

**Philippians 1: 27-30; “To Suffer for His Sake”, Sermon # 6 in the series –
“To Rejoice in Christ”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
July 12th, 2020, in the Morning Worship Service.**

These verses which I just read to you speak to us much about living the Christian life. Your conduct, what you do in the sight of God and men, and the spirit in which you do it, is important to God. Indeed, it is important to yourself, for how you conduct yourself, how you live your Christian life in the sight of God will determine whether you receive a reward from the Lord Himself on the Day of Judgment. In 1st Corinthians chapter 3, verse 10, the apostle Paul says that he laid a foundation in truth, that is upon the foundation of Christ, and others are building upon it. He says that all of us who are true Christians need to take heed to how you build upon it. That is, what you do with all of the truth that Paul gives to you in his apostolic letters is very important to God. For, he says, each person’s work will become clear, for the Day will declare it. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.

We, my brethren, need to strive together as a church to build upon this foundation of truth, so that we will receive this reward. In fact, as you look at the verses of our text, you can see that this is what Paul is saying: Strive together for the faith of the gospel. Part of this striving together is our learning together how to suffer for Christ’s sake, it says in verse 29. This is something which is granted to believers as a part of what it means to glorify God with your life. At this time I would like to speak to you 1st of all – About what this suffering consists of. 2nd – How the Christian should go through this suffering. And 3rd – How you should view suffering with Christ and for Christ, long term, over the course of your Christian life. So let us consider this subject to learn what we can what Christ would have us to know about suffering for His sake.

1st – Let’s learn from this passage what suffering consists of.

Verses 27 and 29 – “Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.” “For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.” We should see from these verses that our conduct, what we do and what we say in any given situation, are the most important thing to our God. We must learn to walk worthy of the Christ who has called us for He is the One who suffered and died for us. The apostle Paul desired to hear of the Christians in the church at Philippi, that they were standing fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel. The good conduct that he was speaking of here was their preserving the unity of the faith in the bond of peace in the local church of which they were a part. They were to strive together in terms of their having this common faith in Christ and the gospel. They were to stand fast in one spirit and in one mind which meant their agreeing on what they believed about Christ and His word, and what they would do when they were opposed by unbelieving wicked people. They would be willing to suffer together for the truth.

They would hold fast the truth even if they were persecuted for it. This leads me to say, that it is your faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and your love of the truth of His word, which is the basis of your being able to show love to all of the brethren, even if you have to suffer because of it. You are committed by faith to hold fast the truth; together with them, being united in spirit with them. For every Christian knows, who knows the word, that we are all indwelt with the Holy Spirit. We are all vitally interested in promoting the same truth. When you are filled with the Holy Spirit, and you are having sweet communion and fellowship with Christ in your spirit, it also then makes you want to love the brethren and to maintain the unity of the faith that you

have with them, in doctrine and practice. It is mature believers who are willing to suffer for Christ's sake.

It is for His sake that you are willing to do this, if this is what Christ is asking of you. Suffering for Christ, our text says, is something which is granted to you for His sake. It is something which you have to be considered worthy of, by our Lord. It is a great privilege if you are called to it. You remember that when the apostles in the early church were preaching the gospel in Jerusalem, they were brought before the council and they told by the elders of Israel that they must stop filling Jerusalem with this teaching about Christ? You remember that Peter said – “We ought to obey God rather than men.” And then he preached the gospel to them, and told them that they should obey it. But they were angry and wanted to put all the apostles to death. And Gamaliel stood up, you remember, and he gave them a very good speech on how they ought to take care not to do that, lest they be found fighting against God. The council of the elders of Israel only listened to this wise council partially, because when they called them back in to sentence them, they commanded that they should be beaten. And when they departed from the presence of the council, it says, they were rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And they did not cease preaching and teaching that Jesus was the Christ.

Ah, you see, this was striving together for the faith of the gospel. They were of one spirit and one mind in this all important matter; even to the point of suffering for it. In applying this to ourselves, I can say to you, based upon our text, that it is your faith and love which you have found in Christ Jesus, that led you to unite with this church, and it will be your love for all the brethren in this church which will bring you to the place where you are willing to suffer. This becomes the basis for your being able to endure the sufferings of mistreatment and persecution that will come to you. It is when you remember what it cost the Lord Jesus, to buy you back from your slavery to sin, and to purchase for you a new heart and a new spirit, it is then that you begin to understand what He has called you to. You are to conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. You will remember the apostle Paul and you receive his words in 2nd Timothy 3: 10-12 – “But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra – what persecutions I endured.” “And out of them all the the Lord delivered me.” “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” What does suffering for Christ consist of? Well, more than we might think at first glance.

Listen to what the apostle Peter says in 1st Peter 2: 18-24 – “Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.” “For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.” “For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently?” “But when you do good and suffer you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.” “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that you should follow His steps: Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth; who when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness – ‘by whose stripes you were healed.’”

How great and amazing were the sufferings of Christ on our behalf. His sufferings ought to instruct us as Christians on what we should do in the various situations of our lives when we are mistreated or when we are persecuted for righteousness sake. Those who were servants were told that they ought to submit to their masters, even if they were not gentle; even if they were harsh. They would be suffering for their own conscience sake, not trying to disobey, or be displeasing to their master, but suffering for doing what was right, and enduring this suffering even if the master was acting badly. If they did good, and they bore it patiently, this was commendable to God, and so it will be the case in our case as well. Even though we are not

servants of men, nevertheless we do believe in submitting to authority in a righteous way. And even if we are reviled, we will follow Christ's example and we will not revile in return. We will do as He did, and commit ourselves to Him who judges righteously.

All of this, a Christian is able to do if their spirit is right within them. Turn over to 2nd Timothy chapter 1, verses 6-12, and I will show you how Paul instructed his son in the faith, Timothy, about the spirit of a Christian. If your spirit is right you will be able to endure persecution with Christ's help. "Therefore, I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands." "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which as given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles." "For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day."

You see that God has given every Christian a spirit of power and love and a sound mind in the New Birth. This new nature in the Christian is the seed of righteousness planted in your soul and spirit. Because you have a sound mind which has been given to us, and because the Holy Spirit fills you with the love of Christ, you have the power to not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of anyone who is a Christian and suffering for Him. Paul was told on that day when He came to know Christ personally that he had been persecuting Him when he went about to persecute Christians. He appointed Paul to be an apostle and a preacher and a teacher of the Gentiles. Paul was not ashamed of this. He remembered that Ananias had given him this word from the Lord – "I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake." The same is true for each one of us. The Lord will show you, and He will be leading you and guiding through all the various situations where you are misunderstood or persecuted for His sake.

2nd – Let's learn how the Christian should go through this suffering.

Verse 28 says – "And not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God." This seems as though it would be easy to say, and yet it would be hard to do when it comes to us. And so, I wanted to go back in history to the first century in order to show you what it was like for the Christian living in the time of the Roman Emperor Trajan. I want to show you what great grace was given to these dear saints during those days of awful persecution. I will read to you from a letter from Pliny to Trajan from the year 110 A.D. I take this from Andrew Miller's History of the Church. Pliny the younger, was the the governor of Bithynia and Pontus. He writes in this way to Trajan – "Health to you. It is my usual custom, sire, to refer all things, of which I harbor any doubt, to you. For who can better direct my judgment in its hesitation, or instruct my understanding in its ignorance? I never had the fortune to be present at any examination of Christians before I came into this province. I am therefore at a loss to determine what is the usual object either of inquiry or of punishment, and to what length either of them is to be carried."

"In the meantime this has been my method with respect to those who were brought before me as Christians. I asked them whether they were Christians: if they pleaded guilty, I interrogated them – a second and a third time – with a menace of capital punishment. In case of obstinate perseverance, I ordered them to be executed...An anonymous 'Libel' was published, containing the names of many who denied that they were, or had been, Christians, and *they* invoked the gods, as I prescribed, and prayed to your image, with incense and wine, and

moreover reviled Christ — none of which things I am told a real Christian can ever be compelled to do. So I thought proper to dismiss them...”

“The whole of the crime or error of the Christians lay in this — they were accustomed on a certain day to meet before daylight, and to sing among themselves a hymn to Christ, as a god; and to bind themselves by an oath not to commit any wickedness; not to be guilty of theft, or robbery, or adultery; never to falsify their word, nor to deny a pledge committed to them when called upon to return it. When these things were performed, it was their custom to separate, and then to come together again to a harmless meal, of which they partook in common without any disorder; but this last practice they have ceased to attend to since the publication of my edict, by which, according to your commands, I prohibited assemblies. “After this account, I judged it the more necessary to examine, and that by torture, two females, who were said to be deaconesses; but I have discovered nothing except a bad and excessive superstition. Suspending, therefore, all judicial proceedings, I have recourse to you for advice.”

“The number of the accused is so great as to call for serious consultation. Many persons are informed against, of every age and rank, and of both sexes; and many more will be accused. Nor has the contagion of this superstition seized cities only, but the lesser towns also, and the open country: nevertheless, it seems to me that it may be restrained and corrected. It is certain that the temples which were almost forsaken begin to be more frequented; and the sacred solemnities, after a long intermission, are revived. Victims (that is for sacrifice at the temple) likewise are everywhere bought up, whereas for a time there were few purchasers (for those sacrifices). Whence it is easy to imagine what numbers of them (that is, those who would deny Christ) might be reclaimed if pardon were granted to those who repent.”

TRAJAN TO PLINY — “You have done perfectly right, my dear Pliny, in the inquiry which you have made concerning Christians. For truly no one general rule can be laid down which will apply itself to all cases. These people must not be sought after: if they are brought before you and convicted, let them be capitally punished; yet with this restriction, that if any one renounce Christianity, and evidence his sincerity by supplicating our gods, however suspected he may be for the past, let him on his repentance obtain pardon. But anonymous libels in no case ought to be attended to: for it is a very dangerous precedent, and perfectly incongruous with the maxims of our age.”

Now, I read this to you in order to show you that evidently the Christians of that day who were arrested and brought before Pliny’s tribunal were not afraid to die. As our text says, they were not in any way terrified by their adversaries, and this was a tremendous witness to those who were putting them to death. Their staunch witness was no doubt, at some point in their persecutor’s lives, something which worked upon their conscience, a proof of their perdition, as it says here in our text. But to those dear Christians who suffered, it was proof to them of their salvation; that it was indeed from God. It was not simply that they thought that they were strong enough in themselves to face this kind of death. It was rather proof of the strength of Christ; the One who was giving them the moral courage and the determination not to compromise the truth that He was Lord. Those who suffered knew that all of their righteousness and all of their strength were coming to them from Christ. And we should understand this as well.

3rd – Let us learn how we should view suffering for Christ, long term, over the course of our Christian life.

Verses 29 and 30 – For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.” What is this conflict that Paul is talking about; the conflict which they saw in him? Well, the word is ἀγῶνα agōna in the Greek. Paul was telling the Christians at Philippi that he they would experience the same strife with bitter foes, and the same struggle in the spiritual

warfare, as he had experienced. I like what William Burkitt, the Puritan Commentator says about this – “Here observe, 1. The title given by St. Paul to his sufferings for the gospel; he calls them a conflict.” “Learn, that Christian courage under sufferings cannot be kept up without a mighty conflict; we must conflict with our enemies, with the rage of persecutors; we must conflict with ourselves, and with our own spirits, to keep them from fainting under persecution; and we must even conflict with God himself, wrestle with him, by prayers, for extraordinary measures of strength to support us under sufferings, and to enable us to glorify God in and by them: well might the apostle then call his sufferings a conflict.”

And so, as I close this message to you dear friends, let me remind you that this conflict that Paul writes about here, you will also see in your own pastor, at some points in his ministry. Perhaps like Paul, you will see in me and my ministry, this conflict. And you will see it before you experience it in yourself. Do not be afraid, my beloved brethren. God is with us in all of our witness for the truth. He is with us in all of our conflicts with Satan and with evil men. He will even permit us, I am sure, to be an encouragement to each other in whatever comes to test our faith, in whatever comes which will allow us to be faithful witnesses to Him; the One who loved us and gave Himself for us. See to it that you are not terrified by our adversaries, but join with me, and others in our church, in standing fast in one spirit. With one mind, let us strive together for the faith of the gospel. And may our conduct be worthy of that blessed gospel, and the Christ who has saved our souls.