



PHILIPPIANS

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For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, Philippians 1:29

Paul's words, though written to the people at Philippi in this instance, are doctrine for the church age. With this in mind, it would be ultra-mega-hyper-fantabulous for Christians to stop tearing verses out of their intended context in order to justify a "prosperity gospel," and to keep Paul's writings as the main guide of their church-age doctrine. This is especially so with verses like the one we now come to. How marvelous it would be if professing Christians would set aside the goofy, put away the self-centered, and assimilate truths which are intended to help us through times of trial, not claim our way out of them.

Within the past few days before analyzing this verse, a "prosperity gospel" church in Nigeria collapsed and destroyed 160 lives. They were not able to "claim" their way out of that mess, and they will all stand before God and give an account of what they believed and what doctrine they adhered to.

Paul, speaking to those at Philippi (and thus to us!) says, "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ..." The verb is in the aorist indicative passive. It has been given since first belief, and it is a simple statement of fact. And what has been granted is "on behalf of Christ." In other words, because of the cause of Christ, and/or in a view towards honoring Christ, this has been granted to us as believers. It is not something unexpected or unfavorable. Instead, what he will state is something we are both to expect, and something that we are to feel honored to have occur.

Continuing on, he says, "...not only to believe in Him..." This is a reference to the fact that belief in Christ is a gift and a privilege. God orchestrated the time and circumstances of our lives to give us a chance to believe. He granted this honor to us so that we might in fact believe. When we demonstrate faith in Christ, we are saved. But this is not the end of the honors that we can expect. Paul will next tell us of another great honor and privilege that we are granted on behalf of Christ. Let us try to guess what it is!

Johnny: Is it that we will always be happy and have our path filled with scented flowers?

Susan: Is it that we will be free from troubles and fill out our days in health just as Heretic Hinn implies when he is asking for donations?

Matthew: Is it that we will be rich, just like Pastor Promise told us last Sunday?

Ralph: Is it that we will have power over demons, devils, and physical afflictions so that we can claim healing? This is what Minister Marvelous said at Bible class last week *Oh boy!*

Nice try, but none of these are what Paul will tell us. Rather, he tells us that we are "also to suffer for His sake." *Sound of crickets chirping*

Paul's word here are consistent with other passages in the New Testament. Unlike the false teachings described above by our confused class of Christians, none of which are to be found in a proper evaluation of Scripture, Paul tells us directly and – without ambiguity or vagueness – that it is an honor and a privilege to suffer for the name of Christ. In Acts 5, the apostles who were beaten by order of the leading council in Jerusalem left rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus. In Colossians 1:24, Paul states –

"I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church..."

Peter tells his audience –

"Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; ¹³ but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy." 1 Peter 4:12, 13

Elsewhere as well, we are shown that to suffer for Christ and as a Christian is an honorable thing. Not all of these are prescriptive verses, but they are given to highlight that our life in Christ is not to be one which expects wealth, health, prosperity, fancy things, or any such nonsense. Instead, we have been given the high honor of emulating the Lord in His sufferings. Let us take this to heart and remove our ears from the false whisperings of teachers who

would promise that the blessings of heaven will open up on us if we simply pass money to them.

Life application: As a Christian, you can expect suffering.

...having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me. Philippians 1:30

The likely construction of Paul's words is that this completes the thought of verse 27, and thus verses 28 and 29 are parenthetical. If we leave out 28 and 29, it would read –

“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, ... ³⁰ having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear *is* in me.”

In his words “having the same conflict which you saw in me,” he refers to a conflict which they were aware of, and one which they had personally seen. This then is what is recorded in Acts 16, having occurred at Philippi. After noting this, he continues with “and now hear is in me.” He is showing them that, once again, he is having a conflict. This is the reason for their need to “stand fast” and to continue “striving together.” The ordeals were sure to come, and they were likely to be continuous. This is what they could expect because of their faith in Christ. The word he uses which is translated as “conflict” is introduced here. It is used by Paul five times, and once in Hebrews. It is the Greek word *agon*, and it is the source of our word “agony” or to “agonize.” It indicates an arduous conflict and comes from the idea of the athletic contests of ancient Greece. These were so grueling that even the toughest of the competitors were known to weaken and crumble.

Paul's choice of wording here shows the true nature of what it can mean to be a Christian. He didn't simply snap his fingers and claim his way out of his trials. Instead, he suffered these agonizing ordeals for the sake of Christ and His gospel message. He notes that those in Philippi were having the same type of conflict as well.

Life application: If we are in dire straits and are facing crushing troubles because we are Christians, we can actually find encouragement from knowing that we were not the first. Further, we can know that we will be saved through them. This is the great value of reading and remembering the words of Scripture. Let us endeavor to keep such things in mind just in case we too face such immense trials. Let us stand fast and strive together with others in our pursuit of Christ.

Therefore if *there is* any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, Philippians 2:1

This verse is necessarily tied to the upcoming verse. He makes four statements preparing us for a heartfelt petition. He begins with “Therefore” in order to show that his thoughts now are dependent on the words of the previous chapter, especially verses 27-29. Based on those things (therefore), he first says, “If *there is* any consolation in Christ.” The word is *paráklēsis*, and it indicates “a call (urging), done by someone ‘close beside,’ i.e. a *personal exhortation* that delivers the ‘evidence that stands up in God's court’” (HELPS Word Studies). One can almost feel Paul’s intent. There is the Spirit of Christ, right there beside us, exhorting us and encouraging us.

Next, he says, “...if any comfort of love.” This is the comfort of love which is found in Christ. We are to understand the significance of His cross, and we are to feel surrounded by the love which it imparts to us. This in turn is then passed on between believers in Christ who, hopefully, will have the same love towards one another because of Christ’s love which sets the example.

After that comes, “...if any fellowship of the Spirit.” This is speaking of the intimate bond between the Spirit and us. It is the comfort we have knowing of His presence. It is the rejoicing in Him for Christ’s deeds on our behalf, and the anticipation of eternal intimacy because of what He has done. It is the reconnection to God which was lost at the fall, and which says that we are once again sons of God through adoption. These things, and so much more, are realized through the work of Christ, and the Spirit testifies to them.

And he then states, “...if any affection and mercy.” These are traits that are to be found among believers. Christ showed these to us, and we are to turn and have them in us now as well.

Each of these clauses is given in order for Paul to next make his heartfelt petition to them. In like manner, we are to use this same thought process as we encounter similar circumstances in our own Christian lives.

Life application: Paul asked “if” in each of these cases, implying that it is the way it should be with us. We are not to be devoid of the things he has asked about, but rather we are to have them as a part of who we are in Christ.

...fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind.
Philippians 2:2

In verse 1, Paul gave four statements which were a preparation for a heartfelt petition. Now, he makes that petition in four exhortations. In doing this, he notes that they will “fulfill my joy.” Paul’s joy as an apostle, and one who is responsible for their growth and maturity in Christ, was to be found in the things he now asks of them. The same should be true with teachers and preachers of the word today. The evidence of these things in a congregation should be the rejoicing of the heart of one whose allegiance is to Christ, and whose hope is for a strong fellowship of people who are united in the ways he will now state.

First, he says that they are to be “like minded.” The Greek states, “that you think the same thing.” His heart for them is that they would have one mind, one intent, no splits or divisions, and to not be striving against one another. To be like minded would indicate harmony and good will. In the end, a congregation like this would desire that people would be saved, that others would be built up, and that Christ would be magnified.

Next he says, “...having the same love.” This would be both a vertical and horizontal petition. They should have the same love towards Christ, and they should have the same love towards one another. They may not be in complete agreement on all things, but they were to be in agreement in such love.

After this, he mentions that they should be, “...of one accord.” The word he uses, *sumpsuchos*, is found only here in the Bible. It is derived from two words which indicate “with” and “soul.” In other words, they are to be “of one soul.” Because they are in Christ, their souls should be united to one another just as they are united to Him. If this is so, then their allegiances and hopes for the fellowship would also be united.

Finally, he says they should be “of one mind.” They should be thinking the same thoughts, and agreed on what those thoughts are to be directed to.

Life application: Paul’s desire for those at Philippi should be the hope for all congregations who are properly directed towards the Lord, and who hold to proper and reasonable doctrine. Though differences on minor points of doctrine may exist, there should at least be fellowship between the people to the point that they can overlook those differences. Only if extremely bad doctrine, or even heresy, is involved should a schism be allowed to arise.

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Philippians 2:3

Paul continues his exhortations to those at Philippi (and thus to us!) in this verse. He begins with, “*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit.*” The Greek simply reads “...nothing according to selfish ambition or conceit.” He is tying these words to the previous

verse which dealt with being like-minded. In being like-minded, they were not to act (thinking or doing) according to personal ambitions or conceit. Should they do this, they would not be “like-minded” at all.

The word “selfish ambition” gives the idea of a faction. They were not to divide one another into factions, but this is what a person of selfish ambition does. It is contrary to like-mindedness. The word translated as “conceit” is found only here in the NT, but it has a kindred adjective which is found in Galatians 5:26. It is comprised of two words which give the sense of “vain glory.” It indicates a person who is always elevating himself in an attempt to be the highlight of the room. Such attitudes are not becoming of followers of Christ.

Instead, the exhortation now continues with a contrast – “...but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.” The term “lowliness of mind” indicates modesty or humility. It is found in one who is humble and shuns praise. This is a trait that the Lord looks favorably upon –

“Surely He scorns the scornful,
But gives grace to the humble.” Proverbs 3:34

This proverb is then quoted by both James and Peter, demonstrating that the apostles clearly understood and agreed upon this precept. Finally, to “esteem others better than” oneself is a similar quality. One who is humble will look at those around him and see their positives, not their negatives. He will seek to highlight their strengths and overlook their weaknesses. This goes so far as to comparing those strengths against their own and finding them of better quality.

In other words, if someone is an athlete that can run a race in ten seconds, he cannot esteem someone else as a better athlete if they run the same race in 2 minutes. Rather, he will overlook his strengths and accomplishments and highlight a different strength which is found in others – “Markus Paulus, you are the finest theologian I have ever known. I wish I had one-tenth of your ability to interpret and explain Scripture.” In choosing this avenue, he is overlooking the deficiencies and highlighting the strengths. This is what is good and appropriate for the believer in Christ.

Life application: By exalting others, you are showing that you care about them and that their strengths are important to you. Likewise, by not seeking your own glory, you are giving room to others to be like-minded with you. In so doing the group will be able to focus in a united way on seeking the glory of the Lord. There won't be time for factious rivalry.