We tend to shrink back from it and it is that reality that Paul is saying in verse 28 of Philippians 1, he says, "As you're striving together for the faith of the gospel," he says, "in no way alarmed by your opponents." That word "alarmed" refers to a reaction that feels intimidated by the reality of conflict and you know that a conflict is coming and you feel that sense of intimidation that maybe makes you shrink back from it, to avoid it because you don't want to deal with the uncomfortable feelings that come in the midst of it. This word "alarmed" is used in other literature to describe frightened horses, a stampede of horses that are out of control because something spooked them and they just go stampeding off, running from the occasion of their fear.

Paul says, "Whatever you do in the Christian life, don't be like that. Don't be alarmed." And what he's calling for here, then, is courage, of strength, of a willingness to graciously engage whatever is needed to protect the faith and to protect the unity of the body. Unity and courage, beloved, are virtues that Christians display to honor the gospel. Unity and courage is what's worthy of the gospel. Look, if the gospel of Christ is true, and it is, and if Christ is so glorious as he is, and he is, then it is a matter of virtue, of propriety, of the right thing to defend that which Scripture testifies about his glory, and to defend and protect, beloved, to defend and protect the local body from that which would divide and sour that even if it takes conflict to resolve it. One commentator said and I quote, he said,

"The recognition that Christ is on their side should cause believers to avoid the unreasoning terror that prevents intelligent effort."

Why, beloved, why is this call to courage so necessary in this context? Why this call to not be alarmed by your opponents? Well, can we just be real with each other right now? Can we just be candid and not deal in superficialities or pretense that life is any different than what it really is? Can we do that for a moment for the sake of Christ here this morning? The reality of why courage is necessary is that divisive people are often subtle, they're often cruel, and they're often vindictive, and to confront them is to invite that subtlety, that cruelty and that vindictiveness upon your own head. To say, "We can't do it that way here," is to invite a conflict that calls for courage.

False teachers, some of you know this personally even in your own family, false teachers are often arrogant, they often have degrees and letters after their name that would tend toward intimidation. They're marked by defiance and anything other than a love for the truth and a humble submission to it. So to confront a false teacher is to invite a conflict that is not going to be easily resolved and what we see from Scripture is that it may require uncomfortable conflict for a church, for its leadership, to protect unity and the faith.

And rather than – oh, beloved, some of you have church experiences that would testify in a sad way to the truth of what I'm about to say – rather than shrinking from that responsibility, a church, a virtuous church, virtuous church leadership, shows courage in response to it and says, "This ain't gonna be fun but I'm gonna step up to the plate and address it." And why do you show that courage? You see how tightly Paul's logic is worked together here, it's because that's what's worthy of the gospel. It's because Christ is worthy of the gospel, the gospel is worthy to be defended. The innocent trusting lives within a local body who may not know everything that's happening, they're entitled to have a sense, a realm of protection, an oasis that they can come, that they can have a presupposition that it's safe here, that there's not somebody trying to swallow me up here, trying to destroy me and lead me astray here.

Well, to a church, to its leadership, is entrusted the responsibility to protect that, to protect the unity, to protect the faith, and to show courage when they do because it may bring conflict and the man of God, the woman of God, has to step up and say, "You know what? I'll stand in the breach here. I'll go to the front line. I'll fight this battle for the sake of unity and for the sake of truth." Courage faces the difficulty. Courage seeks to resolve the difficulty rather than withdrawing from it.

So what Paul is telling the Philippians here is, "Don't give in to that feeling of intimidation when the inevitable times of conflict arise." And having said that, he gives them a sense, he gives them a two-edged sword of encouragement to inform their courage. Look at the end of verse 28, he says, "Your attitude of refusing to be intimidated, it carries a sign, it signifies something." He says, "It is a sign of destruction for them, for your opponents, but it's a sign of salvation for you and that's from God." He says, "Even if it brings suffering to you, you patiently endure it for the sake of the truth,

for the sake of the body, for the sake of your fellow believers, horizontally and vertically for the honor of Christ. You show courage for it in order to protect that which has been given to you, which has been entrusted to you, the stewardship which God has allowed you to have. You say, 'Oh, I'm gonna give an account for this and this is really important. It doesn't matter what happens to me. Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life I'll sow. The body they may kill, God's truth abideth still. His kingdom is forever.'"

And so he's saying the courage that you show as a sign of divine judgment that faces your opponents and it is also a signature indication from God that true Christians will be saved in the end. If you don't surrender in the conflict in time, it's an indication that you'll be saved, delivered, enter into glory, as it were, in the final outcome. Your courage now testifies that God will deliver you in the end and so he says, "Of course, you'll be courage. Remember that and let it help you to be strong and to stand firm in the faith. Your final triumph is assured."

Charles Spurgeon said this, he said, "The weakest of minds are those which go forward because they're carried along by the crowd. The truly strong are accustomed to stand alone. They are not cast down if they find themselves in the minority."

Unity testifies to the one true faith of the gospel. The gospel is not divided. Christ isn't divided. The Holy Spirit isn't divided. Our salvation isn't divided. So how could we be divided if we're joined together by that? The oneness of a body testifies to that unity of the gospel, testifies to the one true faith, and when you and I show courage when opposition comes, it's a testimony to the ultimate triumph of Christ. The hymn-writer back in the middle of the 19th century said this, he said,

"Stand up! stand up for Jesus!
The trumpet call obey;
Forth to the mighty conflict
In this His glorious day.
You that are men, now serve Him
Against unnumbered foes;
Let courage rise with danger.
And strength to strength oppose.

Stand up! stand up for Jesus!
Stand in His strength alone;
The arm of flesh will fail you;
You dare not trust your own.
Put on the Gospel armor,
Each piece put on with prayer,
Where duty calls, or danger,
Be never wanting there."

Conduct yourselves, he's saying, in a manner that's worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Will you be a Christian like that?

Let's pray together.

*O God, give us strength, give us courage, give us clarity to be just that kind of Christian.
By the power of Your Holy Spirit, to the glory of the name of Christ, for the sake of the
one true faith of the gospel. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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