

The Steadfast Church

Philippians 1:27-30

Pastor John Miller

We're going to read just one verse to get us started, Philippians 1:27. Paul says, "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye," notice, here's our theme, "stand fast in one spirit, with one mind," or soul, "striving together for," notice this phrase, "the faith of the gospel."

Paul was writing to the Christians in Philippi from a Roman jail. Now, when I say Roman jail, technically it was a house that he was renting, and he was under house arrest. He was a prisoner in chains awaiting trial before Caesar Nero. He wasn't sure what the outcome would be, whether he would live or die, but Paul said, "...whether it be by life, or by death," as long as Christ is preached, "...I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice."

Philippians is the epistle of joy, and Paul is joyful that Christ is being preached, even with his chains, even with his circumstances, "...so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body," that's all that Paul was concerned about. He knew that God was using his circumstances in three ways. In verse 5, Paul referred to the fellowship of the gospel. What Paul was going through was causing the believers to have a deeper, more intimate koinonia. The word "fellowship" is the Greek word koinonia which means participation. I see that even today in our church, when someone is suffering or going through adversity, that others gather around them, support them, and there's a deepening of the fellowship in the gospel. In verse 12, Paul uses the phrase, "...the furtherance of the gospel," and he's saying in his circumstances, Christ was being preached and he rejoiced. Even though he was in chains, the gospel was not bound, and he was preaching the gospel. Thirdly, tonight in verse 27, Paul talks about being steadfast "...for the faith of the gospel." He mentions the fellowship of the gospel, verse 5; the furtherance of the gospel, verse 12; and then mentions the faith of the gospel, verse 27.

The theme of our text is seen in several verses that I want to point out to you. In verse 27, Paul says, "...stand fast," and he uses the phrase, "striving together," and we're going to come back and unpack those phrases. In verse 28, Paul uses the phrase, "your adversaries," in verse 29 he uses the word "suffer," and in verse 30 he uses the word "conflict." Those phrases, words, and figures of speech convey the idea that Paul exhorts the Philippians to remain steadfast, united, unafraid, and to regard the privilege of suffering for Christ something to rejoice in. Paul is writing to believers about the difficulties and adversities that he's going through, they are going through, and again he's joyful and thankful that they're rejoicing in the Lord even in this time of conflict; so, "stand fast," "striving together," "your adversaries," your suffering, and you're in the conflict. The believers in Philippi were in a battle "...for the faith of the gospel."

Again, before I go to the text and unpack that, I want to ask the question: What is "the faith of the gospel"? Notice that it's "the faith," it's not just saying "faith in the gospel," or "faith," period. It's "the faith." Whenever you see "the faith," it's not talking about your individual personal trust in God, which is subjective, which the Bible teaches we should trust in the Lord, but it's talking

about the body of belief, the teachings of the gospel and about Christ in the Bible. It's not talking about your faith in Christ, it's talking about the truth about Christ, "the faith." The Bible warns us in 1 Timothy 4:1, "...that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils," or demons. We talked a lot in the book of Jude about the apostasy that would come in the last days. The Bible actually predicts that before the coming again of the Lord for the church, that there will be a great falling away. It's the word apostasia, There will be many people who profess to be believers but don't really possess Christ, and they turn away from "the faith." We see that going on in the world today, and even in Paul's day there were those who were turning away from "the faith."

Jude 1:3 tells us that we should "...earnestly contend for the faith," there's the same expression, "which was once," and for all, "delivered unto the saints." By the way, that's one of the key verses on that concept, and in the Greek text it's not just "contend for the faith," but "...the faith which was once," and for all, "delivered unto the saints," which means there's no new doctrine or new truth or new revelations that are going to come along that are going to supersede the Word of God.

Paul said to the Galatians, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed," anathema. As Harry Allan Ironside used to say, "If it's new, it's not true; if it's true, it's not new." People are always looking for some kind of a new doctrine, new truth; and the truth is, we want to find the old truths and shed new light upon them by the Holy Spirit's work of illuminating the text and applying it to our lives, but we must "earnestly contend."

Like the Christians of Paul's day, we face a hostile world that is trying to destroy "the faith of the gospel," so Paul gives us three admonitions in our text tonight explaining that there are three essentials needed for us to be steadfast in the battle. If there was ever a time that the church needed to be steadfast in the battle to destroy the faith, it's right now. If you're taking notes, let me give you the three. The first is live consistently, verse 27. We must be living consistently or holy, godly lives. We must be living like Christ. Go back to verse 27. Paul says, "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ," stop at that point. What does Paul mean by the word, "conversation...becometh the gospel"? The word "conversation" is an interesting word translated in the King James Bible, which I use. It actually means citizenship, but it's conveying more than just a citizenship, which we see is in Heaven in Philippians 3:20, it's conveying the way we live.

The word that's used is an interesting word. It's the Greek word polis, and we find it within the names of Indianapolis and Minneapolis, but it means city and became known as what was used for citizenship. It's actually saying that as believers—listen carefully—our citizenship is in Heaven. Now, it's also on earth, which what's going on in our government today makes it very hard to be a citizen of the United States of America. I love my country, but I weep for America right now. We live a certain way because we're Americans and we're citizens and we should live becoming of our citizenship. Every Christian has dual citizenship—you're a citizen of a city, a state, or a nation, but you're primarily a citizen of Heaven. I love that biblical concept!

Abraham "...looked for a city...whose builder and maker is God." He owned all the land that God gave him through the promise, but he "...looked for a city...whose builder and maker is God." As Christians, I believe we should be heavenly minded and we should be conducting ourselves—this is what Paul's saying—living in a way that is becoming of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul is telling us to live according to the gospel or "the faith of the gospel" of Jesus Christ. We are citizens of Heaven, "...your conversation," or citizenship, and the Christian must also walk worthy of the calling wherewith he is called. Look at verse 27, "...be as it becometh the gospel," so "Only let your conversation," or the way you live as citizens of Heaven, "be as it becometh the gospel of Christ." It means that we are to live in harmony with the responsibilities and the blessings of the gospel brings.

Philippi was actually what's called a Roman colony. It was a Greek city, so it was called a Rome away from Rome. They lived the Roman culture and spoke the Greco-Roman language. They were Greek and Roman, but weren't in Rome; they were like a little pocket of Rome because they were a colony. They understood what it was like to live as Roman citizens, so Paul is reminding them of their citizenship is in Heaven and that they should live accordingly.

It's important that the New Testament truth teaches that the moment you are saved—I know I hit this a lot, but I think it's so important that we grasp it—you are taken out of Adam with all the sin, death, and condemnation, and you are actually placed into Christ. The Holy Spirit takes you out of Adam and places you in Christ, so you are positionally (a word that Bible students use) in Christ, and Paul used that term all through his epistles, "in Christ," "in Christ Jesus." Positionally, you're as righteous as Jesus Christ. That's not what Paul is talking about here. The second situation for the believer is that there's progressional righteousness, and if you don't understand these two categories as a Christian, you'll never really understand how to live the Christian life. The moment you're saved, you're perfectly, completely, totally righteous. Every Christian is equally as righteous as Jesus Christ because His righteousness has been imputed to you and me. It's a banking term, the concept of putting money in one's account, imputation—He's giving you His righteousness. Romans 8 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are," there's our phrase, "in Christ Jesus."

The second category, as I said, is what we call progressive righteousness, and not all Christians share this equally. This is what we sometimes also call sanctification. We're justified or declared righteous positionally in our standing before God, you can't improve on that, but the goal of the Christian life is to bring up our practice, our progressive righteousness, to the position of "in Christ." That's a lifelong process, so don't get discouraged if you look in the mirror and say, "I'm not like Jesus," because that won't be finished until you see Jesus face-to-face and you're transformed into His image. You want to get as close to His likeness as you can before you leave planet earth. Amen? You don't want to be lax in this area. This is why Paul says in Philippians that we should, "...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you," so don't get frustrated with faults, weaknesses, and failures in your life. You're righteous in Christ, that cannot change; but do seek Him with all your heart and seek to walk in the Spirit and be obedient to His Word and grow in holiness and likeness to Jesus Christ. It's so very, very important. That's what Paul is really exhorting us to.

Are you conducting yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel? You know, that concept of “as it becometh the gospel,” verse 27. Sometimes we use that term when someone is wearing a piece of clothing. Maybe husbands and wives are getting dressed and the wife sometimes says, “What do you think of this dress,” or this blouse, and husbands say, “Well, it’s not becoming of you,” or “It doesn’t really match your hair or complexion,” and “No, that doesn’t look right. You should change it,” and he is very careful how he says that. You feel like you’re always being trapped here. My wife does it to me. Sometimes I’ll put on a shirt and she says, “No, no, no. Take that shirt off. Don’t wear that shirt.” I don’t think there’s anything I can do to become myself, but the idea is like a garment that is becoming of you. Sometimes you’ll say, “That color is very becoming of you. It compliments you,” so my behavior is to be becoming of Jesus Christ and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Someone said, “You’re writing a Gospel, A chapter each day, By deeds that you do, By words that you say. Men read what you write, Whether faithless or true; Say, what is the Gospel According to you?”

I heard the story of an evangelist who was in a certain town conducting some revival meetings for several nights preaching the gospel and so forth. The time came for him to leave town, so he went to the train station. He was buying a ticket to get on the train to head home, and the person working in the ticket booth purposely gave more change back than he should have. The minister looked at his change and realized that he was given more money than he should have. He said, “I’m sorry, but you gave me too much money back. Here,” and gave it back to the man in the booth. He responded, “I know, I know. I’ve been sitting in your evangelistic meetings all week. I did it on purpose to see if you would keep the money.” That really convicted me because I probably would’ve said, “O Praise Jehovah! Jehovah Jirah, the Lord provides! Hallelujah! We can eat tonight!” or “Wow! This is awesome!”

I can’t tell you how many times I’ve been in a store or a mall or a restaurant and my wife will say, “John, you better quit acting up. You never know who’s watching you.” I run into people all the time that know who I am, I don’t know who they are, so would you reveal yourselves to me in the mall when I see you right away so I won’t do something weird and embarrass myself? Our behavior should be becoming of the gospel of Jesus Christ; stand fast and live consistently.

Here’s the second thing that we need to do to be a steadfast church in standing firm, we need to work cooperatively. We need to work together as believers cooperatively. Look with me at verse 27. Paul says, “...that whether I come and see you, or else be absent,” remember we’re going to go back in just a moment to what Paul said before this. He said, “...so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death,” he wasn’t sure, but he was confident that through their prayers that he would be released and would come to them, but he didn’t know for sure so he said, “...that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs,” and here it is, “that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel,” working together, striving together. We face a hostile, unbelieving world, so we need consistency in our walk but also cooperation in our work. We need to get along.

I don’t know what it is, but Christians sometimes just don’t seem to want to get along.

Someone said, "To dwell above with saints in love, that will be glory. But to live below with those saints I know; brother, that's another story." We not only need to live consistently, we need to work together cooperatively to get the gospel out. Amen? We need to pray, we need to serve, we need to give, we need to go, we need to work together. Jesus prayed in John 17 that we would be one.

There are two things we need to do, look at the text, verse 27, we need to stand and strive. "...that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind," that phrase "one mind" means one soul, that we be of a kindred spirit. What a blessed thing it is when we work together cooperatively, when we stand together strengthened by the Holy Spirit, so "...that ye stand fast in one spirit." We don't know whether or not Paul is referring to the Holy Spirit, most likely, or the human spirit, our hearts, either one is possibly what he had in mind—the Holy Spirit working through our hearts knits us together in love. We learn to work together cooperatively and we work together standing against the enemy in one mind.

The phrase "striving together," is where we get our word athlete or athletic from. It's tied in with the idea of agonizo or agonize. I think of a sports team and the importance of a team working together. You know, obviously I'm not a basketball player, but I've watched basketball and played when I was in middle school or junior high and high school. Have you ever played basketball with a glory hog? The dude gets the ball and nobody else is going to touch it. "Hey! I'm open. I'm wide open! I'm under the basket!" He's way out at the three-point line and shoots it and misses. They get the ball back. Every time he comes down the court he doesn't pass it to anybody, never sets a screen for anybody, never gives up the ball for anybody. He's got to always get the glory.

That's not what we need in the church! Pass the ball, okay? Be willing to pray and be servants to others. Be willing to work together, even if you're not the hand or the eye or the mouth. Be willing to be whatever part of the body of Christ He has created us to be. There are no vestigial organs in the body of Christ. We all work together for a common goal and a common good, as I said, by praying, by studying God's Word, by serving together, by giving, by going, by telling others, and by supporting those that God uses and God's using and called in ministry and you share equally. I think of what God is doing through this church. It wouldn't happen without you and your prayers. I think of what God's doing with the outreach of the radio ministry and the internet. It wouldn't happen without you, your prayers, your giving, your serving, and all that goes on.

We couldn't do church without all those that serve so diligently here at Revival Christian Fellowship. It's more than just a talking head in the pulpit. As important as that is, it's not the whole body of Christ. "And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee," so we need one another in the body, so let's work together cooperatively.

Here's the third, and last. It's the longest text, verses 28-30. We need to stand courageously. We need to live consistently, work cooperatively, and we need to stand courageously. Look at verses 28-30. Paul says, "And in nothing terrified," in no area should you be terrified, "by your

adversaries: which is to them,” that is, your adversaries, “an evident token of perdition,” they’re lost, they’re going to be judged, “but to you,” there’s a contrast intended between them and you, “of salvation,” and that salvation is the work of God, “and that of God. 29 For unto you,” the believers, “it is given,” it’s a gift, “in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; 30 Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.”

I love this section of this text where Paul in this sequence indicates that Christians, living righteously, seeking to win the wicked world to Christ, preaching the gospel, will be persecuted. Isn’t that what the Bible said? It says, 2 Timothy 3:12, “Yea, and all that will live godly,” literally in the Greek that actually reads, “All that desire to live godly,” “in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” I find that interesting that when you have your little promise boxes of Scriptures, you see that little loaf of bread with the little cards in them that you put in your windowsill over your sink at home. You pull a little promise out and you don’t usually get that verse, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” “Forget that one, let’s try another one. I don’t like that one.” It could cause us to want to draw back, “I’m not going to witness. I’m not going to try to evangelize. I’m not going to stand and make my convictions known. I’m not going to go against the culture and the current, I’m just going to go with the flow. I don’t want to rock the boat. I don’t want to upset anybody.” If you live righteously and you preach the truth of the gospel, you will suffer persecution. It is inevitable, so don’t be terrified.

The word “terrified” was used of a herd of horses that were spooked and would go into a rage and run violently down the cliff. They were afraid or spooked or terrified horses. Don’t be afraid or don’t be terrified. By who? “...by your adversaries.” He doesn’t tell us who the adversaries are, but we know that the world is against us—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. We know that the flesh, the old sinful Adamic nature is our enemy, not our friend; and, thirdly, we also know that the devil is real, and he opposes us. He uses individuals. A couple possibilities are the legalistic Jews who actually followed Paul everywhere he went and opposed his preaching of the gospel, especially to the Gentiles. They would never let up, never let alone, never back off. Everywhere Paul went he had Jews that were hounding his steps and after him to stop preaching the gospel.

Then, there were the paganistic and pantheistic Roman Gentiles. They had their statues, idols, and their gods. Do you know that the Gentiles or the Greeks actually believed that Christians were atheists because they didn’t have idols in their churches or in their homes. They were used to seeing people that were idolatrous, and the Christians were worshiping a God you couldn’t see, in Spirit and in truth, so they actually called them atheists and persecuted them. It’s pretty interesting. Then, there were the quarreling church members, those who opposed one another in the body of Christ. How sad and how tragic.

There are three things to remember when you are suffering persecution. Let me break it down, verse 28, it’s evidence of who is lost and who is saved. I would title verse 28, “Proves that we are saved.” Go back with me to verse 28. The adversity that they were experiencing through persecution, “...is to them,” that is, the unbelieving world, the opposition they were facing, the persecution, “an evident token,” or sign or picture, “of,” their “perdition.” What does that mean?

It means the fact that they are persecuting you indicates that they are unbelievers, that they are not really true Christians—they're not really born again. It indicates that they will be judged, the idea of "perdition." "...but to you," it's a sign, "of salvation, and that of God."

Persecution separates the wheat from the tares. That's why we need to remember—I know this is hard—no matter how wicked our culture gets around us, how much they oppress and attack us, it separates the wheat from the tares. Persecution has never hindered the growth of the church. Jesus said, "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." They can shut down the church, close down the church, but they can't stop the church. Amen? They can put Paul in prison, but he still had prayer, his pen, and he started preaching to the Roman soldiers he was chained to—talk about a captive audience—and they were getting saved, going back to Caesar's household and having Bible studies, and there was a revival going on. Paul said, "Isn't this awesome? I would've never thought about reaching these Roman soldiers, but God had me get arrested, put me in jail, so I could share with them!"

Maybe God put you in the hospital. Maybe, just maybe, He might put you in jail to be a witness there (and don't go out and rob a bank to do that). "That'd be cool! I wanna be like Paul!" Wherever He places you, let your light shine. The persecution was kind of an indication of their unsaved state and of your salvation, and I think that's kind of marvelous.

Secondly, it's a gift and a privilege. I love verse 29. "For unto you," so there's them, verse 28, and you, and then he comes back in verse 29, "it is given," since it's given, that means it's a gift. God gives it to us as a gift, "...in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him," we like that part. God allows us by His grace to believe on Jesus, put our trust in Him, "but also to suffer for his sake," wow. That's in the Bible! Some preachers would like to erase that. They won't preach this text. They skip over that. That's why they like to do topical sermons because they're not bound to preach the text they deal with. If I jump over a verse, people are quick to say, "Pastor John, why didn't you deal with that verse?" "Oh, because I was afraid," or "I didn't want to offend anybody." I'm bound by teaching the Scriptures verse by verse, being faithful to expound what it says, and let the chips fall where they will.

Not only does God grant you by His grace, the same grace of God that grants you that you can trust Christ and be saved, He also grants you the privilege that you get to suffer for His name sake. I don't think we should ever want to be persecuted or want to be suffering, but, you know, those that have been persecuted and those that have suffered have experienced an amazing, amazing sense of God's peace, power, presence, and the strength and the work of the Spirit in their lives. You read the stories of the martyrs or the stories of the early church, the early Christians, and early church history, those that have suffered the most and paid the greatest price experienced such a nearness to God.

One of my favorite quotes is out of John Bunyan who wrote the famous "Pilgrim's Progress," that spiritual allegory, from a prison in Bedford, England for preaching the gospel. Do you know what he said? He said, "In times of affliction, we commonly meet with the sweetest experiences of the love of God." Whatever you go through, when you're in, Psalm 23, "...the

valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil,” why? “for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.” So even when persecution comes, Peter says, “...the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.” It is an actual privilege, a blessing, to be “...counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.” What a blessing that should be. We should have it as a badge of honor. There are two gifts: we get to believe, and we get to suffer for His name.

Thirdly, verse 30, I want you to notice that Paul points out that you’re in good company when you suffer, or others have suffered, and we have the same conflict, “Having the same conflict,” the same persecution, the same opposition, “which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.” Two things, the same suffering, the same sorrow, the same opposition, the same trials that Paul went through, they saw in him. In Acts 16, when Paul went to the city of Philippi, remember what happened? He was arrested, beaten, he and Silas were thrown into prison, their feet and hands were put in stocks, and they were in an inner dungeon—they weren’t in a hired house, they were in a dungeon. Being in stocks means that their hands and feet were in stocks, bound, lying on a dirty dungy prison in Philippi, so the believers in Philippi knew what Paul had gone through.

Can you imagine having your pastor being in prison for preaching the gospel? He was persecuted for this? He’d been whipped and beaten for preaching the gospel? This actually happens right now in many countries around the world. There are many places right now where Christians are being persecuted for their faith. They’re in prison. We should be bound with them. We should be praying for them. We should be informed about the suffering church because they’re our brothers and sisters in Christ. We have all this freedom and all this liberty, many times, to our detriment in America because we get complacent, apathetic, and carnal. Paul says, “You saw” Acts 16, “the prison.” They sang praises and the jail began to shake, the doors were opened, and the jailer was saved. They heard the stories, but now notice he says, “...and now hear to be in me.” He goes from “saw in me,” to “hear to be in me.” They heard the reports from Rome, so they saw his example in Philippi, and they heard about what’s going on, “Paul’s in prison, Paul’s in chains, Paul’s under arrest,” and “Paul’s steadfast, Paul’s courageous, Paul’s strong, Paul’s preaching. Be encouraged.” When Christians are strong in their faith and steadfast, it encourages us, so we’re not alone. Your suffering is not unique.

I think of John Wycliffe. He’s one of my heroes. He’s the morning star of the Protestant Reformation. He’s one of the first to put the New Testament in the English language. They couldn’t get to him before he died, but they hated him so much that even after he died—and this is just a fact of history—the Roman Catholic Church opposed him, exhumed his body, took his bones, burned them, took the ashes and threw them in the river which flew into the River Thames and into the ocean. They hated John Wycliffe so much.

I think of John Huss, who was influenced by the writings of John Wycliffe. He was arrested, put in prison, and was to be put to death by burning at the stake. The night before he was to be executed, he was in his prison cell where there was a candlelight. He started to run his finger into the flame to see how painful it would be to be put to the flames and executed the next day.

He would recoil in horror at the pain and said, "O Lord! I can't bear the stake, but I don't want to dishonor You. Would You please give me strength? Would You please be with me?" The next day he woke up with a great sense of God's presence. He was marched out, tied to the pole, they lit the wood around him, and he sang praises and worshiped the Lord and prayed for those that were persecuting him and putting him to death.

I think also of what's going on today in India, China, parts of the middle east, Egypt, Syria, North Korea, Vietnam, other places around the world where Christians are being persecuted for their faith, so if we are persecuted as well, we are in good company. We should stand courageously.

To wrap this up, we must live consistently. Don't hold back from living godly lives. Secondly, we must work cooperatively. Let's pray together, serve together, and work together. Thirdly, we must stand courageously by working together in unity, verse 27; living without fear, verse 28; experiencing our suffering, stand courageously; and with one another working together as the saints of God. Amen?