

WHEELERSBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

Life Application Sunday School Class

Philippians - Session 4

May 6, 2001

I. READ Chapter 1:27-30

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

1. What is Paul referring to when he says "Whatever happens"?

Even though in verse 25, Paul indicated that he was convinced that his life would be spared, and that he would remain and continue with them, he understood that he was not omniscient. Paul is saying whether he gets to see them again or not, that they need to live a life that glorifies God. Even when God seems to speak to our hearts, and we are confident that we know His plans, sometimes things go differently than we expect, and when that happens, we still need to do the right thing and be faithful to our calling. Only God knows the future for sure, and our attitude should always be "such and such will happen if the Lord wills."

2. What does verse 27 teach us about the cause for disunity in the church?

Disunity is a result of church members not living a life worthy of the gospel. When we all have the same goal and desires, we will be in unity. So what does it mean to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel? The Greek word for the "conduct" means live as a citizen. This carries the idea that we need to view ourselves as citizens of heaven, and live in light of our heavenly citizenship. Citizenship carries great privileges, but great responsibility as well. As we will learn in chapter 2, because our citizenship is in heaven, our responsibility is to live unselfish lives. Living a life worthy of the gospel as follows: First, live a life worthy of the gospel, we need to understand the gospel: the gospel is that Jesus Christ came to this earth, and laid aside His glory and divine privilege, and assumed the role of a servant. He came not for Himself, but to give Himself as a ransom to purchase a people chosen by His Father. He humbled Himself to the point of ultimate sacrifice, namely, death on the cross. That death paid for the penalty due us for our sins, and removed our guilt and punishment. God then raised Him from the dead, and He ascended to heaven, and now reigns as the King of the universe. To live a life worthy of the gospel, we need to understand the word worthy: the word worthy means to live a life reflective, or equal to, or the same weight as the gospel. If we bear Christ's name, we should live a life worthy, or comparable to His name. To live a life worthy of Christ is to live unselfish lives fully committed to our Savior and one another. It is living lives where we lay aside our desires in preference to God and one another. It is doing for Christ and others what Christ did for us.

3. What is the result of living lives worthy of the gospel?

If we live that way, there will be harmony and unity in the body of Christ, and such unity is essential because of the battle. The gospel always has been and always will be under attack. The scriptures present the Christian life as war. And we are not called to fight alone, but as a unit. To prevail, we must stand as one, contending for the faith once delivered to the saints. We need to work together as we stand unmovable as one person for the truth of the gospel. If we live selfishly and only look to ourselves, we cannot stand firm;

But the opposite is also true: if we chose to live worthy of the gospel, we will stand courageous and strong, united by a common purpose of the defense of the faith.

4. In verse 28, what is the sign of destruction and salvation?

In Matthew 16, Jesus said that on the rock of the revealed truth about Himself, which is the gospel, He would build His church, and the gates of hell would not prevail against it. When believers stand strong in the midst of persecution and suffering, it is an evidence of grace of God at work. God cannot fail, and all those who stand in opposition to God will be judged and destroyed and brought to nothing. Romans 8:35-39 states it this way:

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written, "For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

5. The word "granted" in verse 29 means a favorable gift of grace. Why does Paul say that suffering for Christ, as well as believing in Christ, is a gift?

To answer that question, let's look at some other passages.

Romans 8: 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. 18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

1 Peter 4: 12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 16 However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

When a believer suffers persecution, he is blessed because he has been so identified with Christ that those who would hate Christ if He were here today hate him. There is no inherent blessing in suffering and pain. The temporal blessing is in the close associating with Christ that points to a far greater eternal blessing that will follow. Paul yearned to be so close to Christ, that he would know the fellowship of His sufferings. Suffering for Christ is presented as a privilege. Often our thinking is that comfort and the avoidance of pain and suffering are the ultimate good. We need to ponder this question. Do we view it a privilege or a curse to suffer for Christ? Let's bring it close to home. Why don't we boldly share the gospel with those around us? Is it because we don't want to suffer embarrassment or misunderstanding. Is it because we feel that those we speak to may think we are strange, or fanatical? Was Christ misunderstood? Did anyone think that He was mentally unstable? Was Paul ever accused of being "mad"? The answer to all of those questions is yes. We need a radical change in our thinking. As we stand together for the gospel, we need to realize that there is going to be opposition. And when the opposition comes, it is not a sign of God's disfavor. Instead, it is a sign of God's blessing. Look at Matthew 5:10-12

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Notice, again, that the rejoicing is not in the pain and suffering, but in what the suffering is evidencing. The persecution and opposition are evidence of future blessing. Even Jesus Himself endured the cross for the joy set before Him. When we suffer for the sake of Christ and the gospel, it is a blessing because people are treating us the way as they would treat Christ if He were on the earth today.

Another application of these verses is that we need to stand together with the persecuted church in prayer. We need to uphold the brothers and sisters throughout the world that are minute by minute giving their lives and possessions for the cause of Christ. In conclusion of this section, let's read it again.

READ Philippians 2:1-4

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

At this point, we are going to start to look at the key to true fellowship and unity in the body of Christ. Looking at verses 1-4, what is the key to unity?

Humility is the key, which is in contrast to selfish ambition and vain conceit. Let's begin by considering some definitions:

6. What is humility?

Humility: A state of mind - It is how we view ourselves. Do we think of ourselves as great? When we think of ourselves, are we proud of what we are, of our accomplishments, of our knowledge, of our position in life, of our giftedness, of our talents, of our possessions? Or do we view all of these as gifts bestowed by a gracious God. Our speech concerning these matters will many times reveal our heart. For us to have unity in the body of Christ, there must be humility. Humility is a proper view of ourselves - that we are sinners saved by grace, and that we are what we are and have what we have because of God's grace, and that apart from Him we can do nothing, and that our confidence must be in Christ alone, and not in ourselves. Humility will display itself in being teachable, realizing that our understanding, knowledge, and wisdom is limited and fallible. We will recognize that we need one another, and that we cannot stand alone. A humble person will be quick to confess his weaknesses, and ask for help. Humility sees Christ as the vine, and ourselves as branches, totally dependent on the vine for life. Humility recognizes that gifts and talents are distributed by God as sees fit, and finds great joy and appreciation in the accomplishments and blessings of others. Humility expresses itself in contentment, realizing that any good thing in my life is from God, and is undeserved. A humble person is ready to help another in need, recognizing that we are fellow strugglers in constant need of help to stand strong.

7. What is selfish ambition and vain conceit and how are they related?

Literally, the words selfish ambition mean self promotion to gain a following - creating factions and strife. It

carries the idea of being partisan and contentious, taking sides. Vain conceit means empty pride, self esteem, vain glory. Verse 3 says that we can do things with these as motives. People who want recognition and a feeling of importance do things to promote themselves and gain a following. They can many times be people pleasers and flatterers, but their motive is always to make themselves look good. In the modern vernacular, they are politicians. The admonition here is to do nothing for these motives. There are those who have this as their sole motivation. But we need to ask God to search our hearts to be sure this is never our motivation.

8. According to verse 4, what is the result of the humble spirit.

A humble person will not be self-centered. A humble person realizes that the world doesn't revolve around him. Listen to others in conversation. Listen to yourself. Does everything you say relate to you or your job or your family? Do you take a sincere interest in others and their lives and families and joys and problems? In our relationships, are we there to give as well as take? An outward demonstration of Christ-likeness is when we are sincerely interested in the well being of others, and not just ourselves. A humble person recognizes the privilege and blessing in giving as well as receiving. Are we transparent in our relationships? A humble person will make himself vulnerable, and take the risk of being hurt for the sake of edifying another. True fellowship will only thrive in an atmosphere of humility.

Now lets go back to verses 1 and 2.

9. What is the central command in verse 2?

It is three-fold. Being like-minded, having the same love, and being one in spirit and purpose. Again, to better understand what is being said, let's look at definitions:

Like-minded - literally means to think the same way; think the same thing

Same love - love for all without respect of persons

One in spirit and purpose - having the same desires, goals, and affections

As we have seen, Paul's passion and desire was to glorify Christ and see the gospel proclaimed. His joy would be made full when he saw that same thinking, desires, and goals in the church members. But how can we all come to think alike, and have the same desires and goals. This is again, where the ministry of God's Word is critical, to bring us into unity. Look at Ephesians 4: *1As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

¹¹ It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Verse 11 is critical - God has provided apostles and prophets (their teaching through the New Testament) and evangelists, pastors, and teachers for the preparation of His people - the goal being in verse 13 - unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God - the fullness of Christ. God has given the ministry of His church to perform this task.. As a minister of the gospel, this was Paul's deep desire and joy, to see these believers have the same mind, love, and purpose.

10. Paul has called for unity and humility. In verse 1, what are the resources that enable believers to fulfill this calling?

Verse 1 speaks to the intimacy we have with Christ. Encouragement literally means to come along side to help and edify; the comfort of love carries the idea of closeness and tenderness based on a deep affection and love; fellowship with the Spirit speaks again of the closeness and oneness with the Spirit as deep calls to deep, and tenderness and compassion speak of being moved within from the love that He has for us as His own. We love Him, and others, because He first loved us; the point being if we have this relationship with Christ, it constrains and compels us to love one another in the same manner. God empowers what He commands, and we can humbly serve one another and be joined together in unity based on the great love, fellowship, and assistance we receive from God through Christ and the Holy Spirit.