

## **Side By Side: Gospel Partnership in Philippians**

**Life as a Citizen of the Kingdom**

**By [David Strain](#)**

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### **Philippians 1:18-30**

Now let me invite you, please, to take your copies of the Scriptures in your hands and turn with me to Paul's letter to the Philippians. Chapter 1. Philippians chapter 1. We'll read from verse 18 to the end of the chapter, though our focus will be on the words of verses 27 through 30. Before we read, would you bow your heads with me as we ask for the help of God in prayer? Let us all pray.

*O Lord, would you please enable us as we hear the Word of God read and preached to believe it, to receive the Christ who comes to us by it, to rest on him, to feed on him. Give to us teachable spirits. Give to us submission to the truth. Give to us repentance and faith. Give to us grace to live in new obedience. Sanctify us by the truth. Your Word is truth so come and work we pray for the honor of the name of Jesus in whose name we pray, Amen.*

Philippians 1 at verse 18. This is the Word of God.

What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

Only let your manner of life be worthy[h] of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Amen. And we praise God that he has spoken to us in his holy, inerrant Word. May he write its eternal truth on all our hearts.

### **Learning from Paul by Both Precept and Example**

As I was reflecting on the way the apostle Paul writes the Philippians in the second half of this opening chapter and mindful that today is Father's Day, I was thinking about the way my own father instructed me when I was a very small boy learning to swim. I was not at all confident in the water. Dad was teaching me. He wanted me to learn to lie back and float. He believed that if I could see that I would not immediately sink like a stone to the bottom of the pool, but would float quite well if I just inhaled deep lungful of air, I would be able to lie back and float, I would become much more confident in the water. I had a hard time believing him thinking that furiously pumping my arms and legs was the best way to stay afloat. Not terribly successful. So he would teach both by example and precept. He would lie back and float and waggle his toes at me in the water as he floated there. Then, he would hold me and support me and teach and say, "It's going to be okay. You saw what happened to me. Let me show you how to do this." And he would hold me up and then he would take his arms away and I would float. And soon I was swimming like a fish. Example and precept. That's how good fathers teach. Example and precept. They model it and then they explain and teach. And that's what Paul has been doing as a good spiritual father with the Philippians in this opening chapter, isn't it? He has been showing us by example and now in verses 27 to 30 he's going to teach us by precept. Particularly how to live for the honor and glory of Jesus in the context of suffering and persecution and hardship and opposition. If the Philippians, if we, are not to sink under the troubled waters of real opposition and trials when they come, we need to learn both from Paul's example—that's verses 12-26, how he responded and dealt with his trials—but also by precept. What is it that all his example seeks to teach us? He begins to unpack that for us in the verses now before us.

Would you look at the text with me please? Philippians 1 at verse 27. Notice the very first word in verse 27: "Only, only, let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ." If you were reading an NIV, a New International Version, it attempts to capture something of what Paul has in mind by beginning verse 27 this way when it says, "Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner

worthy of the gospel.” Karl Barth, the famous German theologian, said this word only is “lifted like a warning finger over the Philippians calling them to take careful note.” He’s been giving him his example, he’s been talking about himself, how he deals with trials, both his present sufferings and even how he’s able to be filled with joy and confidence knowing that future suffering may still await. And now he says, “Take note, here’s what this has to do with you. Pay attention. This is important.” He lifts the warning finger and explains now how his example should play out in our lives.

Specifically here we could summarize Paul’s counsel to the Philippians under two large headings. First, he tells us about Christian duty. Christian duty, what we are to do. And, then, secondly, Christian endurance, how we are to suffer. Christian duty: what we are to do. Christian endurance: how we are to endure and deal with suffering.

## **I. Christian Duty: What We Are to Do**

First of all, let’s think about what we learn here about Christian duty, what we are to do. Verse 27, again, notice the two duties that Paul lays upon us. First he says we are to “live lives worthy of the gospel,” and then secondly we are to “contend together for the gospel.” We see those both in verse 27. “Live lives worthy of the gospel.” “Contend together for the gospel.”

### **A Call to Live in a Manner Worthy of the Gospel**

Let’s think about the first of those. “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ,” he says. Notice that expression: “manner of life.” “Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel.” It shares the same root as the word for citizen and city, carries the idea of civic duty, of behavior implied by belonging to a particular polis, a city, a state. It originally meant “to live as a citizen of a free state.” Paul is reminding us if we are Christians we are citizens of another kingdom. We hold dual passports, dual citizenship. We belong here in this world of God’s creation. We are citizens of this earthly realm and there are implications—aren’t there?—civic duties that flow. We are to be good neighbors. We are to pay our taxes. We are to play our part in our society as citizens of this land. Paul is saying to us here, “But you are also citizens of another world.” And there are civic duties incumbent upon you as citizens of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, the kingdom that is made visible only in the church.

He even tells us what those duties are that rest on citizens of the kingdom of heaven. Look at the text again. “It is,” Paul says, “to live a life worthy of the gospel of Christ.” That’s what it means to live as a citizen of the kingdom of grace and redemption. Live a life worthy of the gospel. He doesn’t mean, of course, live a life that merits or deserves the salvation the gospel gives. Paul’s theology has not all of a sudden collapsed into a mass of self-contradiction. What he now

suddenly for no reason we can tell begins to teach a salvation of works; not at all! What Paul really means is simply live a life consistent with the gospel that has redeemed you. Live a life that adorns the doctrine of God our Savior in all things. Live a life consistent with redeeming grace lavished upon you. Live up to the good news you profess. It is a searching exhortation, isn't it? It reminds us of just how easy it is to profess faith in the gospel—"Oh yes I'm saved"—while living in a way that is indistinguishable from the world. There is simply no way to get around the fact that those who say they stand in the good of the saving grace of Jesus Christ ought to be increasingly humbler, wiser, happier, more patient, more charitable, more sacrificial, more loving, purer, gentler, bolder, more courageous, more compassionate, more reliable. In short, they ought to be more like Jesus than a world who rejects him as Lord. The fruit of the spirit, remember, is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. That, Paul says, is what a life gripped by the free grace of the good news of Jesus ought to look like. If you're a citizen of the kingdom of heaven you are radically different because those values that are now most dear to you and the animating principle that directs and governs and fuels your life comes from another world breaking in upon you. It is the gospel of grace. This world is no longer your home and you are to live in a manner that makes evident to all where your home really is. You are a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. Live in a manner worthy of the gospel.

### **A Call to Contend Together for the Gospel**

But, there's a second part of Paul's call to Christian duty here. He calls us to live in a manner worthy of the gospel and then he calls us to contend together for the gospel. Verse 27, again: "Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ so that whether I come and see you or am absent I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving side by side together for the faith of the gospel." His language there, of course, evokes struggle, conflict. "Stand firm." "Strive side by side." He's told them about his own sufferings. In verse 30, he uses that language as he talks about them—the language of conflict. He even tells them that similar trials are coming their way too. And by using these categories of conflict and combat Paul is reminding us that behind the persecution and opposition that the church is facing stands the opposition of Satan and a spiritual realm. We are locked in mortal combat. There is a spiritual war in which we are engaged. And so, Paul says, "Stand fast. Hold the line. Fight on." Here is muscular Christianity, strong and courageous. It is no weak, limp, retiring, passive "let go and let God" sort of thing. No, for Paul a life that is lived in a way consistent with the gospel is going to put you on the front line, in the trenches. And you better recognize, Paul is saying to us, the deadly struggle in which you are engaged and saddle up for the conflict. Notice, too, this is not merely defensive warfare that the apostle has in mind. He isn't saying get ready to protect yourself against spiritual attack should it come. He's saying much more than that. Look at the text. "Strive side by side for the gospel." Begin a gospel counter-insurgency. Fight back with the good news about Jesus. Take the gospel

to a lost world living in hostility against God and proclaim to them that there is salvation found in no other name than in the name of Jesus Christ. He is able to save to the uttermost all that will come to God by him. "Strive for the gospel" because you've been won by the gospel to a life worthy of the gospel. Notice, too, that this all to be done not in isolation but in partnership with God's people. Paul does not want to see mavericks taking independent action. When troops on the battlefield under pressure from enemy fire break ranks and act individually, in isolation from their comrades, no longer functioning as integral parts of their unit, they put themselves and others in danger. Paul wants unit cohesion for his gospel counter-insurgency. Look at the text: "Stand fast in one spirit with one mind striving together for the gospel." Go on the offensive with the good news about Jesus, but do it together. Let unity and community and interdependence, not independence, mark your warfare as citizens of the kingdom of redeeming grace.

### **Side by Side: Gospel Partnership**

Our title for our expositions all the way through the book of Philippians comes from this phrase "Side By Side," partnership in the book of Philippians. That's what Paul is really aiming at here. He wants the Philippians to stand together in unity for the cause of Christ in gospel partnership and in mutually supported ministry. Paul would say to us, I think, "Brothers and sisters, you need each other much more than you know." Ours is a culture—I'm sure you'll agree—that is inimical to corporate solidarity, to community life. We are schooled from a very early age to be consumers whose primary concern is the satisfaction of personal and individualistic wants and needs. Self rules in our context. Individualism is praised as a virtue. Corporate life is really rather odd. And the Philippians, too, for their part are not immune to that problem. Some of them, remember, are preaching, but only in attempt to take Paul down while others preach out of love. Chapter 4 will demonstrate there's some real tensions within the life of the community. There are friction and factions and divisions. And so, Paul is calling them and he's calling us to the deepest possible integration, to profound connection. Look at what he says: "one spirit one mind striving side by side." "We are to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ," Ephesians 5:21. We are to "look out not only for our own interests but also for the interests of others," Philippians 2:4. We are to pray with and for one another. We are to open our homes and share our lives with each other. We are to sacrifice for one another. Bear one another's burdens.

An effective gauge of just how far a local church believes the gospel it professes is how well it strives together for the gospel calls. "By this will all men know that you are my disciples: by your love for one another." Those who follow Jesus love those who follow Jesus and want to stand with them for the cause of Christ and the honor of his name. It may be that the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures is calling some of us this morning to repentance. Perhaps repentance in our attitude toward the church in general. Maybe you've had some bad experiences

with the church and you've been hurt. You've had a hard time letting go. Maybe you've allowed a root of bitterness to spring up, causing trouble, defiling many. You've harbored a grudge. You've nursed it. Some secret resentment, some quietly simmering frustration against some brother or sister. And it has hindered your service and it's hindered others. Stopped you participating in the body life of the church. The Lord is shining the light of his Word on your unrepentant anger and your unresolved conflicts. It's time to seek each other out in humility and seek and give forgiveness. It's time to begin to repair some bridges. When we build our unity and let go of our jealousy and resentment and pride and strive side by side together. Christian duty: what we are to do. "Live lives worthy of the gospel." "Contend together for the gospel."

## **II. Christian Endurance: How We Are to Suffer**

Then, secondly, notice what we learn here about Christian endurance: how we are to suffer. Verses 28 to 30. In verse 28, Paul suggests that the opposition the Philippians are enduring really is inducing fear in them. 29 to 30, they've been granted to suffer for Christ's sake, the very same conflict that Paul is enduring. In other words, here is a church as well as an apostle locked in the crucible of suffering for the sake of Jesus. They are facing persecution. And, sometimes, it is tempting for us when we read texts like this to say well that's not us. That was then, this is now. Maybe, somewhere else in the world, not here. And so, we gloss right over persecution passages, don't we? Let me point out three things I think we need to remember when we come across texts like this one with advice for the persecuted church that will help us not gloss over them quite so quickly.

### **Persecution: A Present Reality**

First, in the last two centuries the church has expanded in a way that it has never expanded before. And keeping pace with that expansion the church has also witnessed more martyrdom in the last two-hundred years than in all the eighteen-hundred years leading up to that point combined. Today, right now, around the world you have brothers and sisters facing extraordinary suffering and deprivation and persecution and death for the cause of Jesus Christ. Persecution is a present reality and a very real one for so many of our brothers and sisters.

### **Persecution: A Coming Reality**

Second thing to remember, it is not at all clear to me that our liberal democracies here in the west are immune to the kind of intolerance that Paul and the Philippians are enduring. Increasingly the hostility of pluralism and political correctness to the absolute and exclusive claims of Jesus are proving costly—aren't they?—for churches and for Christians all of the world. Here in the United States no less than elsewhere. So we ought not to get too comfortable in our certainty that persecution will never come our way. It is coming. It is coming.

## **Persecution: A Constant Reality**

And, thirdly, the New Testament is consistent in asserting that to follow Jesus faithfully will always mean enduring the opposition of the world. “In this world, you will have trouble,” John 16:33. “Through many tribulations, we must enter the kingdom of heaven,” Acts 14:22. Persecution isn’t something we can dismiss. For many of God’s people around the world, it is a terrifying daily reality. For all us, it is coming very soon.

## **Suffering is a Proof of Grace**

But, I want you to take note of the two implications Paul draws from the fact of persecution here. First, he says suffering is a proof of grace. Verse 28, he says to them, “Don’t be frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation and that from God.” Sometimes it’s hard to tell who the unbelievers are. They are moral. They’re kind. They’re pleasant. They’re good neighbors. Sometimes it’s hard to tell. But when they are persecuting the church, it’s not so hard. And unless they repent, they’re destiny is clear. It is manifest by their hostility to the people and to the cause of our God. It’s a sign of their coming destruction. But, on the other hand, the other side of that is if you are being persecuted for Jesus’ sake your persecution is an evidence to you. It is a mark of your true citizenship. It is a reminder: this world is not your ultimate home. You are redeemed and your residence, ultimately, is elsewhere. Your citizenship is heaven. God himself has saved you. He has done it. He has brought you to Christ. He’ll keep you in Christ. And he’ll bring you home to Christ. And as you endure, understand the trial you endure is a reminder to you. It is a sign to you of the salvation that you have been given that will bring you home one day to another world, the home of righteousness where you will be forever with the Lord. It is a sign of grace.

## **Suffering is a Gift of Grace**

But, he says, secondly and finally, and we close with this: suffering also is a gift of grace. Isn’t that extraordinary? Not just a sign of it, but a gift. Look at what he says. Verse 29: “It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him...” It’s been granted to you to believe in him. That’s the gift of God. But, not only to believe. That’s not the only gift you have been given. “...But also to suffer for his sake.” It has been granted to you to suffer for his sake. How counterintuitive is that? For me, perhaps for you, for the most part, suffering is a problem to be avoided at all costs. Paul says to the Philippians some of that suffering that is so inevitable you need to understand in a different light. When you suffer for the sake of the name of Jesus it is a privilege and a gift. You see that—don’t you?—in Acts 15:14. The apostles have been arrested for preaching and beaten for preaching. And then—this is extraordinary—Luke tells us, “They left the presence of the council having been beaten for preaching

the gospel. They left the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer this honor for the name.” They counted suffering for the sake of the name of Jesus a cause for joy, that they could somehow share in the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings as Paul will go on to talk about it in chapter 3. How do we do that? How do we get to that place where living for the glory of God regardless of the cost we consider it worthwhile? We’re ready to bear the reproach of Jesus that we may extend his fame.

### **A Call to Consider Christ: Suffer Gladly while Serving Faithfully**

Perhaps you’ve found yourself shrinking back from bold witness in your workplace, in your classroom, with your flat-mates, your housemates, your roommates (whatever your crazy American term is!). Perhaps you’ve shrunk back from standing for Jesus because you know when you do the people around you will push back. It’s going to cost you. So how do you get to the place where you’re able to say, “I love Jesus; I want his name to be known; and I’m prepared to count it all joy when for his sake I encounter suffering and trials”? Maybe one reason we’re so unwilling to sacrifice much for Christ is because we don’t really grasp how much Christ has sacrificed for us. If that’s the case, then the remedy to our problem is close at hand, isn’t it? We need to go back to Calvary. We need to look at the nail marks in his hands and feet. We need to see the darkness cover the face of the earth. We need to watch as our Savior pronounces pardon and offers assurance and see ourselves and the wretch killed and crucified beside him whose sin the Savior bears and promises he’d be with him this day in paradise. We need to hear again the cry of dereliction is torn from our Savior’s lips: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” as the Father exacted payment from him that we should be paying. We need to hear again the cry of victory: “It is finished.” The work is done. Our penalty paid. Redemption accomplished. Heaven secured. We need to go back to Calvary and grasp again what was done for us. Because when you do, what happens? You begin to say, “Were the whole realm of nature mine/That were an offering far too small/Love so amazing, so divine/Demands my life, my soul, my all.” I’ll give it all. He’s worth it. I’ll count it all joy when I face trials of many kinds. He’s worth it. Let his name be known. And if there are wounds to bear as I make his name known, I will rejoice because he’s worth it.

Will you pray with me?

*Our Father, we praise you that Jesus is worth it. He is wonderfully sufficient. Help us to bear this world’s rejection and delight to serve the name of Jesus. Give us your grace and make us your servants. And it’s in Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*



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