

Philippians 1:27-30
Wise Counsel on Worthy Conduct
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There is a major shift in focus in our passage for today. The focus has been on the apostle Paul and his situation. Look at verse 12:

12 But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel,

Paul has been talking about the things which had happened to him. He was a prisoner in Rome, and he was waiting for his verdict, waiting to find out if he would be set free or if he would be executed. Paul knew that the Christians at the church in Philippi were concerned about his situation, and so Paul wrote to them about his situation. Yes, he had been a prisoner at Rome, but God had used this for the advancement of the gospel. Through his imprisonment, Paul had actually been given opportunities to preach the gospel to those whom he might not otherwise have ever reached. After all, Paul had a captive audience in that some Roman soldier was daily assigned to guard him. The soldiers guarding Paul were from the elite praetorian guard, the elite soldiers who served as Caesar's bodyguards. What an opportunity that was! In addition, others in Rome had been inspired by Paul's boldness, to preach the gospel themselves with greater boldness. True, not all the Christians preachers at Rome were preaching with the best of

motives. Some were envious of Paul, and saw his imprisonment as an opportunity to outdo Paul as a preacher. Yet even this ill motivated minority were preaching the true gospel and not some heresy. So Paul was encouraged. What was important was that Paul's imprisonment was being used by God to increase the proclamation of the Christian message in Rome. In this Paul rejoiced.

Now as to Paul's own personal situation, he was not worried. He knew that the Philippians were praying for him and that the Holy Spirit was providing for him. Paul was confident that whatever else happened, God would enable him to maintain a faithful witness in any and all possible circumstances, and would protect him from doing anything shameful that would harm the gospel. That was Paul's confidence and comfort.

Now as to whether Paul was to be set free or executed, Paul couldn't decide which was better. To die is to depart this life and to be with Christ in a more direct and immediate way. It is to be freed from the suffering of this life. The soul as the center of one's conscience existence is made perfect in holiness and goes to heaven to be with the Lord. The body, though dead and in the grave, is still united to Christ and will be redeemed through the resurrection when Christ returns at the end of this age. In other words, to die is gain.

And yet to live is Christ. To live is an opportunity to continue to minister in the name of Christ and for the cause of Christ and to the people of Christ. To live is Christ, and to die is gain. As to which of these was the better outcome of Paul's situation, Paul

was at a loss to know. His educated guess was that he would be freed so that he could again minister to the church at Philippi. And that, of course, is what did happen.

So Paul wrote about his situation in order to alleviate the concerns of the Philippians, to remind them that God is in control, and that God had already been working this situation for the advancement of His kingdom.

Then in our passage for today, Paul shifted the focus from himself and onto the Philippians. We see the shift in the word "only" which begins verse 27, where Paul said, "Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of peace..." . Paul is there saying,

"Enough about me; let's talk about you. Regardless of what happens to me, whether I come to be with you again, or whether I am absent from you, here is what you need to do."

Paul then gave the Philippians some wise counsel on worthy conduct. Again, verse 27 of our text says, "Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ." Paul's choice of words is interesting here, especially when you consider the historical situation of the city of Philippi. The Greek word translated "conduct" is from the Greek word family from which we get English words such as "political" and "metropolitan." The root idea is citizenship. What Paul is saying here in Philippians 1:27 is, "Live out your citizenship in a manner worthy of the gospel." What citizenship is Paul talking about

here? Well, in Philippians 3:20, Paul said, "our citizenship is in heaven." This is the same thought Paul has in Galatians chapter 4 when he says that the Jerusalem above "is the mother of us all." The author of the epistle to the Hebrews said in Hebrews 12:22, "... you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem..." The point is that though the Christian lives here on earth, his real citizenship, his primary citizenship is in heaven. And that is where the Christian's primary loyalty should be.

The citizens of the city of Philippi were very familiar with what it means to live in one place but to have one's primary citizenship and loyalty in another place. When Luke wrote the book of Acts and described Paul's missionary visit to the city of Philippi, Luke described the city of Philippi in Acts 16:12 as "the foremost city in that part of Macedonia, and a colony." What is key is the word "colony." Caesar Augustus had over a century earlier made the city of Philippi into a Roman colony. As a result, many Roman citizens settled there, including many Roman army veterans. Even though the city of Philippi was in northern Greece and the city of Rome was in Italy, even though the trip from Philippi to Rome was about 800 miles, the city of Philippi was small scale reproduction of the city of Rome. Most of the people in Philippi were Romans. Their first language was Latin and not Greek. They were governed not by Macedonian authorities but by their own resident Roman magistrates. Their city was under Roman law, not Macedonian law. One of the privileges of Italy was that it was free from Roman taxation, and so was the city of Philippi, just as if it were located on Italian soil. Philippi was a Roman military outpost, and its

responsibility was to defend the Roman Empire. You see, the Philippian colonists lived in Macedonia, but their primary citizenship was in the city of Rome across the Adriatic Sea. They lived in Macedonia in northern Greece, but their laws were Roman laws and their culture was Roman culture and their loyalties were Roman loyalties and their responsibilities were Roman responsibilities. They knew what it meant to be located in a mere province but to be under an obligation to live lives worthy of Roman citizenship.

With this background, the Philippians could well understand what Paul meant when he exhorted them to conduct themselves worthy of the gospel. Though they lived in this world, they were responsible to conduct themselves as citizens of heaven. They lived in this world, but their laws were heavenly laws and their culture was a heavenly culture and their loyalties were heavenly loyalties and their responsibilities were heavenly responsibilities.

The gospel is the good news that Jesus has delivered us from the domain of darkness and has translated us into His kingdom. Jesus has freed us from Satan who had taken us captive to do his will. Jesus has redeemed us from the pagan traditions of our forefathers, not with corruptible things such as silver and gold but with His precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

If we are to live worthy of the gospel, we can't live as if we were still citizens of the domain of darkness, as if we were still war prisoners of Satan taken captive to do Satan's will, as if we

were still enslaved to the pagan traditions of our ancestors. As to how we should instead live our lives, there are many aspects of conducting ourselves worthy of the gospel and our heavenly citizenship. We will look at the three which Paul mentions: standing firm, standing harmoniously and standing fearlessly.

To live worthy of the gospel means to stand firm or to stand fast. In verse 27 of our text, the Apostle Paul says that he wants to hear that the Philippians are standing firm. We have a good Biblical example of standing firm in Exodus 14. Pharaoh had let the children of Israel go, but then he changed his mind and sent his chariots after them. When the children of Israel saw the chariots coming, they cried out in fear and said that it would have been better to have lived as a slave in Egypt than to die in the wilderness. That is when Moses said this: "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever." Instead of capitulating to the enemy and instead of fleeing from the enemy, they stood firm and waited to see the salvation of the Lord.

If you are a genuine Christian, if you really have experienced the new birth and are a new creation in Christ, then you will stand firm, you will persevere. 1 Thessalonians 3:8 says,

"For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.

Paul isn't here saying that we are alive spiritually because we stand fast. He isn't saying that we stand fast in order to receive spiritual life. He is saying that standing fast is a result of our

being spiritually alive and thus an evidence and demonstration that we are indeed spiritually alive, just as we profess to be.

Living worthy of the gospel means standing firm and also standing harmoniously. In verse 27, Paul said that he wanted to hear that the Philippians were standing firm in one spirit with one mind. Paul was saying that Christians are to strive together in their battle against the enemy. The idea is a cooperative struggle and a coordinated fight against a common enemy for a common cause. Our common cause is the gospel, and our common foes are any and all adversaries of the gospel. As Christians, we should be united in spirit and soul, united in mind and heart, united in doctrine and commitment. When we strive together against the commonly recognized foe and for the commonly acknowledged cause, we are very effective. Our ability to focus our struggle in this way makes the difference between fighting with a sword with its one sharp point and fighting with a broom with its multitude of straws going every which way.

What is really sad is when the members of a church forget their common commitment to the gospel and divide into warring parties whose primary concern is getting their own way on secondary matters. How sad it is when the church stops battling the world and begins fighting among itself like the Midianites who were frightened by Gideon's trumpets and torches when the Lord set every man's sword against his companion throughout the whole Midianite camp.

Conduct worthy of the gospel involves standing fast, standing harmoniously and standing fearlessly. Philippians 1:28 says,

28 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.

The Greek word here translated "terrified" is often used to refer to a timid horse that is spooked by encountering something unexpected or unknown in its path. The Christian should not be easily spooked, because he has the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord is the key to Christian courage. Jesus said,

Matthew 10:28

28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Of course, the one who can destroy both body and soul in hell is God. If we are right with God, we shouldn't fear what men can do to us. I am reminded of those famous words of Polycarp, the second century Christian martyr, to the Roman proconsul shortly before Polycarp's martyrdom:

"You threaten with fire that burns for a time, and is quickly quenched, for you do not know the fire which awaits the wicked in the judgment to come and in everlasting punishment. But why are you waiting? Come, do what you will."

Paul said that when God gives Christians such courage, God uses it to speak both to the Christians and to their persecutors. When God frees a Christian from the fear of death in the face of persecution, this is assuring evidence that God has indeed saved this Christian and given him a new heart. Such courage in the face of persecution also speaks to the persecutors. God uses such courage to tell the persecutors that they have something to fear that is much worse than death, and that is divine judgment for eternity. Even if the persecutor will not acknowledge this in his conscious thoughts, this is the message which God is delivering to him in his heart of hearts.

Paul has told the Philippians that conduct worthy of their heavenly citizenship involves standing firm, standing harmoniously and standing fearlessly. Then Paul closes this section by giving reasons why the Christian should engage in this worthy conduct. The first reason is that suffering for Jesus is a privilege. We should always remember this. Just as surely as God in His grace gives His true people the heart ability to believe in Christ with a persevering faith, so God also gives His true people opportunities to suffer for Christ in this life. If we are united with Paul in the fellowship of the gospel, then we will also be united with Paul in his conflict with the world that is opposed to the gospel.

The modern missionary martyr Jim Eliot, who was killed by the Auca Indians of South America in 1956, said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose." We cannot keep the things of this world. In contrast, our heavenly reward is an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled

that does not fade away. "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose."

Beloved, let me close with this thought: Do you really know Jesus? Do you really have a faith relationship with the Savior? One evidence that you do is that if you have to choose between being on good terms with Jesus or being on good terms with the world, you will choose being on good terms with Jesus.

If you have really claimed the gospel as your own through faith, then I challenge you to live worthy of that gospel message, to live worthy of your citizenship in heaven.