

Suffering by Grace

Humble Unity Part 2
Philippians 1:28-30 2-28-2016

Summary: We must stand firm in unity, without fear of opposition. Fear destroys unity, and we need unity to overcome fear. When we have courage, that testifies to our opposition that they will lose and we will win. Courage comes from realizing that all of it is from God. And so is the gracious gift of faith and the opposition itself. Suffering was an essential part of the work of Christ, and it remains an essential part of being the body of Christ.

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Philippians 1:27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel **28** without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. **29** For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer on behalf of him, **30** since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

Introduction

Fear God Alone

All cowards go to hell. Does that strike you as a provocative statement? Who would say something like that? God would. Revelation 21:8 gives a list of all the types of people who, if they don't repent, will be sent to the lake of fire, and guess what the very first thing in the list is?

Revelation 21:8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, ... their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.

Why is cowardice such a big deal to God? Cowardice is evil because just as all of our love belongs to God, so all of our fear belongs to God, and to God alone.

Isaiah 51:12 Who are you that you fear mortal men

Fearing men is just as much unfaithfulness to God as loving the world is. And it's important because you will bend the direction of your life in order to satisfy the demands of the one you fear. That's why it is so dangerous to be afraid of suffering. If I fear suffering more than I fear God, Satan can steer my life pretty much anywhere he wants just by using threats of suffering. So in today's passage, Paul is going to do two things: first he is going to tell us not to be cowards, and then he is going to show us how to properly interpret suffering so that we are not afraid of it.

Review

We left off last week in midsentence, so let's take a moment to refresh our memory on the beginning of the sentence in verse 27. The main point of the sentence is that Paul is calling us to stand firm in unity.

Philippians 1:27 Whatever happens, live as citizens in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, ... I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel

That's what Paul is after. He wants us to stand firm in unity. But we are not going to be able to do that if we are afraid of opposition. So he says:

28 without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.

Fear of opposition will destroy our unity, because we will be more concerned about avoiding conflict than we will about real peacemaking. Cowards are always peace fakers, never peacemakers.

The Effects of Fear

Some people are so terrified of opposition that they are pretty much paralyzed. They can't stand the thought of anyone opposing them even in the slightest degree, so they never do anything or talk about anything of any consequence for fear that someone might disagree with them. There are pastors who will never preach anything controversial from the pulpit, because they are afraid of how people might react. And all of us have passed up opportunities to share the gospel because of this kind of fear. Fear of opposition is a very real problem even for the most courageous among us.

But what does it say about our God when we are afraid of what man might do to us? Someone we don't like wins an election, or some immoral or unjust law gets passed, and there are people in the church who literally lose sleep over it. They are scared to death that the government is going to come in and spy on their privacy or take their money or confiscate their property or whatever. If we are afraid of those things, what does that say about the God who has promised to take care of us? We might as well put a flashing neon sign out front that says, "The Lord Jesus Christ is powerless." But on the other hand, if we stand firm without being frightened in any way, that sends a different message. It sends a message about their destiny and about our destiny.

The Testimony of Courage

28 without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God.

Proof of Destiny

Paul is going to teach us two very important principles about when we suffer opposition that will help us have courage. And the first one has to do with the testimony of courage. If someone opposes you because of your commitment to Christ, and you stand firm in unflinching courage, that sends a very clear message about who is going to win and who is going to lose. I remember many years ago my mom gave me a book titled *God's Spy*, by Chris Panos. At the beginning of the book he tells his story about how violent his life was before he became a Christian. And there is one story in particular that I think of every time I read Philippians 1:28. He tells the story of when he and his friend were in a bar. Panos was in an ugly mood, and was looking for a fight. So he saw this really big, tough looking guy, and purposely spilled his beer on him.

“‘What are you doing, punk?’ he demanded. ‘I ought to cut your head off.’

‘Just try it, you fat slob. You haven’t got the guts. The only guts you have are in that big spare tire of yours!’”

“His hand went for his knife. But before it got there, I slammed my beer bottle against his face backhanded. I had expected to knock him down, but he just stood there. He shook his head and looked at me. When the guy didn’t go down, I knew I was in trouble.”¹

He goes on to describe the fight, which was decidedly one-sided. Panos got stabbed, thrown through a window, and ended up with this guy on top of him, knife raised, ready to kill him. When Chris Panos hit that guy across the face with his beer bottle expecting it to knock him down and it didn’t even faze him, that was a sign that he would be destroyed and the other guy would win.

When the world takes its best shot at us and we don’t even flinch, that’s a sign that points to their final destiny and ours. What is their best shot? Death.

Luke 12:4 I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more.

That is their beer bottle across the face – death. And when they threaten us with that, we can smile and say, “Ha! Is that all you got?” The point is, when the world takes their best shots and we stand firm with no fear at all, it becomes evident which is going to be the winning side and which is going to be the losing side. When some pro-abortion, anti-Christian, godless person gets elected President, or the IRS is used illegally to persecute Christians in financial ways, or we hear on a talk show how all kinds of horrible things are happening, and we have zero fear – just unflinching courage and joy – that is a sign to the enemy that he is going to lose.

And it is proof to you that you will be saved. One of the most compelling proofs of true faith is perseverance in suffering. Fake Christians give up their faith when the going gets really hard. True faith perseveres.

2 Timothy 2:12 if we endure, we will also reign with him.

Requires Unity

And the connection with the first part of the sentence back in verse 27 goes in both directions. On the one hand, we have to have courage in order to maintain our unity, because cowardice destroys unity. But it also goes in the other direction – we need unity in order to have courage. It is only when we stand as one man that we will stand firm. If we are scattered and bickering against each other and going off in different directions in the church, there is no way we are going to be able to handle the onslaught that comes against us. Many times people have said the church is the only army that shoots its own wounded. Someone commits a scandalous sin, and even after they repent they are forever relegated to second-class status. We can’t keep doing that if we want to win the war.

¹ Chris Panos, *God's Spy*, p.42-43.

That is also illustrated in the Chris Panos story. The only reason Panos didn't die that day was because his buddy Ricardo came flying in right as the knife was coming down, and knocked the guy off him and they were able to get away. That story just wouldn't be quite the same if Ricardo had walked up and kicked Chris Panos in the head and said, "That's for that cutting remark you made to me last week. I really didn't appreciate that." When someone in the church is in sin, or your spouse is in sin, that means the enemy has him pinned on the ground with a knife to his throat. He is being bested by the enemy. Why are we so prone, at that point, to join the enemy in destroying the person? Shouldn't we try to kick the enemy off and rescue our brother from that sin? If my brother in Christ has to try to fight against sin with one hand, and to deal with my antagonism on the other hand, he is going to fall. But when we stand united, we are invincible.

So our steadfastness in suffering is a sign that reveals their doom and our salvation.² So often people ask, "Why do I have to suffer like this?" Lots of reasons, but one of them is to make it clear what your eternal destiny is.

2 Thessalonians 1:4 ... we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. 5 All this is evidence that ...you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering.

Your perseverance is proof of your eternal destiny, and of your opponents' doom.

They Don't Have to Like Us

This is an important principle, because the fear of the world's disapproval has shaped the evangelistic strategy of many churches. The driving principle behind the evangelistic strategy of many churches is, "We have to get them to like us, otherwise they won't listen to our message." And so we never get around to telling them the offensive parts of the gospel, because we are afraid of their disapproval.³ Jesus promised us that they would hate us just like they hated him. But that's okay, because even when they hate us, there is still a way to reach them. We can reach them by having unflinching courage in the face of opposition. That will be a sign to them.

Opposition is Opportunity

And so opposition is actually opportunity. When an election doesn't go our way, or public opinion turns against us, that is a glorious opportunity to send a clear message by our total lack of fear. Opposition is always opportunity – even inside the church. Remember, earlier in the chapter, what Paul did when he faced opposition? People in the church were against him, and he responded by rejoicing in the fact that the gospel was still being preached. Every time anyone opposes you, whether it be an unbeliever opposing the gospel, or a Christian opposing you for some other reason, if you respond to that opposition in a godly way, you come out ahead and the work of the gospel comes out ahead. Opposition is always opportunity.

Okay, so that is the testimony of courage. But how do I get that courage? You can't get rid of fear just by telling yourself, "Don't be afraid." So what you do if you find yourself afraid and lacking courage? The answer is in verse 29. Actually, it starts at the end of verse 28.

The Source of Courage

28 without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God.

² Does that mean they will always get the message? No. No matter how clear the sign is, if people are determined to ignore it, they will ignore it. Paul's point is not that everyone will be convinced; his point is that the proof is there.

³ We should do what we can to live at peace with all men. But if we proclaim the truth, the world will inevitably be offended.

When he says **and that by God**, the word **that**, grammatically, refers to the entire verse.⁴ Their destruction and your salvation - all of it comes from God. God is the one who is in control of everyone's destiny. When we start fearing man and getting all flustered about what's going on around us, it's because we forget that. And that is easy to do. It is so easy for us to lose sight of God, because we live in a naturalistic culture.

Who are the major players in the political world right now? President Obama, Congress, the Supreme Court, the mainstream press. And the spotlight right now is on the front runners in the primary process: Bernie Sanders, Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump, Ted Cruz, and Marco Rubio. Are those the major players? No, those are the minor players. Those are the secondary figures in the background. Who are the major players? God and his church. The key figure to watch in the 2016 elections - and I really think you should keep an eye on him because it's looking like he is going to finish strong - the key figure in this election is ... Almighty God. I really like his chances. What President Obama, or Donald Trump or the voters on Super Tuesday or Hillary Clinton - what those characters do is of a little bit of importance, but what really matters, and what will really determine what direction this country will go and what will happen in our personal lives, is President Jesus, who is not a lame-duck, who has no term limit, and who is not limited by Congress or the courts or the voters. He is not affected in the slightest by opinion polls, he is not controlled by special interest groups, he has plenty of funding, no one can stop his executive orders, and he has full veto power over everything, including the courts, the Constitution, and the entire voting public. He has never made a policy mistake, never reversed his position, never made a blunder of any kind. Keep a close eye on him on Super Tuesday. Watch what he does. Because he is the president maker. He is the King of kings and President of presidents. He has the endorsement of God the Father, and nothing will ever happen in this country without his permission - including persecution and the suffering of his church.

That is what Paul is trying to do with that last little phrase in verse 28. He reminds us that the fate of our opponents as well as our fate all rests in God's hands. You hear about the guy who gets hit with the beer bottle and doesn't flinch and you say, "I'm not like that guy. I'm not stronger than the people who oppose me." Of course you're not - God is. That's the point. When the mighty Pharaoh had the upper hand and forced God's people into slavery, they cried out to God, and God absolutely manhandled Pharaoh and all the Egyptian gods. He delivered his people, and when Pharaoh's army tried to come after them, God opened up the Red Sea, gave them safe passage, and drowned Pharaoh's army. When they got to the Promised Land and saw the Canaanites in the city of Jericho, they felt like grasshoppers compared to those people. What chance would these ex-slave desert people have against them? God came and flattened the walls of Jericho and gave his people victory. And that happened again and again in the conquest of Canaan - every time God's people trusted him, they won. When they fought the Gibeonites, they were running out of daylight, and so God made the sun stand still for an extra day, and Joshua 10:15 says, "**Surely the Lord was fighting for Israel!**"

When Aram got the upper hand on Israel, God delivered his people through Othniel. When Moab got the upper hand, God sent Ehud. When the Canaanites got the upper hand, God delivered his people through Deborah. When the Midianites got the upper hand, God called the weakest guy out of the smallest tribe and then sent away most of his fighting men, and then gave them victory. When the Ammonites got the upper hand, God sent Jephthah. When the Philistines got the upper hand, God raised up Sampson. When a giant defied the hosts of Israel, and not even the mighty Saul was willing to go up against him, God delivered Israel with a shepherd boy and a rock. When Nebuchadnezzar threatened to burn Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to death, God let him throw them in the furnace, but then God protected them so they didn't so much as get smoke damage on their clothing. When they threw Daniel to the hungry lions, God gave them lockjaw. When Nebuchadnezzar was at the height of his power - way, way beyond any examples of overreach by our President or Supreme Court or Congress, and he seemed absolutely unstoppable in his evil, God just took away his sanity and Nebuchadnezzar ended up walking around on all fours eating grass like a cow.

⁴ The word for salvation is feminine and the word for that is neuter, so it cannot refer to salvation.

When they put Paul in prison in Philippi, God sent the most surgical earthquake ever, opening all the doors and making all the chains fall off. That is a special earthquake. When they put Peter in prison, God sent an angel to set him free. There is a reason why God picked up that nickname, “Savior.” When the world tries to rise up against God and his people...

Psalm 2:4 The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. 5 Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, 6 “I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill.” ... 10 Therefore ... be warned, you rulers of the earth. ... 12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment.

Daniel 7:14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

Romans 8:31 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?

God is invincible.

Don't Be Afraid of the President

So what are we afraid of? It is amazing to see the handwringing that goes on in the church when there is some sign that the culture is shifting against us. When it comes to persecution, we are living in one of the mildest, safest, most tolerant situations anywhere in the world. And yet, an election doesn't go our way, or a law gets passed, or a judge is confirmed who opposes what we believe in and there is despair.

“Oh no – they passed HR#...”

“So-and-so won the election - It's over. God, I don't know if you saw the headlines on Fox News tonight, but I'm here to tell you, it's all over. You might as well just give up. Not even you can recover from this, God.”

No one would actually say that, but that's the feeling you get from the reactions people have.

For us to be caught up with fear because of the political maneuverings in the world is not a good testimony. You hear people say, “The idea of a Hillary Clinton presidency, or a Bernie Sanders presidency, or Donald Trump presidency scares me to death!” I think if Paul were here he would say, “Shame on you. None of those people should scare you in the slightest.”

Granted

We don't have anything to be afraid of because **all this is from God**. And then in verse 29, he wants to elaborate on that further. He really wants us to see that everything comes from God. And it doesn't just come from God; it comes from God as a *good* gift.

29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ...

Stop right there. Something has been **granted to you on behalf of Christ** – for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. The word translated **granted** refers to something that is bestowed as a gift of grace, or an expression of God's favor. It is the same word used in chapter 2, verse 9.

Philippians 2:9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and granted him the name that is above every name

It is the same word used in Romans 8:32.

Romans 8:32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously grant us all things?

It has the same root as the Greek word for *grace*. And it is an expression of divine favor. So God has bestowed something upon you; he has graciously given you something as a special unearned, undeserved gift of grace to show that you are one of his favored ones. He wants people to know that you are one of his favorites, so he has given you this special gift.

The Gift of Faith

Actually, two gifts. Gift #1 is faith.

29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ ... to believe on him...

That's gift #1. Everywhere else in Scripture, faith is presented as our responsibility. It is something that we must decide to do. We are commanded to believe. Much of Scripture is devoted to persuading us to believe, and if we fail to do so, it is our fault. But here we see that if we do believe, the source of that faith is actually God. It is a gift he graciously grants us.⁵

Why did God give me faith and not someone else? I don't know. Maybe for the same reason he chose Paul – so God could prove how unlimited his mercy is (1 Tim.1:16). But whatever the reason, one thing I can say for sure – it has to do with glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ.

29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ ... to believe on him

The reason God decided to put faith in my heart had to do with his love for his Son. God didn't save me mainly so that I could go to heaven. He saved me mainly so that his Son would be exalted and magnified and shown to be great through my being saved.

Gracious Suffering

So gift #1 is faith in Christ. What is gift #2?

29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him

That is the part Paul emphasizes – the gift of suffering for Christ. Now, what happens in your heart when you read that verse? Does your brain spit out a reading that says, “Does not compute – move on to the next verse”? Does this verse make sense to you? Do you really believe that suffering for Christ is a gracious gift from God granted to you for the sake of Christ to show his favor? Think of how you respond to opposition. Is there any evidence from the way you respond to opposition that you really do believe this? I am asking you the questions that crushed me as I was studying this.

I understand that all my suffering comes from God.

⁵ One of the themes of the book of Philippians is to the fact that even things that are our responsibility, ultimately, when we do them, it is because of God's influence on us.

Philippians 2:13 it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

When you do something or even desire something that is in line with God's good purpose, including having faith in him, ultimately that comes from God. This is something that has no comparison in daily life, and so we can't fully understand exactly how it works. However, we can believe that it's true, because the Bible says it is true. If you have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, that faith came to you as a gracious gift from God. On the basis of what? Why did God choose to give you faith? Was it because of your faith? Obviously not – if you already had faith he would not have had to give it to you. God decided to give you faith back when you didn't have it. And why did God decide to do that? Was it because you were trying your best to believe and needed a little help? No, according to Romans 1:18, prior to God giving us this gift of faith, we were all resisting the truth and suppressing it. We were trying our hardest *not* to believe.

So if we weren't doing anything to deserve it, and we weren't seeking it, why did God choose to give us faith? Was it because he looked into the future and saw that we would believe? That would be silly. God wouldn't have to look into the future to see if we would have faith after he gave us faith. If God gives someone faith, obviously the person is going to have faith – you don't need a crystal ball to figure that out.

Ecclesiastes 7:14 When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other.

That is just very, very basic. We understand that, but what is a little harder to understand is that suffering doesn't just come from God; suffering for Christ comes from God as a demonstration of God's favor on your life. It is a gracious gift that shows God's smile on you.

When we suffer some opposition and say, "What did I do to deserve this suffering?" the answer is, "You don't deserve it. You could never do anything to earn or deserve the privilege of suffering for the Lord Jesus Christ, but even though you didn't deserve it, God graciously granted that high privilege to you anyway." The Apostles understood that.

Acts 5:40 They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41 The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.

That statement about being flogged goes by kind of fast in the narrative, but don't skip over that. They used the cat-of-nine tails. A whip with nine thongs, each one with a barb or piece of glass designed to lacerate the back and create excruciating pain. Remember the scene of Jesus being flogged in the movie *The Passion*? That is what happened to these guys. *Gruesome*. When they filmed *The Passion*, at one point in that scene there was an accident and one lash missed the board and actually hit the actor who was playing Jesus, and it took his breath away. He said, "The stinging is so horrific that you can't get air." He jerked his hands against the shackles and injured his wrists. To this day he still has a 14 inch scar from that. He later ended up having to have heart surgery because of the injuries he sustained in filming that movie. So 39 lashes full force, and without any modern medical treatment – it is just an unimaginable degree of suffering. They did that to the Apostles.

"Did they get PTSD?"

No, they left rejoicing – feeling happy because they got that privilege. They understood what Paul is saying here – that the honor of suffering for Christ is a precious gift from God.

How could I ever get to be like that? How can I get to the point where this would actually motivate me? What if I don't want that particular gift? Can I say to God, "No thanks, I don't need that special honor"? No. That's not an option, because Christ's work of suffering isn't done.

Colossians 1:24 Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.

There is something lacking in regard to Christ's suffering. And the part that is lacking is the part that is graciously given to us to bear.

The Suffering of Christ

We talk a lot about the death of Christ on the cross, which is fine, because Scripture often refers to his death. But just as often it refers to his suffering. And when Jesus talked about the cross, he mentions the suffering more than the death. For example:

Matthew 16:21 ... Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things...⁶

His suffering was part of what he came to accomplish. He *had* to suffer.⁷ His suffering was part of the price of redemption. Jesus did not accomplish the atonement for our sins by dying; he accomplished it by suffering and dying. It would not have been enough for Jesus to come and just be hanged or beheaded. The suffering was part of it.

⁶ We see the same emphasis in the book of Acts whenever Jesus' death is referred to.

⁷ That is what he told the men on the road to Emmaus.

Luke 24:26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"

Just read Isaiah 53 and notice how often it talks about not just his death but his suffering.

Isaiah 52:14 ... his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness

It goes on to talk about him being **punished** and **oppressed** and **crushed** and **afflicted** and **wounded**. And it is not just physical suffering either. The emotional anguish and the disgrace and humiliation and rejection were also a crucial part of his suffering. That same passage talks about him suffering dishonor, rejection, shame, humiliation, and injustice. That is what was required to satisfy the wrath of God over sin.⁸ Suffering was part of the price of atonement.

Isaiah 53:5 ... by his wounds we are healed.

It was not just his death that healed us, but also his wounds.

Our Role in Christ's Suffering

So suffering was part of the package of what Jesus came to do. And here is the thing we need to understand: his suffering isn't finished. The persecution of Jesus Christ must continue all the way until the Second Coming. And since Jesus is not physically present in this age, those who want to persecute him do so by persecuting his church. When Saul was persecuting Christians and trying to destroy the church, remember what Jesus said?

Acts 9:4 ... "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

Persecuting the church is the world's way of persecuting Jesus. That is why in Galatians 6:17 Paul said **I bear on my body the marks of Jesus**. Jesus suffered in our place, and now we suffer in his place. He took the blows from God for us, now we take the blows from men for him.

Necessary

"Any chance I can opt out?"

Yeah, you can opt out – as long as you are greater than Jesus.

⁸ There are other reasons as well, including the following:

1) His perfection

Suffering was required for Jesus to reach maturity in his humanness.

Hebrews 2:10 In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.

Hebrews 5:8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered

Even though he was sinlessly perfect, he still had to learn how to obey. And that can't happen apart from suffering - not even for Jesus.

2) Example for us

Jesus had to suffer to show us the right way to respond to suffering.

1 Peter 4:1 Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude

1 Peter 2:20 ... if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. 21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. ... 23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

3) Sympathy for us - especially when it comes to the suffering of temptation.

Hebrews 2:18 Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.

He always knew what it was like for us, because he is omniscient. But the fact that he actually experienced weakness and went through what we go through helps us believe that he can sympathize with us.

John 15:20 ... ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.

If you are a Christian, then suffering for Christ is just as certain as going to heaven. It is the only path to heaven.

Philippians 3:10 I want to know Christ ... and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

If you are going to be a Christian, you are going to suffer for Christ.

Romans 8:17 ... we are heirs-- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

If you are going to be with Christ in glory, you are going to first share in his sufferings.

2 Corinthians 1:5 ... the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives

Just as suffering was part of the package of what Christ had to accomplish to purchase our redemption, so suffering for Christ is part of the package of our salvation. If you look up all the occurrences of this word **granted** in verse 29, and write down a list of everything the Bible says has been graciously granted to us, here’s the list: Salvation (1 Cor.2:12), an inheritance (Gal.3:18), faith (Php.1:29), all good things (Ro.8:32), and suffering for Christ (Php.1:29). It is part of the glorious package of salvation.⁹

It’s All Part of the Plan

Have you ever watched a movie or TV drama where it looks like the hero has made some terrible mistakes and now he’s in serious trouble? It seems all is lost and the situation is hopeless, and then, everything turns around and you realize the whole thing was part of his original plan all along? He meant to get captured, and he meant for all those things that look like they were going wrong to happen – that was all part of his plan to win. That is exactly the situation we are in when we suffer. That is why Peter tells us, “Don’t be surprised when you suffer.” That’s part of the plan, and it’s not like the plan was any big secret. It was prophesied throughout the Old Testament, and we saw it played out in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the life he lived was a pattern for our lives. So when you suffer, you are right on schedule.

It has to happen, because it is the price that has to be paid to deliver the grace of God to people (Col.1:24). But the upshot is this: Jesus suffered to purchase grace for everyone, but it is up to us to minister that grace to people face to face. Christ purchased it; we deliver it. And that will always involve suffering. All ministry involves suffering.

So if you are suffering for Christ, that’s great news. It means you are in the game and not on the bench. Imagine if athletes had the same perspective about opposition that a lot of Christians tend to have. The football player is in the game, he’s getting hit by opponents, smashed to the ground, mocked by the other team, shoved around, tackled, blocked. And he thinks, “The coach must hate me. What does he have against me, that he would put me in a situation like this? What did I ever do to deserve this?”

Finally the coach takes him out and puts him on the end of the bench, and there are warming lamps to keep him comfortable, and people bringing in Gatorade, and he can rest and relax, and he’s thinking, “Wow, the coach must love me!” No, that’s not how they think. Just the opposite. Athletes understand that if they aren’t experiencing any opposition, it means they are on the bench, which is their worst fear.

⁹ When John introduced himself in the book of Revelation, he called himself **your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus** (Rev.1:9). The suffering is ours just as much as the kingdom is ours. When Paul was converted Jesus said: **Acts 9:16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.** That word translated **must** (Gk. *dei*) is a word that refers to necessity. **1 Thessalonians 3:2 We sent Timothy ... to strengthen and encourage you ... 3 so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them. 4 ... we kept telling you that we would be persecuted.**

But if they are experiencing opposition, that means the coach trusted them and put them right in the heat of the contest, and they are happy because that's what they are there for. If you take a couple of hits for Christ, rejoice that you are not on the bench.

This is a gift to those of us who struggle with emotions of love. Sometimes people say, "I want to love the Lord Jesus Christ with all my heart, but the passionate emotions just aren't there." Suffering for someone is a way to express profound love even when the emotions aren't what they should be.

What Counts as Suffering for Christ?

This would be a great encouragement for the Philippians because look at verse 30 – they were going through the same suffering that they saw Paul go through when he was there. When Paul was in Philippi he suffered ridicule, injustice, persecution, he was insulted (1 Thes.2:2), and thrown into prison (Acts 16). And now those same kinds of things were happening to the Philippians.¹⁰

And we face it, too. In our country, we don't have the physical persecution and imprisonment and all that just yet, but we face plenty of opposition and insults and humiliation, and ridicule. And those emotional kinds of opposition are part of Jesus' work of redemption. Isaiah 53 makes a major point of that aspect. After the Apostles were flogged, the thing that they were rejoicing most over was that they had the privilege of suffering disgrace for Christ. When Paul talked about his suffering in Philippi, he specifically mentions the insults. Emotional suffering and being rejected by people – sometimes that can be more painful than physical suffering.

Any painful or unpleasant thing that ever happens to you as a result of your commitment to Christ counts as suffering for Christ. If your spouse is mean to you, but you stay married because of your commitment to Christ, then any difficulty you have in that marriage is suffering for Christ. If you say no to temptation because of obedience to Jesus, and saying no to that temptation is painful, that is suffering for Christ. In chapter 2, Paul says that Epaphroditus almost died for Christ, and then you find out that what happened was he got sick while transporting a gift to Paul. If you just get sick, and it happens while you are carrying out your calling, then the discomfort of that sickness counts as suffering for Christ. That means if God called you to be a housewife, and you catch a cold, so it's uncomfortable for you to do the laundry, your coughing and sneezing and lack of sleep counts as suffering for Christ. And if people in your family or at work or at school think you are a weirdo because of your commitment to Christ, that is suffering for Christ.

Don't Be Afraid

And Paul is saying, "Hey, don't be afraid of that. Gather up your courage and stand firm in unassailable unity with your brothers and sisters in Christ." And the way to get that courage is by realizing that everything that is happening is from God – including your destiny, their destiny, the final outcome, your faith, and the opposition and suffering itself.

Whenever we are afraid, or we get caught up with anxiety or worry, it is always because we have lost sight of the sovereign control and goodness of God, and his favor on the lives of his children.

Honor

But if we see it for what it is, and we actually love the Lord Jesus Christ, then we will have joy when we are granted the gift of participating in the very sufferings of the Messiah, and we will regard it as a

¹⁰ At the time this letter was written, the primary titles for the Emperor of Rome were lord and savior. Just like we start every sporting event with the national anthem, they started major events with everybody saying, "Caesar is lord." That was just a basic statement of patriotism. The believers in the Philippian church could no longer say that. They were calling someone else Lord. And given how important Roman citizenship was in Philippi, you can see how that could create some major persecution.

high honor. Jesus has been shunned and rejected and pushed outside the camp like some disgusting, unclean thing. And it is a great privilege for us to go and join him out there.

Hebrews 13:13 Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.

1 Peter 4:16 if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.¹¹

Prayer:

*Father, forgive us for when we act like you are not a powerful Savior. Help us remember that in this age, you exert your mighty, awesome, delivering power, not through plagues or the Red Sea or a stone and a sling or a surgical earthquake, but through your unified church. Deliverance comes through our contending as one man for the faith. Oh Lord, make us one. Give us courage. Help us to remember those sweet, comforting words: **All this is from God.***

Benediction: 1 Peter 4:1 Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude

1 Peter 2:20 ... if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. 21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. ... 23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

- 1) Listening to the news can be done in a way that glorifies God, and it can be done in a way that harms your spiritual life and increases fear. Are there any adjustments you believe God would have you make regarding your practice in the area of watching/listening to/reading/interpreting the news?
- 2) List a few examples of instances of suffering for Christ that God has graciously granted to you.
- 3) What are some threats that you are most tempted to fear?

¹¹ The worst they can do is kill you, and that is an even greater honor because of how it glorifies God. Remember Jesus' words to Peter?

John 21:18 ... when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." 19 Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.
Peter was going to glorify God by being crucified as an old man for the sake of Christ. Purpose driven death.