

Philippians 1:27-30

Contending as One Person for the Faith of the Gospel

Nunawading and Waverley, 20-9-20

Dear friends in Christ,

Like the many strands of a rope, together, we become unbreakable. Trying to remain a Christian by yourself does not work. We need to be nourished by the Lord through his word so that our baptised life grows. We need to be at the communion table together so that the real presence of Christ brings the peace of his forgiveness. But every believer needs a safe circle of Christian friends. As church, we need fellow Christians who will share the tasks of ministry and the responsibility for outreach. This is why the great apostle Paul urges us **to stand with one spirit**. The weight and pressures of service in the church and outside of it can make us fall but with the support of one another, with unity, when all the separate Christians are twisted around each other into one chord, the chord cannot be broken.

Each of us is called by the Lord to be his witness, to evangelise and honour him by spreading his name and improving his reputation in the community. Not everyone will necessarily be on the front lines of mission yet all of us can work together, using whatever spiritual gifts we have to bring the word of life to people. Some will specialise in prayer, some hospitality and welcoming, others in organising mission, some will focus on the technology etc. but all are together, **taking a stand on the gospel of Christ**. Consider the Alpha course. Some will be really good at inviting friends to the online course, a few will be leaders of the groups, and others will earnestly pray. When participants become curious, others will teach them. Some will sponsor them and stand with them from baptism and beyond. All threads in the one chord.

Our first act of **contending for the gospel** is to live a life worthy of our baptismal calling. A police woman recently was convicted of stealing properties through adverse possession. Apparently, she was a devout Catholic. It seems hardly possible but Christians have blind spots. The Spirit calls us to honour Christ, to hallow the name of God by maintaining our Christian integrity, watching over our ethical standards, being honest in your work, no lying but in our conversation but being transparent and true. Violence, bullying and abuse will be shunned. The way we interact with colleagues and the values we have are important witnesses to Christ. In his behaviour, Christ was the exact representation of his

Father. We, also, represent Christ, matching what we believe with how we live so that we become a mirror of Christ. Displaying good actions, kindness, compassion, being gentle, slow to correct and condemn but quick to compliment and affirm, these are acts of contending for the gospel.

Thank the Lord that we do not strike much opposition as Christians. However, the weight of work, of teaching, serving, leading in church juggling family demands, the problems of ageing and fitting in recreation and travel, these things create a tension within us. We want to serve our Lord but there are competing demands. The Spirit calls us **to stand**, to stand firmly and be immovable. He calls us **to contend**, to struggle, as athletes do or wrestlers struggling against their opponents in a contest. He calls us **to not be intimidated** by threats or persecutions. Our Father will help us with the pressures of life and our need to stand and contend for the gospel if we seek him and submit to his will.

We live in a secular culture when mentioning spiritual things can be hard for us. On the Drum, an ABC television programme, Greg Sheridan, a lovely Christian journalist, spoke up when the subject turned to coping with the lock down. He spoke of drawing on spiritual reserves. He found strength in reading the Psalms. Against all the psychobabble, he introduced God into the conversation but did it in a helpful way. A good example, indeed, of how our ascended Lord will strengthen us to contend for the gospel in a highly secular culture.

Paul says, **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.** It is for Christ sake we stand in one spirit, together witnessing to him and honouring him before the world. It is also his suffering that flows into our lives. With this call to represent Christ in our lives and in our speaking, come his victories of the resurrection. So, let us be of one mind and together contend for the gospel.