

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Philippians 1:27-30

Verses 27,28

Only conduct yourselves as worthy of the gospel of Christ whether I come and see you or I am absent and hear news concerning you that you are standing with one spirit, contending as one person for the faith of the gospel, in no way intimidated by your opponents. This is a sign to them of destruction, but for you, salvation.

Whatever happens to Paul, he requires of the congregation at Philippi, that the members there conduct themselves **as worthy of the gospel of Christ** (1Thess 2:12). Christ conducted himself as the exact representation of his Father so that by observing him people could see who God actually is (Col 1:15; Heb 1:3). In a similar fashion, Christians are to mirror the gospel of Christ. Elsewhere, Paul refers to this as the grace of God at work in him (1Cor 15:10; 2Cor 12:8). The gospel is to bear fruit as our Lord said (Matt 7:16ff). **Conduct yourselves** πολιτεύεσθε is a verb suggesting a person lives according to a rule, governed by the laws of the state. **Conduct yourselves as citizens**, is the full translations, though not as people of the kingdom, but worthy of the gospel. Correct conduct is in mind, for sure, but it is conduct that honours the magnificent message of Christ, **the gospel**. Through the gospel, Christ delivers people from what is worthless, undesirable and a dishonour of him.

Paul further wishes that this new life in Christ continues to flourish in each of them **whether he comes to see them or he is absent and hears news concerning them**. This reminds us of the parables of stewardship when overseers mistreated the master's servants when he was away (Matt 24:45-51). What Paul truly desires is unity in the mission of the church, which is **to stand in one spirit, contending as one person for the faith of the gospel**. **Standing** στήκετε here really means to stand firm, to take one's stand (1Cor 15:1). Paul has in mind that the congregation will be immovable against opposition in its desire to take the message of Christ to others. This is best done together, so that mutual support maintains a consistent and strong front to the world. The high priestly prayer of Christ emphasizes this (John 17:21). Paul is only too aware that the gospel creates enemies and that the church needs to **struggle** συναθλοῦντες **or contend as one person**.

For the faith of the gospel πίστει ευαγγελίου could mean the orthodox doctrine of the gospel or the evangelistic activity of the church. The context makes it clear that it is the latter. Paul is assuming that in his absence, the congregation is acting with one thought in mind, with **one spirit and one person**, against those who **oppose** the message.

Vested interests are challenged as ordinary people discover the freedom of Christ and want to see change in the community. Paul encourages them to **in no way be intimidated by their opponents**. Threats should not frighten them. Rather, they should interpret them as signs from the Holy Spirit. Of course, opponents would not consider the church's resistance as **a sign of their destruction**. But believers see things through the eyes of faith and know that a judgement will come when unjust attacks, slander, insults, discrimination, persecution and unlawful executions of Christians will be answered by God. The opposite is true. To stubbornly hang on to Christ and tell others that he is the way, truth and life, is a sign that one belongs to Christ and is going to be saved. A special sign is the love Christians are to have towards their enemies (Rom 12:17-21)

Verses 29,30

For to you it has been granted for the sake of Christ, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for his sake, having the same struggle that you saw I was having and now you are hearing about from me again.

Paul reminds the congregation that to be a Christian does not mean to have blessing upon blessing. Rather, it is a call to die with Christ, spiritually and sometimes physically (Rom 6:3; Matt 16:24). Because of Christ, **it has been granted** to the Philippian Christians **to believe in him**. This is a

wonderful expression of grace, that even the faith directed to Christ is not the believer's action but a gift ἐχαρίσθη. **Given** is in the divine passive voice. See Eph 2:8). They are appointed by God **to suffer for his sake**, that is, for the sake of Christ. They do this for Christ, as witness to him and to the world but the mention of Christ goes further. It is because Christ's suffering includes the suffering of his people, his suffering overflows into their lives (2Cor 1:5).

But Paul draws attention to his own sufferings, **the same struggle** ἀγωνία, which gives us our word "agony". It means a contest as between two wrestlers. He has already mentioned these in the verses before. Interestingly, he refers to previous difficulties and burdens that **they saw happening to him**. He must be referring to the public beating Silas and he received when they began their missionary activity in Philippi (Acts 16:22). Paul is an example to them; as they now hear about the persecution he is enduring, they are to take courage and do the same. The Philippians are to endure not stoically but by faith knowing that their suffering is given to them and serves God's saving purposes revealed in Christ.