

December 8, 2013 by Steve Brandon



Live Worthy of the Gospel

Philippians 1:27-30

1. In Unity (verse 27)

2. Without Fear (verses 28-30)

In our exposition of the wonderful book of Philippians, we have arrived this morning at verse 27. And, Lord willing, we will finish the chapter this morning, which means that we will carry on through verse 30. I want to begin by reading the text for us this morning.

Philippians 1:27-30

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.

In college, I graduated with a double major. I majored in physics and computer science. One of the things about both of these majors was that the emphasis was upon thinking and reasoning and problem solving. As such, the reading load each night was minimal. I remember reading some 3-5 pages each night for my physics homework. I remember spending long hours in the computer lab to complete my computer science homework. Rare was the time when I would spend hours reading to finish my homework. But, rare was the time when I wouldn't spend hours figuring out my physics problems or hours programming the computers.

Now, with a physics major, you learn really fast that the key to your success is not found in memorizing a long list of facts. However, the key is to look for the key concepts and work to fully understand them. That's what physics is all about -- learning the fundamental ways that gravity works, learning the fundamental ways that electricity works, learning the fundamental ways that magnetism works, or friction or torque or energy or momentum.

And when you understand that $\text{Force} = (\text{mass}) \times (\text{acceleration})$ or $\text{Energy} = (\text{mass}) \times (\text{the speed of light})^2$ or $\text{Voltage} = (\text{current}) \times (\text{resistance})$, then you simply apply these things in hundreds of different ways to solve the problems at hand.

You may never have taken a physics course in your life, but you all know what I'm talking about. Anybody who knows that $2 + 2 = 4$ knows what I'm talking about. Once you learn that key concept, that $2 + 2 = 4$, just think about the number of times that you have applied this in your life. How many times have you added 2 and 2 together? Eventually, you hardly even need to think about it. Well, that's how physics works.

Now, such a mindset didn't serve me well as I went off to seminary. Throughout my first year at seminary, I was always trying to find the few key concepts that would unlock everything. However, for the most part, this doesn't work when it comes to the Bible. There isn't one key concept that will help you understand God. There isn't one key concept that will help you understand the Trinity. There isn't one key concept that will help you to understand the similarities and distinctions between Israel and the church. There isn't one key concept that will help you understand the atonement.

Instead, you often need to take in a bunch of Bible verses from many different angles to really understand what the Bible teaches on a given subject. However, as we come to our text this morning in Philippians, chapter 1, we find one key concept that will help you live the Christian life. If you understand this one concept, then you will know everything of what God requires of you as a follower of Jesus. If you but follow this one command of Scripture all the days of your life, then you will have no regrets in standing before the Lord when your life is through. In fact, I'm sure that you will hear the words of the Lord Jesus, "Well done, good and faithful one" (Matthew 25:21).

What is this concept? It comes in verse 27, ...

Philippians 1:27

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ,

There it is. This is God's calling upon your life. In many ways, this is God's only calling upon your life.

Do you remember when the expert in the law came to Jesus to test Him with a hard question (Matthew 22:35)? He said, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" (Matthew 23:36). And Jesus replied, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" In this way, Jesus synthesized the entire law. Love toward God with everything that you have. Love toward others with all that is in you. This is why Jesus said, "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:40).

There is no greater way to sum up all of the commands in the Bible. You show me a command in the Bible, and I'll show you how it relates to one of these commands.

Do not worship any other gods (Exodus 20:3). Why? Because you love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. You have no heart nor strength to give another god. Do not make any idols (Exodus 20:4). Why? Because your love for the LORD God Almighty is so great that it is an exclusive love. You have no heart nor strength to give another god. You shall not murder (Exodus 20:13). Why? Because your love for others is as great as your love for yourself. You want to live, and so you let others live as well. You shall not bear false witness (Exodus 20:16). Why? Because your love for others is as great as your love for yourself. You want others to be truthful toward you, and so you are truthful toward them.

And what is true of the ten commandments can be applied to any command given in the Bible. Now, in many ways, this command in Philippians 1:27 works in the same way.

Philippians 1:27

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ,

If you would truly understand all of the implications of Philippians 1:27, there would be no need for you to be told how to act. There would be no need for you to be told what to do. Just like in physics, if you truly understand the principles behind the way the world works, you can put a man on the moon. So likewise, if you would truly grasp the significance of this one statement, you would know what the Lord wants of you.

Now, just like in physics, it takes some practice to figure it all out. So, in life, it takes some practice to figure it all out. It takes some practice to figure out exactly what a life worthy of the gospel looks like. But, should we grasp it, I do believe that this is the core concept that we need to keep in our mind as we conduct our daily lives.

I do believe that this is Paul's point in beginning the verse with the word, "Only." I believe that there is significance to this word. "Philippians, this is the only thing you need to know. Philippians, this is the only thing you need to do. Philippians, this is the most important thing I have to tell you."

In fact, if you look carefully, you will see that this is the first command in the entire book of Philippians. You will look in vain in the first 26 verses for Paul instructing those in Philippi to do anything. Paul began the letter with a greeting (verses 1-2). Paul expressed his thanks to God for the Philippians (verses 3-5). Paul expressed his heart of care for the Philippians (verses 6-8). Paul prayed for them (verses 9-11). Paul gave them a perspective of his imprisonment (verses 12-18). Paul told them of his willingness to die for Christ, and of his resolve to live on to serve those in Philippi (verses 19-26). But, now, for the first time, Paul instructs them how to live. He says, "Live Worthy of the Gospel."

This is the title of my message this morning, "Live Worthy of the Gospel." This is the main point of the book of Philippians.

Over the past few months, we have seen the theme of Philippians. It's "Rejoice in the Gospel." And fundamentally, this is how you rejoice in the gospel. You "live in a manner worthy of the gospel." When you hear the gospel, you believe. When you learn more about the gospel, you trust more. When you have opportunity, you speak to spread the gospel. When you have opportunity, you give to spread the gospel. When you hear of the gospel spreading in other places, you rejoice.

This past week, Yvonne and I had an opportunity to put this into practice. Through a series of circumstances, we stumbled upon a website of a church plant that was taking place in DeKalb. I grew up in DeKalb. We lived in DeKalb for 9 years. By grace, we were an integral part in starting a church in DeKalb -- Kishwaukee Bible Church. In God's providence, that church sent us to Rockford to plant Rock Valley Bible Church. Now, before this week, we hadn't heard about this church in DeKalb.

But, there, front and center on the website was a picture of their building, actually it was our building! It's the very building where we used to meet! We knew that Kishwaukee Bible Church had sold the building. But, we didn't know to whom they sold it. As we looked through the website, we were encouraged. Here's what the website said, "We are ... a new church in DeKalb Illinois. So, for introductions, we want to keep it short. We are a new church about one thing: The Gospel of JESUS Christ. The whole story of Jesus Christ's perfect life, substitutionary death, burial, resurrection, reign as King, and hopeful soon coming. We're excited about how the Gospel changes us to worship our God, causes us to love each other and be loved by others, and to be used by Him for His mission to proclaim the Good News of the Gospel to our city and the cities of the world." It doesn't get better than that. And so, we are rejoicing in the gospel, especially as it spreads in DeKalb and beyond.

That's one way to "Rejoice in the gospel." Rejoice when the gospel is being spread. That's one way to "Live worthy of the gospel."

Throughout the rest of Philippians, we will see many other ways to "live worthy of the gospel" as well. In fact, my argument this morning is this: everything else in Philippians can be traced back to this command. Everything that Paul will say in chapters 2, 3, and 4, actually has its roots here in verse 27.

Now, this isn't the first time that Paul has ever said anything like this. This is almost identical to what he wrote in Ephesians. So, turn back one book in the Bible to the book of Ephesians. It is significant that Paul wrote this at the same time he wrote Philippians. It is one of his "prison epistles." Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon were all written during Paul's days of house arrest in Rome.

And in the book of Ephesians, Paul spends the first half of the book explaining the glorious gospel of Christ. He begins in chapter 1, verse 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." He continues on through the first half of the chapter explaining some of these blessings.

Here are some of the blessings. "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world" (verse 4). "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself" (verse 5). He did this "to the praise of the glory of His grace" (verse 6). "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of His grace" (verse 7). "He made known to us the mystery of His will" (verse 9). "In Him, also we have obtained an inheritance" (verse 11). We were "sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise" (verse 13). And all of this, "to the praise of His glory" (verses 6, 12, 14).

Someday, Lord willing, we will spend weeks (and perhaps months) in this chapter, reflecting upon the greatness of the spiritual blessings that we have received in Jesus Christ. It is literally mind-blowing, to think that God would give all of these blessings to undeserving sinners like us.

These blessings are so great that Paul spends the second half of chapter 1 praying for those in Ephesus to grasp what he just told them. "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe" (Eph. 1:18-19a).

In chapter 2, the theme continues. We were "dead in our trespasses and sins, ... But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ" (Eph. 2:1, 4-5). We were dead, but God made us alive!" It's only by His grace that we stand forgiven in the Lord.

And what was true of us individually is also true of us corporately. As Gentiles, we were far from God. We were "separate from the Messiah, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise ... " (Eph. 2:12). As Gentiles, we had no right to claim any of the promises given in the Old Testament. The promise was given to the Jews, and not to us. That's why Paul said that we had "no hope and [were] without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12).

And again, in verse 13 comes the contrast, "but now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." We, who were far away, have been brought near. And now, we Gentiles, along with the Jews, have become recipients of the promises of God that have been given to us. This Paul explains in the first half of Ephesians 3, "... the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (Ephesians 3:6).

That's the gospel! Through Jesus, we become partakers of God's covenant promise!

Paul finishes chapter 3 with a prayer. Verse 19 says, "... to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge." That's it! That's how awesome the gospel is. It surpasses knowledge. Try as we might, we can understand a portion of it. We can understand God's love for us in sending His Son to die for our sins. But, we can't understand the extent of God's love for us. In other words, we know in part, but not in whole. But, what we do know is enough.

Now, I say all of that in Ephesians to say this. In chapter 4, verse 1 of Ephesians, we see Paul's first command in the book. Chapter 4, verse 1 says, "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." In other words, walk worthy of the gospel! For three chapters, Paul lays out the gospel! And now, the central point of the book of Ephesians -- walk worthy of the gospel! He will spend three more chapters in Ephesians working out this little phrase. Paul will give dozens of instructions as to how to live, but everything in chapters 4-6 goes back to this little phrase: "walk worthy of the calling with which you have been called" (**Ephesians 4:1**).

Paul's argument in the book of Colossians is much the same. In the first portion of the book, he focuses upon the supremacy of Christ. And then, in chapter 2, verse 6, comes the beginning of applications. He writes, "Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him" (**Colossians 2:6**). Again, this is one of those summary statements, one of those key concepts, that if you thoroughly understand it, it will set the trajectory of your Christian life in the only direction you need to go.

As you have received Christ Jesus in the gospel, walk in that way by faith, trusting the Lord with a thankful and joyful heart, and seeking Him.

Paul's argument in the book of Romans is much the same as well. For the first 11 chapters of the book, Paul spells out the gospel in great detail, writing of how we were dead in our sin (Romans 1-3); writing of how we are "justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24); writing of how our justification comes through faith alone (Romans 4) and how the work of Christ fixes everything that the was messed up when Adam sinned (Romans 5); writing of the battle we now have with sin (Romans 6-7), but that in Christ Jesus our salvation is secure (Romans 8); writing of God's sovereign saving plan, which can never be thwarted (Romans 9-11). And finally, after 11 chapters and more than 300 verses, Paul writes, "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship" (**Romans 12:1**).

Again, this is one of those verses in the Bible that if thoroughly understood and embraced, it is sufficient to set your life of following Christ in the proper direction. And it all has to do with the gospel, remembering the mercy that God has shown you and living accordingly.

In many ways, the book of Philippians is much the same. The hinge of the entire book comes here in chapter 1 verse 27. He says, "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ."

Many commentators have pointed out this unique word translated here as, "conduct yourselves." The word is politeuō (politeuo). Although this word is used only twice in the Bible, its meaning is clear. It comes from the Greek word, poliŷ (polis), which means, "city." Thus, we get, "to live as a citizen."

The only other place is Acts 23:1, where Paul says, "I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day." You could easily translate Paul's words, "I have lived my life [as a citizen] with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day." Such was Paul's point.

The noun form of this word is found one other place in the Bible. Philippians 3:20 -- "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." In this verse, the idea of citizenship comes through clearly as Paul calls the Philippians (and us) to live as a citizen, as a responsible representative of our heavenly kingdom. We have been saved by the gospel and transferred to the kingdom of His beloved Son (Col. 1:13). And now, Paul calls us to live worthy as a heavenly citizen.

A few weeks ago, Darryn and I travelled to India. In order to get there, we were required to bring our passports, which are proofs of our citizenship of the United States. And with our passports came some privileges. We are citizens of the United States of America. You mess with us, and you will have to answer to the administration of our country. But, with our passports comes responsibility as well. We are citizens of the United States of America. We are to conduct ourselves as worthy members of our country.

The parallels with our passage here this morning is clear. We are citizens of heaven. As such, we have privileges of being children of God. Our sins are forgiven. There has been reconciliation through our adoption. But, we also have responsibility. We are to represent Him well. We are to live as citizens, "in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ."

Now, the big question is this, what does it mean to "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ"? We see here in verse 27 that Paul emphasizes unity. In fact, that's my first point. Live worthy of the gospel, ...

1. In Unity (verse 27)

Let's read the entire verse

Philippians 1:27

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;

Did you notice the focus upon unity? Paul mentions the concept twice: "Standing firm in one spirit" and "with one mind striving together." When Paul speaks about the life worthy of the gospel of Christ, he first speaks about unity.

Note over in chapter 2, he will pick up the same theme in verse 2, "make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose." Four times in this one verse, he speaks about unity -- same mind, same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.

Such is the first thing that Paul mentions when he speaks about living a life worthy of the gospel. He talks about unity in the church. Now, this may come as a surprise to you (it did to me). I don't naturally think of unity in the church as the main way to live a life worthy of the gospel. I naturally think that a worthy life means that we live consistent with our calling. That we represent our Lord, Jesus Christ well. That we obey His voice. That we praise the One who has redeemed us. That we tell others of the salvation we have experienced. That we express our thanks to the Lord for our salvation. That we willingly sacrifice our lives as Christ sacrificed His life. That we no longer live for ourselves, but for Him who died and rose again on our behalf. That we trust the Lord in all circumstances. That we confess our sins to the Lord and to each other. That we serve one another as Christ would have us serve. That we commune with the Lord in His word and in prayer. That we seek His glory above our own. That we put no confidence in the works of our hands. That we think on those things that would be pleasing to the Lord.

And all of these things are true. But, the first thing on Paul's pen is a focus upon the community. He describes a community that is "standing firm in one spirit." He describes a community of people that know what they believe. He describes a community of people that stand on their faith. He describes a community of people that aren't wavering on the gospel.

Paul had seen people waver on the gospel. He had seen the churches of Galatia depart from the gospel. He wrote to them, "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another" (Gal. 1:6, 7).

To those in Philippi, Paul says, "stand firm in one spirit." Embrace the gospel and believe it! But, I believe that "standing firm in one spirit" goes beyond merely believing the gospel together. He's getting at unity.

Paul had seen divided churches. The church in Corinth comes to mind. To them, he wrote, "Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10). Two verses later, he describes the problem, "I mean this, that each one of you is saying, 'I am of Paul,' and 'I of Apollos,' and 'I of Cephas,' and 'I of Christ.'" (1 Cor. 1:12). You simply need to read through 1 Corinthians to see the extent of their discord.

To those in Philippi, Paul says, "stand firm in one spirit." Live in unity and in harmony with one another. Don't divide. Paul is getting at these things for the church in Philippi. United in the gospel Living without division.

But, the picture here is more than this. The picture here is of locking elbows and standing arm-in-arm, in solidarity with each other. Over in chapter 4, verse 1, Paul uses the same terminology. He says, "My beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved."

The picture is of the early church before the day of Pentecost. The few followers of Christ were "all with one mind, ... continually devoting themselves to prayer" (Acts 1:14). The picture is of the early church after the day of Pentecost, when thousands believed. We read that, "Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people" (Acts 2:46-47a).

The picture is of the early church when Peter and John were arrested, threatened, and released by the Sanhedrin. The early church prayed together with such faith and passion that the "the place where they had gathered together was shaken" (Acts 4:32). The picture is of the early church who were standing firm together, such that they were even selling their property to give to those in need. "There was not a needy person among them" (Acts 4:34). The picture is of the early church when Peter was in prison and soon to be killed by Herod. "Many were gathered together and were praying" (Acts 12:12).

United in one spirit. On the one hand, enjoying fellowship with one another. On the other hand, supporting one another when the attacks came upon the church.

Paul has another phrase in verse 27 to describe the unity that is worthy of the gospel of Christ: "... with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." This imagery comes from the athletic world.

The word here comes from the Greek word *sunaglew* (*sunathleo*). This comes from two Greek words. The first is *sun* (sun), which means "with." The next word is *aglew* (*athleo*), meaning "athletic." You put them together and you get "with athletic." Or, in better English, "competing together." We are teammates on the gospel team. Our actions should show it.

Even the most casual observer of sports knows what teamwork is about. You picture the offensive line of a football team. They are down and dirty in the trenches. When the play is called, they all know their assignments. When the ball is snapped, they make their blocks with all the strength that they have so that the quarterback can be protected, the running back can find his hole, and the team will win.

Victory on the football field comes only with hard training and dedication and teamwork. Dissension in the locker room will wreak havoc on the field. Lack of coordination on the field will mean a loss for the team.

Paul here is calling for a unity in the gospel that we all would be on the same page, striving together for the common goal of Jesus being exalted. Do you know anything about this at Rock Valley Bible Church? Are you in the trenches, together with your offensive linemen? Are you striving together with Rock Valley Bible Church to see the glory of Christ exalted. One lexicon has listed this Greek word as a synonym with *sunagonizomai* (*sunagonizomai*), meaning "agonizing together with." This is what Paul is calling us to. Agony for unity.

Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35). Does this describe your relationship with others in this church? That's what Paul called the Philippians to. He called them to a life of interlocking love.

And I remind you that the church in Philippi was a diverse bunch. It began with a business woman, named Lydia, who was a seller of nice fabrics. One of the early converts was the jailer of the town, not exactly the softest of men. To be a jailer you needed to have a rough side to you. You needed to be strong and brutal. If the slave-girl, who had the demon cast out of her was converted, you had quite a mixture of people there.

The unity of the Philippian church was not dependent upon social structures or upon common backgrounds. It was dependent upon and energized by the gospel of Christ.

Note also, that this unity wasn't dependent upon Paul either. He says in verse 27,

Philippians 1:27

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;

Unity in the gospel is the right thing to do, whether Paul makes it to see the Philippians or not. You may remember from previous section of Philippians, that there was some doubt as to Paul's future. He may live. He may be put to death by the Roman government. But, Paul says this, whether I actually make it to see you or not, makes no difference. If I come and see you, I want to join with you and rejoice in your unity. If I can't come to see you, I want to hear of your unity together.

Church unity isn't dependent upon the leadership. I know what it's about to see people change when they find out that I'm a pastor. More people than I can count have said some things in my presence, for which they have immediately apologized to me, as a pastor. As if I haven't heard those things. As if my presence is the big factor, forgetting about the presence of God.

No, unity in the body of Christ must come as a grass-roots movement. It must come from the body standing firm and making great efforts to obtain and keep the unity (more about how to do that next week). It must come whether Paul is present or not. It must come whether the leaders of the church are present or not. When behavior changes in the presence of a pastor, something is dreadfully wrong.

I have shared with you a bit of the struggles that we had at Rock Valley Bible Church over the unity of the church some years ago. And I remember some times after church when we were mingling, that I would see a few guys talking off in the corner, I would walk up to join the conversation, and it would stop. I don't know for sure, but I think that some of these conversations were about me and the poor leadership that I was giving to Rock Valley Bible Church. And when there is disunity among the ranks, the church is headed for trouble. And, more importantly, such actions are not consistent with a life worthy of the gospel of Christ (Phil. 1:27).

Are you living a life worthy of the gospel In Unity (verse 27)?

Let's quickly move to my second point. Live Worthy of the Gospel, ...

2. Without Fear (verses 28-30)

In verse 28, Paul brings up those who are opposing this unity. He brings up those who are opposing this life worthy of the gospel. He writes, ...

Philippians 1:28

in no way alarmed by your opponents -- which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God.

Now, we don't know if these opponents were inside the church or outside the church.

That there are opponents inside the church is no surprise. Judas betrayed Jesus. Paul warned the Ephesian elders that after his departure, "savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30). Demas deserted Paul (2 Tim. 4:10). He was at one time a fellow worker with the apostle Paul (Col. 4:14; Philemon 24).

That there are opponents outside the church is no surprise. Jesus was hated by the religious establishment. Jesus was crucified by the Roman authorities. Peter and John were imprisoned and flogged by those who refused to believe the gospel (Acts 4-5). Stephen was stoned to death for confronting unbelief (Acts 7). James was "put to death with a sword" at the command of Herod (Acts 12:2). Wherever Paul went, there was opposition by those who refused to believe. Paul and Barnabas were driven out of Psidian Antioch, and Iconium (Acts 13-14). He was even stoned and left for dead at Lystra (Acts 14:19). Paul was asked to leave Philippi and Thessalonica (Acts 16-17). It was only through a divine vision, which promised his safety, that Paul remained at Corinth (Acts 18). And as he wrote, he was under house arrest.

The church of Jesus Christ always has its opponents. Some are inside the church. Some are outside the church. If you are living worthy of the gospel of Christ, such opposition will surely come upon you as well.

It is difficult to know exactly who these opponents were. In chapter 3, we will see Paul describing some enemies of the church. In verse 2, he calls them, "dogs." He calls them "evil workers." He calls them "the false circumcision." He tells of the "enemies of the cross of Christ" in verse 19, "whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is their shame, who set their minds on earthly things."

It's difficult to discern from Paul's writings of these things whether these people are the same group of people. It's difficult to discern from Paul's description whether these people are inside the church or outside. Some of these enemies are Jewish; they have a false circumcision. Paul seems to be heart-broken over some of these enemies, for verse 18 speaks of how he mentions them only with tears. Perhaps they were in the church at one time, but turned away to follow their own lusts. We simply don't know.

And, we don't know who these "opponents" in verse 28 are either. But, it doesn't matter who they are. What matters is how you face such opponents, be they inside the church or outside the church, be they religious or secular. What matters is that you are not alarmed by such individuals.

Or, as I have said, Live worthy of the wospel without fear (verses 28-30). Don't fear those who oppose you. Don't fear those who oppose the gospel. Don't fear what they may bring upon you.

Rather, look at things from an eternal perspective. As people oppose you and the gospel, it's simply a clear indication of where the battle lines are drawn.

When Jesus came and lived a perfect life upon the earth, extending his hand of kindness to all, healing all who were hurting, preaching the good news to the oppressed. And still people opposed Him. It was a sign that the battle lines had been drawn.

Jesus came from God; the Pharisees knew this. Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, came to Jesus and said, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him" (John 3:2). The religious leaders knew that Jesus had made a blind man see. There was no getting around it (John 9). The religious leaders knew that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11). And instead of believing in Jesus and heeding his words, they resisted Him and killed Him.

It was clear what side of eternity they were on. They were opposed to the Lord. And so likewise, when opponents of the gospel come against you, don't fear. They are merely drawing the battle lines.

That's why the apostles, when they were flogged and ordered not to speak any more in the name of Jesus, "they went on their way ... rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name" (Acts 5:41). The persecution makes it clear who is on whose side. Jesus said, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you" (John 15:18-19).

Those who oppose the gospel demonstrate themselves to be against the Lord (Psalm 2). Those who are walking worthy of the gospel and are being opposed demonstrate themselves to be for the Lord. And this is how the Lord has planned it all. Paul writes in verse 29, ...

Philippians 1:29

For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,

Our salvation is a gift of God. When anyone believes in Jesus, it is only because of the kindness of the Lord. It is only because the Lord gives belief. We know this. We love this! If you are here this morning, believing and trusting in the Lord, please know this -- it is only God's kindness

that has given you faith. That's what verse 29 says, ...

Philippians 1:29

For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, ... to believe in Him. ...

Let us rejoice that we are saved by grace through faith. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Let us glory in the doctrines of grace! Let us glory in the marvelous grace of God.

But, let us also realize that suffering is a gift as well.

Philippians 1:29

For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,

Suffering is a gift from God. Let us rejoice that God gives us suffering to refine us. We read in James 1:2, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials." It may sound odd to your ears. We are actually to rejoice in our trials? Try asking those who have gone through difficult tries trusting the Lord. Many would agree that their trials are refining times; they are profitable (even if painful) times.

Now, we don't know exactly what those in Philippi were experiencing, but we have a clue in verse 30, ...

Philippians 1:30

experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.

Do you remember what happened to Paul in Philippi? He was wrongly accused, beaten, and thrown in prison, and asked to leave the city. Those in Philippi may well be experiencing the same suffering. I would not be surprised if some of them faced accusations and beatings and imprisonment as well. But, such is par for the course. Such is to be expected for followers of Christ. "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 4:12). Jesus said, "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil" (John 3:19).

So, when the suffering comes, don't fear. Know that your heavenly Father has given it to you as a gift. Since he gave it, he also knows how much (or how little) to give. The reality is that He will never give too much for us to bear. We can rejoice in the promise of 1 Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it." We have no need to fear when opponents come against us.

So, live worthy of the gospel in unity (verse 27) and without fear (verses 28-30).

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on December 8, 2013 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rvbc.cc.
