

PHILIPPIANS BIBLE STUDY

Philippians 1:27-30 (b)

Lesson #9

IN ONE SPIRIT, WITH ONE MIND

27 Just one thing: live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or am absent, I will hear about you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, working side by side for the faith of the gospel, 28 not being frightened in any way by your opponents. This is evidence of their destruction, but of your deliverance—and this is from God. 29 For it has been given to you on Christ's behalf not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him, 30 having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear about me.

Phil 1:27-30 (HCSB)

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A. Standing Firm in One Spirit:

Paul concludes that living our lives in a manner that is worthy of the gospel will show various and diverse fruits, or characteristics. Among them he counts our standing firm in one spirit. This is the small "s" spirit which I will dare to call heart attitude for want of a more specific definition. Our spirit is our deep felt beliefs, attitudes, goals, appreciations, and affections; in other words, all those things that make us what we are inwardly.

The point that Paul is making is that lives that have been regenerated by the Spirit of God are going to be lived in conformity with the gospel teachings, and will have the same goals, attitudes, mind set, affections, and heartfelt beliefs at their central core. The gospel will influence their hopes and desires the same, and they will all share alike in these vital heart attitudes that are the essential elements of the gospel message. They will share a common desire for holiness and sanctity, and the desire to honor Christ by their actions.

The practical applications of this statement is that the church maintains an attitude and affection for the things of Christ ahead of all earthly concerns. What do I mean by the things of Christ? I mean the things that He taught and commanded his disciples to do. Like loving and respecting others, caring for their needs, both materially and spiritually. Encouraging each other to godliness and sanctification, because this is the will of God for His saints, and the purpose of His redemptive sacrifice of His Son. The radically changed lives of His redeemed, like a lamp set on a lampstand, are the visible means that His chosen have been given to display the riches of His glory in His manifold mercy to His children.

Standing firm in one spirit is keeping this understanding at the forefront of the church, so that nothing else becomes the primary objective. Because as soon as anything else takes the first place, then Christ has been demoted from being the king over His church to being a servant to His church. We must never let the good works done, or even the preaching of the gospel, replace the primary objective of conformity to the likeness of Christ by the members. Because the good works and the preaching of the gospel are the fruits of transformation and sanctification, not the means to obtain it. Acceptable worship only takes place by sanctified believers who are holding fast to the truth of God and His Christ, and are offering their thanksgiving from a broken and contrite heart of repentance and faith.

I don't want to beat this point to death, but I have to add that it is entirely possible, and even very common, to have one spirit within a church, but yet that spirit isn't the right spirit. By that I mean there are no end to the so called churches that have diverse themes and bizarre beliefs. Churches of every kind of spirit imaginable are all over our city here in Miami. Churches that cut off chicken heads and leave the dead bodies laying in the road for everybody to see, and God only knows what else they're doing. We must never take for granted that general agreement in spirit necessarily means that something is true. Truth and belief are two different things. One can sincerely believe error just as fervently as they believe truth. Look at the whole of the Muslim religion. It doesn't lack fervency or unity, it just lacks truth. And the whole world is keenly aware of the consequences.

Paul makes this statement of standing firm in one spirit immediately following the mandate to live our lives in a manner that is worthy of the gospel. In other words, it is based on something definite, tangible, and definable. We are all to be firmly anchored, in one spirit, with the truth of the gospel presentation and the whole of the teachings of the holy scriptures. With this as our authority and guide, we all think and function in one accord, in one spirit, with the word of God because we are all indwelt with the same Spirit of God. So, standing firm in one spirit absolutely demands a common standard to which all agree and conform, and that standard must be nothing other than, or contrary to, the word of God as recorded in His holy scriptures and rightly interpreted by His true preachers and teachers.

Now, moving on to the next point in Paul's statement of verse 27:

B. With One Mind:

Now it becomes even a little more difficult. While it is relatively common to share a generalized theme with many others, it is however another thing altogether to entirely agree on all the little details involved in the working out of that theme. The reasons for this are many and diverse. From the faults and frailties of humanity, the ignorance and pride that drive the human mind and cause disputes and divisions, to the intentional abuse of false teachers who want to profit from the gentle spirits of the saints. When I read this statement from Paul I am immediately reminded of the statement Jesus made in His sermon on the mountain. Remember, He summed up the beatitudes and similitudes with the closing statement that "we are to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect." (Mat 5:48)

As a brand new Christian, reading the bible for the first time, I remember clearly to this day my initial terror upon reading this verse from the lips of Jesus. I said out loud with horror, "Oh my God, I can't do this" and terror filled my heart. The word of God had brought me face to face with the hopelessness of my condition, and I clearly recognized it. I didn't understand right then that this was the entire purpose of that statement, and it was the mandatory first step in a life long journey to sanctification, that would only be perfected by God, through His Son Jesus Christ, and the new resurrected body that the believers will inherit at His return. That degree of perfection is reserved by God for His own dispensing, in His own time, and at His own place. And this statement "with one mind" is very much the same.

To achieve perfect accord in our thinking on every issue is just not achievable while we reside in our earthly mortal bodies, and retain the vestige of our fallen natures. And secondly, we lack that one specific final authority who can answer our questions and render perfect answers and conclusions. Even among the greatest and noblest scholars there has always been disagreements on both fine points and even major points of interpretation, causing sharp and spirited disagreements that end up in divisions of churches. Until the return of that One single perfect authority, who has all the right answers, and never errs on anything, we will be unable to achieve perfect agreement on all issues. Perfect agreement absolutely requires a perfect governing authority from whom all may get the final undisputable answer to every question in existence. As long as fallen mankind is the final authority on interpretations, we will fall short of perfection.

However, in the meantime we are still to seek out knowledgeable spiritual leaders who have proven themselves trustworthy in handling the scriptures, and be willing to learn from them. Immediately after the departure of Jesus He sent His apostles throughout the region speaking and teaching on His behalf. Because there were immediately false teachers also among the people, He authenticated His real ones with unmistakably miraculous works of healing and even resurrections of the dead. These apostles had the authority from Christ to answer questions and settle disputes over practices and interpretations as long as they were alive. But eventually they all died, or were put to death as martyrs, and then after that, there was no more living absolute authority to turn to for interpretations of the writings and teachings these apostles had left behind. **(We have the perfect inerrant scriptures, and yet we can't agree on what they teach, Why?)**

And this is, to this day, the situation in the churches of Jesus Christ. We are a kingdom that is missing our King. We try our best in His absence, but even our best isn't really good enough. We desperately need our King to return and take His place as absolute authority over us. To answer our questions and set us straight when we err, either to the left or to the right. Oh Yes, we have been regenerated and indwelt by the Spirit, but perfection is still beyond our grasp.

The frustrations of trying to live and function without Him are always present. We just weren't made to operate this kingdom without Him, and we know that full well. And it is for this reason, and a great many more, that we live every day in anxious anticipation, looking for that blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Who will lift the burden of management responsibility off of mankind and personally take control of God's marvelous creation, because we just can't handle it without Him. Until we get our resurrected bodies, fashioned like His marvelous body, and our new pure and perfect minds, we cannot, and will not ever be of one mind and one opinion on everything.

Just as we cannot possibly be perfect as He is perfect, neither can we be completely of one mind with one another on the issues of the scriptures and the church. But, that is the standard to which we are accountable, and it is our mandate to relentlessly strive toward this our entire lives. For, (listen to me know) in the relentless, yet unsuccessful striving, comes the realization of the value of the ultimate attainment, which will be provided by God at the coming of His Son, Jesus. So, like I said, in the meantime we are to pursue this one mindedness with all diligence, whether it's attainable to us or not.

C. Working Side By Side for the Faith of the Gospel:

Another rendering is Striving Together for the Faith of the Gospel. Let's remember that the context is the persecution that is happening to the Philippian believers as they read this epistle of encouragement from Paul. We are always strengthened and encouraged by faithful, like minded companions who stand by our side as we face trials and difficult situations. For the perseverance of each is an encouragement to the other. In his commentary John Calvin wrote:

I have no doubt that the Apostle's meaning is this: "Let the faith of the gospel unite you together, more especially as that is a common armory against one and the same enemy."—Calvin's Commentaries

Verse 28

28 not being frightened in any way by your opponents. This is evidence of their destruction, but of your deliverance—and this is from God.

Paul tells the Philippians not to be afraid of their opponents, even though they are more powerful and more numerous than themselves. And he goes on to explain why they are not to be fearful, when, to all appearances, it looks like they should indeed be terrified. Paul says that this situation is an intentional evidence of the ultimate destruction of the persecutors, but at the same time of deliverance of the believers, and this is directly and intentionally from God.

The fierce opposition that was being encountered was visible evidence that destruction is destined for those who oppose. And, at the same time, the perseverance under that persecution was visible evidence of the grace of God at work in the hearts of the believers, who will be saved by the power of God through an enduring and unyielding faith tested under fire. Paul says they are not to be fearful because all of this is, in fact, a work of God, designed by Him to display His glory and to provide encouragement to His chosen children. In the next verse he goes on to explain this even further.

Verse 29

29 For it has been given to you on Christ's behalf not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him,

Paul tells the Philippians that it has been given unto them by God, and on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, which is to their salvation and His glory, but to visibly suffer for Him. Which is also to their salvation and His glory. Obviously I don't mean that enduring suffering is the means to salvation, but rather it is the unmistakable evidence of the authenticity of their salvation, and the verity of the grace of God. For who will suffer intense persecution for that which he doesn't really believe? And, from where does the strength come to endure under that persecution when it comes?

Clearly, this situation was a grace of God to display His glory, to honor His Son, to authenticate His salvation in the hearts and minds of His saints, and to visibly display all of these things to all mankind and angelic beings. In the face of this understanding, there was no need to be afraid, in fact they should indeed rejoice, for there is recognition and reward in eternal heaven for all those who persevered under persecution for the glory of the name of Jesus Christ. (Jas 1:2-4) And then Paul puts the final endorsement on his point by his next statement:

Verse 30

30 having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear about me.

Paul puts his authentication on their faith by reminding them that what they are enduring is exactly what he himself had endured when he was there with them, and is still enduring now everywhere he goes with the gospel message.

The gospel, preached with clarity and verity, and without editing or custom tailoring to individual tastes, will everywhere produce both believers, in small numbers, and opposers in massive throngs. And this too is the work of God in His eternal plan of creation. Any attempt by man to change this situation and side step the opposition by manipulation or omission of the full gospel will be a useless venture that produces only massive crops of false fruit that cannot pass the tests of trials and persecutions when they come.

Rather let us rejoice that though the true crop is small, we have been blessed by God to be one of His elite little group, though we were entirely unworthy in every way. To Him be the glory for ever and ever.

Amen