

# “Striving”

**Introduction.** Luke ends the book of Acts by telling us that Paul spent two years under house arrest in Rome (28:30-31). It is conceded that during this time-frame the apostle penned four epistles: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon, though not necessarily in this sequence.

The apostle’s status as a prisoner was a constant reminder of the sacrifices that sometimes are necessary for Christ. It’s no doubt that Paul had difficult physical and emotional circumstances, but he also had many people who stood by and assisted him, included the Philippians.

The energy of faith produces energetic individuals. In Philippians, Paul was writing to a group of Christians that he loved very much. What does it look like to really be working for Christ? Paul describes what it looks like in 1:27-30.

## ***I. Consistent In Conduct (v. 27a)***

- A. “Conduct” was a political term meaning “live as citizens.” The Philippians lived in a free Roman city, and thus understood from their own experience what it meant to live as citizens. Paul is here picking up on that motif and elevating it to the citizenship of heaven (3:20).
- B. Whether Paul would be released and thus enabled to visit them in person, or be forced to remain away from them and learn of their progress through the reports of others, his exhortation is the same.
  - 1. The conduct of these united saints in the gospel is to match the blessed saving gifts they have received. The conduct is to reflect what the gospel and its riches have made of the Philippian congregation.
  - 2. “Worthy of the gospel” recalls similar phrases in other letters of Paul (Romans 16:2; Ephesians 4:1; Colossians 1:10) in which he insists on the very highest standard as the pattern of Christian’s behavior (Titus 2:7, 10).

## ***II. Cooperative In Service (v. 27b)***

- A. This exhortation to unified thought and action has in view the goal of “striving together for the faith of the gospel.”
  - 1. Paul means here the objective faith (i.e. the body of truth) embodied in the gospel message.
  - 2. “Striving” suggests their need to promote and protect the message of Christ, while at the same time implying that adversaries must be faced. Such work required joint effort, if it was to be successful in the contest.
- B. The Philippians’ attitude to these pressures must be based on an internal harmony (1 Corinthians 1:10).
  - 1. Courage in their commitment to Christ’s gospel and unity as the badge of their congregation are combined in the words contending as one man, and carries the association of contest in war and in the arena where the gladiatorial struggle was one of life and death (cp. 2 Timothy 2:5).

2. This imagery would remind the Philippian readers of the phalanx, consisting of a body of trained spearmen who fought in closed ranks. This was a tactical device used by Philip of Macedon and his son Alexander the Great.
  - a) Taken from the front, Philip's Macedonian phalanx was virtually unstoppable. Its cohesiveness and the weight of its offensive armament was unmatched in the contemporary world. Yet this new formation was not without its flaws.
  - b) The key to the phalanx' deadliness was its cohesiveness. If the formation was shattered — whether it be from fighting on uneven ground or from being attacked on either the side or rear — then the poor individual fighting skill of these soldiers would soon be apparent. The phalanx was deadly just for so long as it maintained its order.

### **III. Courageous In Confrontation (v. 28)**

- A. "Terrified" is a vivid term, unique in the Greek New Testament and denoting the uncontrollable stampede of startled horses. Any preacher who attacks evil — in any form — will face opposition.
- B. "Adversaries" is a descriptive word that has a wide range of application, embracing the enemies of Jesus in the gospels (Luke 13:17), the opponents of Paul at Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:9), the "son of perdition" of 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, and Satan, the adversary of God and man (1 Timothy 5:14-15).
- C. The courage of Christians in the face of opposition declares to the "enemies of the cross" (3:18) that saints are confident of their salvation and that God will recompense these enemies for their persecution (Romans 12:19). "Perdition" is the destruction which consists in the loss of eternal life.

### **IV. Confident In Persecution (v. 29)**

- A. Suffering for Christ is not accidental, nor does God merely tolerate it in His providence.
  1. Suffering is a gift from God (cp. 1 Peter 2:21) and is participation in the sufferings of Christ (3:10).
  2. The privileges enjoyed by Christians included the ability not only to believe in Christ initially and subsequently throughout their lives, but also to suffer for Him (Acts 5:40-42). This is the surest sign that He looks on them with favor (cp. Hebrews 10:32-39; 12:3-6).
- B. If we question the propriety of referring to suffering as a privilege and a gracious gift, remember that the New Testament regards suffering as God's means of achieving His gracious purposes both in His own Son (Hebrews 2:10) and in all saints (James 1:3-4; 1 Peter 1:6-7).

### **V. Coexistent In Conflict (v. 30)**

- A. "Conflict" refers to an athletic or gladiatorial contest as in 1 Timothy 6:12 and 2 Timothy 4:7. The Philippians were experiencing the same sort of suffering Paul had endured throughout his ministry.
  1. They had seen some of Paul's sufferings when he was in Philippi (Acts 16:19-24; cp. 1 Thessalonians 2:2).

2. They had heard of more he had undergone recently in Rome (from reports of travelers or other messengers), including those who conveyed the information about Epaphroditus (2:26).
- B. In an article written November 10, 2020, Pew Research reports that persecution worldwide is getting worse for Bible believers. They found that 40 percent of the world faces significant hindrance in worshiping God freely. Christianity is the most harassed religion in the world and India, Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Russia had the highest overall levels of both government restrictions and social hostilities toward practitioners of the religion.
- C. Suffering was Paul's apostolic life of service. The United States was on the list of the countries with the lowest interference — and God is to be thanked for that. But I've wondered if I would be the person to fold under pressure. I've wondered if I could go to the death like Stephen or Antipas (Revelation 2:10).

**Conclusion.** We can be the kind of people Paul describes: Consistent in conduct, cooperative in service, courageous in confrontations, confident in persecution, and coexistent in conflict. Let's stand together, striving for the faith of the gospel, protecting and promoting it aggressively all over the world.

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