

Striving Together for the Gospel

Text: Philippians 1:27-30

Introduction:

1. This is Paul's first major exhortation of the Epistle. Up until this point the focus has been more on the report concerning his prayers for them and his imprisonment. Now he begins to zero in on the needs of the Philippian believers more specifically.
2. The Gospel is again central to Paul's focus in these verses. The Gospel is mentioned 6 times in Philippians chapter 1:
 - The Fellowship in the Gospel (Vs. 5).
 - The Defence and confirmation of the Gospel (Vs. 7).
 - The Furtherance of the Gospel (Vs. 12).
 - The Defence of the Gospel (Vs. 17).
 - The Conversation becoming the Gospel (Vs. 27a).
 - The Striving together for the Gospel (Vs. 27b).
3. Paul is concerned that the testimony of the Gospel in Philippi not be tarnished by disunity in the church. Clearly this was a problem from the frequent references on this theme in the Epistle (E.g., 2:2-4, 14; 4:2). There was strife in the church at Philippi and it was likely centered around two key women in the church, Euodias and Syntyche (4:2). It doesn't take much to produce a fracture line in the local assembly! Sometimes there is a division over doctrine that has to be resolved but more often than not, the devil seems to have a knack for getting believers who are unified doctrinally to become divided over the petty. The theme of unity introduced in these verses will lead into the major theme of the mind of Christ in the next chapter.
4. Paul exhorts them to live in a manner consistent with the Gospel they profess to believe. We will consider this theme under three headings.

Note firstly the need for...

I. **SINCERITY IN REFERENCE TO THE GOSPEL (VS. 27A)**

A. **The Analogy – 'conversation'**

The word 'conversation' is rich in meaning. It means:

1. Lifestyle. In today's usage, the word is used to describe a verbal interchange between two individuals. However, in old English, it had a wider meaning of lifestyle, manner of life. The same Greek word is translated 'lived' in Acts 23:1.
2. Citizenship. Paul uses a very specific Greek word and not the usual one translated 'conversation' in the N.T. The word is πολιτευομαι (politeuomai) which is derived from the root word πολιτης (polites). Our English words 'police', 'politics' and 'politicians' are derived from this Greek word. Wuest explains that "the word speaks of one's manner of life seen as a duty to a body or group of which one was a member, and to the head of that group to whom he is responsible." Paul uses the same word in its noun form in Phil. 3:20 concerning the fact our citizenship is in heaven. Paul is exhorting them to behave like citizens of heaven should behave. The

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Philippians were citizens of Rome but more importantly, they were citizens of heaven.

3. Wuest: "The use of this specialized word colours the entire epistle, and gives to it a heavenly atmosphere. It teaches us that Christians are citizens of heaven, having a heavenly origin, and a heavenly destiny, with the responsibility of living a heavenly life on this earth in the midst of ungodly people and surroundings, telling sinners of a Saviour in heaven who will save them from their sins if they but trust Him. The ethics in the letter are invested with heavenly standards. The saints are reminded that as a colony of heaven, they are to live heavenly lives on earth, representing their Sovereign by a life which reflects Him."

B. The Aim – "becometh the Gospel"

1. The word 'becometh' means of like value, worth as much; befitting, becoming, corresponding. The same word is translated 'worthy' in Eph. 4:1, Col. 1:10 & 1 Thess. 2:12. It is also translated "after a godly sort" in 3 John 1:6. Paul wants their lives to beautify the Gospel message they preach. In essence he says, "Behave what you believe!"
2. Concerning the Greek word, Wuest explains that it "literally means having the weight (weighing as much as) another thing." The believer's practice needs to weigh as much as his profession.
3. "The saints are to see to it that their manner of life weighs as much as the gospel they profess to believe, or their words will not have weight. That which gives weight to a Christian's words, is the fact that his manner of life befits, is congruous to, corresponds with the gospel he preaches."
4. Illustration: Imagine you are a very poor testimony at work. You are quarrelsome, rude to the boss and other workers and even swear occasionally. You then attempt to witness to a colleague and give them a tract. Your words will weigh in very light on account of your bad testimony.
5. Remember, you are the only Bible some people will ever read. A poet expressed it this way:
You are writing a Gospel, a chapter each day,
By the deeds that you do, and the words that you say.
Men read what you write, whether faithful or true:
Just what is the Gospel according to you?

Note secondly the need for...

II. STRIVING IN HARMONY FOR THE GOSPEL (VS. 27B-28)

A. When they were to Strive (Vs. 27b)

1. "whether I come and see you" = Paul has in mind the possibility of a return visit to the Philippian church. He has just spoken of this in the previous verse (Vs. 26)
2. "or else be absent" = the point Paul is making is that he does not want their unity in the Gospel to be dependent on his presence among them. Whether he is there or not, they are to be unified in advancing the Gospel cause.

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B. How they were to Strive for the Gospel (Vs. 27c-28)

1. Resolutely – “stand fast”.
 - a. The word means “to stand firm, hold one’s ground. The word speaks of a soldier who does not budge one inch from his post.
 - b. 1 Cor. 15:58 “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye **stedfast, unmoveable**, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”
 - c. It is easy to be a quitter, not so easy to remain faithful through thick and thin. F.B. Meyer writes, “It is much when the young soldier, well equipped for battle, steps out into the early dawn, with the light shining upon his weapons, but it is more important far, if, in the late afternoon, he is found standing in the long thin line, resisting the perpetual onset of the foe.”
2. Harmoniously – “in one spirit with one mind”
 - a. Unified in spirit. This is that oneness of spirit that is so necessary for the work of the Gospel. This unity of spirit is produced by the Holy Spirit if we will cooperate with His inner workings.
 - b. Unified in soul. The word mind translates the Greek word ‘soul’ (psyche). The soul is the seat of the mind, will and emotions.
3. Passionately – “striving together”
 - a. The word means to contend or struggle along with someone, to labour with. It means “to wrestle in company with” (Strongs). The same word is translated “laboured with” in Phil. 4:3. The Greek word is συναγλεω (sunathleo) made up of ‘sun’ (with, beside) and ‘athleo’ (to strive, engage in a contest, contend in public games). Our words ‘athlete’ and ‘athletics’ are derived from this word. “The word refers to an athletic contest in which a group of athletes co-operates as a team against another team, working in perfect co-ordination against a common opposition. Paul is exhorting the members of the Philippian church to work together in perfect co-ordination just like a team of Greek athletes.” (Wuest)
 - b. Paul uses the prefix ‘sun’ approx. 16 times in this short Epistle. The prefix ‘sun’ in Greek corresponds to the prefix ‘co’ in English as in co-worker or co-labourer. His audience would have got the message loud and clear that they were to all be on the same page in the work of God.
4. Purposefully – “for the faith of the Gospel”
 - a. Striving for the faith generally – the term “the faith” in the New Testament is a reference to the Divine body of truth contained in the Word of God. It is faith in an objective sense. It is what Jude refers to in Jude 1:3 “...it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for **the faith** which was **once delivered unto the saints.**” Remember the 7 “one” statements of Eph. 4:3-6 that form the basis of true unity.
 - b. Striving for the Gospel specifically – Paul was concerned that the Gospel advance and that its purity be defended. This would require the church at Philippi working together as a team. The

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Gospel is best advanced by a local church team rather than the lone ranger approach of some who want to Evangelise without commitment to a local, New Testament church. As a church, our passion needs to be the furtherance of the Gospel both through outreach to our local mission field and through the support of missions across the globe.

5. Boldly – “in nothing terrified” (Vs. 28)
 - a. The word ‘terrified’ was a word used of frightened horses spooked into an uncontrollable stampede. Terror is more than just fear. Terror usually means a person loses control of their actions.
 - b. ‘adversaries’ = refers to those entrenched in their opposition against you.
 - c. The persecution would serve to prove two realities:
 - i. The persecutors were lost. The word behind “evident token” is also translated ‘proof’ in 2 Cor. 8:24. It was a Greek law term, denoting proof obtained by an appeal to facts. (Wuest)The adversaries of the believers would begin to realize they were destined for perdition, a word meaning loss and destruction.
 - ii. The believers were saved. Paul reminds them as to the source of their salvation in the words “and that of God”.
 - iii. John 15:19 “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, **therefore the world hateth you.**”

Note thirdly the need for...

III. SUFFERING IN PARTNERSHIP FOR THE GOSPEL (VS. 29-30)

The Apostle provides a theological explanation for their suffering. “In verse 29 Paul puts their suffering in terms of their relationship with Christ; in verse 30 in terms of their relationship with him.” (Fee) It is important to note that he is speaking about a particular kind of suffering, not suffering in general.

A. The Principles of Suffering for the Gospel (Vs. 29)

When we suffer for the Gospel, we need to remember:

1. The Suffering was Given by the Lord. The phrase “it is given” means “to give out of grace” as it is based on the word for grace (charizomai). In fact, it is the same word used of God’s gracious bestowal of the gift of salvation on believing sinners. Consider the example of the Apostles after they had been beaten. Acts 5:41 “And they departed from the presence of the council, **rejoicing** that they were **counted worthy** to suffer shame for his name.”
2. The Suffering is for the Lord – “in the behalf of Christ”. They were called upon to suffer for the sake of, in the place of Christ. This is not a reference to the sufferings of the cross for sin as only Christ could bear those. It is a reference to the suffering for Christ’s sake as his representative on earth. Paul expressed a similar thought in

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Colossians 1:24 “Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church.”

B. The Partnership in Suffering for the Gospel (Vs. 30)

The Philippian believers could be encouraged by the fact that the Apostle Paul was going through the same trial, namely, suffering for the cause of the Gospel. Paul reminds them of:

1. His Past Suffering – “the conflict which ye **saw** in me”. Our English word ‘agony’ comes from the Greek word translated ‘conflict’ in this verse. The same word is also translated ‘fight’ (1 Tim. 6:12; 2. Tim. 4:7) and ‘race’ (Heb. 12:1). It is the word used to describe Christ’s struggle in the garden (Lk. 22:44). Paul is referring back to his experiences 10 years earlier when He and Silas were in Philippi establishing the church. They were beaten and imprisoned after the conversion of the demon possessed damsel.
2. His Present Suffering – “and **now** hear to be in me”. A reference to Paul’s present imprisonment.
3. Remember that when you are suffering for Christ’s sake, you are not alone!

Conclusion:

1. Are you a contributor to or a disrupter of church unity?
2. Are you involved in seeking to advance and defend the Gospel through the local church?
3. What is your attitude to suffering for the Gospel? If you saw it as a privilege to suffer shame for Christ’s Name perhaps you would be more willing to involve yourself in outreach ministry?