

Philippians 1:27-30 (NIV)

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 the one Spirit, striving together as one 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 in 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.

In this week's passage, Paul brings a very personal challenge to the Philippians. He writes, "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ," (v27). Before diving into its meaning, let's listen to a few other translations. The NLT says, "your way of life should be as the gospel of Christ requires." The Good News Translation says, "live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy." Each translation adds something for our consideration. What does in a manner worthy the gospel mean?(NIV). What does the gospel of Christ require? (NLT). How do we live as citizens of heaven?(GNT).

The answer to these questions begins with an understanding of the gospel of Christ. The gospel, literally mean good news, about the Saviour, Jesus Christ, who came into this world to show us God the Father (John 14:9), to save us from our sins by making atonement for us (Romans 3:25) and He has "rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, (Colossians 1:13).

If this is the gospel, then how might we conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel? This is really about our character, behaviour, and actions, and whether they reflect the attributes of the God who created us. Our character then refers to things like faithfulness, love, compassion, truthfulness, gentleness, and we could include the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, as well as many other traits.

Above we saw that the NLT spoke of what the gospel of Christ requires and the GNT spoke of being citizens of heaven. The answer to both of these is that we are to obey the commandments and statutes of God's Word. We need to take very seriously the commandment to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'" (Matthew 22:37,39). If we fail to do this we will not be able to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Paul continues his letter and says that either by observing or hearing of the way they conduct their lives, he will know if they are standing firm and striving for the

faith. He then encourages them not to be afraid of those who oppose them (v28). Those who oppose the gospel will not be saved, but those who stand firm will.

Now we come to the final two verses of this chapter and a very important issue is raised — suffering. **29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in 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.** What form might that suffering take? Paul writes about his suffering in 2 Corinthians 11:22-28. Let me sum up what Paul suffered for the gospel. He says, in labours abundant, stripes (beatings) above measure, in prison often, facing death often, 39 stripes 5 times, beaten with rods, stoned, 3 times shipwrecked, a night and day in the ocean, perils during his journeys, from the Jews and Gentiles, weariness, hunger, thirst, cold and nakedness. Most of us have probably not suffered more than to have someone laugh or scorn you for being a Christian. I remember being scorned by some for not participating in some of their crude behaviour. That's about the most I've experienced.

What we need to understand about suffering for Christ is that it is things we do in faith and commitment to Him. It is when we take a stand for what the Bible says, when we take a stand against injustice, when we reach out to help the needy, when we stand against the lies and perversion of political or culture ideologies. When we know the truth of something and we stand against it even though it isn't popular.

Paul gave his life to proclaim the gospel to a hostile world full of political oppression, religious idolatry, suffering and pain. He brought a message of hope into the world of his day. In many ways our world is much like it was in Paul's day. Are we willing to suffer to bring hope to our world? The only hope is the gospel of Christ.