

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (21-4-1991 Cleland Baptist Church)

Philippians 1:27-30
Additional Bible reading: Psalm 1

Introduction

The last time we saw the two great principles of Christian living presented in v.27. We should behave ourselves as citizens of God's kingdom, and in a way worthy of the Gospel. In the subsequent verses Paul continues to lay down guidelines for our Christian living.

His teaching has in mind that there are pressures on us – pressures to weaken in allegiance to the Lord, pressures to be disunited, pressures to keep quiet instead of speaking out and standing up for the Gospel, pressures caused by very strong opposition. We feel these difficulties keenly. It is easy to give way to fear, to lower our standards, to be discouraged because other Christians do not make the effort, to feel we are in the minority and that ungodliness and unbelief seem so strong. We can become so discouraged that we feel it is not worth fighting any longer.

We are not alone. Lots of people feel like this. Indeed the first readers of this letter felt like it, for it has been one of the besetting problems of Christian life down the ages. Paul knew all about it, and so his teaching in this letter is helpful and encouraging. He tells us something about our attitude to the Lord, to one another, and to our enemies.

In relation to the Lord – stand firm

It is an interesting fact that the Philippian church gave Paul less trouble than any other church, yet twice he feels it is necessary to warn them to stand firm in the Lord (1:27; 4:1). He gave the same command in his other letters – Romans 14:4; 1 Corinthians 16:18; Galatians 5:1; 1 Thessalonians 3:8; 2 Thessalonians 2:15. This was ever topical, and still it never goes out of date. It is one thing to be converted, baptised and in the fellowship of the church. It is another thing to stand firm and keep on with the Lord. Conversion is only the beginning of the day's work – only the first step on the journey. C.f. The early church **devoted themselves (continued steadfastly A.V.) to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer** (Acts 2:42).

Spurgeon once preached on “Keeping on, and the difficulty of it”. A friend commented that it was even more difficult to keep on keeping on. The counsel in this passage is all the more urgent when we are the only Christian in the home or at work, when we are persecuted, ostracized, when we receive glances every time we enter a room, when our prospect of promotion is threatened. It is also important when we feel the pull of worldliness, or when the devil reminds us of the costliness of being a Christian, and how attractive the world is, with the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life.

We must stand firm in our daily experience of the Lord. How easy it is to let this go. There are many calls on our time. We keep irregular hours and that makes it hard to establish a set routine and maintain it.

We must stand firm in the holiness of life. There is always the danger of compromise, especially in little things. This is not easy to do when other Christians, including those we admire, are being compromised.

Stand firm also in our Christian service. We must be “stickers”, not people who just try something for a little while and then want to hand it over because of a little upset, discouragement or inconvenience. Sadly, many do not last in Christian work. **Let us not grow weary while doing good for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart** (Galatians 6:9,10).

In relation to one another – be united, stand together in defence of the Gospel

Stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the Gospel (Philippians 1:27b), i.e. united in heart and soul in defence of the faith of the Gospel. Unity as well as stickability is important, says Paul. The enemy will seek to “divide and conquer”, so we should stand shoulder to shoulder as gladiators in the arena, or soldiers in the battlefield. They do not strive against each other or turn their swords on themselves. Rather, they unitedly fight against the enemy.

There is always a danger of weakening ourselves by internal rivalry and discord. Even in this letter to these model church members, Paul urges them to be like-minded, **being one in spirit and purpose** (Philippians 2:2) and **to agree with each other in the Lord** (Philippians 4:2). One of the most grievous things is divisions, cliques and factions among Christians. It hinders fellowship, prayer and witness of the church. The real enemy is outside, and we have enough to do to defend the faith of the Gospel.

The Gospel is under attack. This was so in New Testament times, hence so many New Testament books were written because of misunderstandings, perversions and attacks on the Gospel, the person of Christ, the way of Salvation, or the resurrection, or the nature of sin. The Gospel is still under attack today. Intellectuals, scientists and philosophers doubt this, challenge that, and reject the other. The cults, busy going round people’s doors, attack the Gospel. And even in the professing church, there is scarcely one doctrine that is not denied or watered down by men who have promised to preach the Christian Gospel and are paid for doing so.

We have to be united in heart and soul to defend the Gospel. “God has called you to Christ’s side and the wind is now in Christ’s face in this land; and seeing you are with Him, you cannot expect to be on the lee-side or the sunny side of the brae” (Samuel Rutherford). Paul was clear about this in his own life - **I am in chains and defending and confirming the Gospel. I am put here for the defence of the Gospel** (Philippians 1:7,16).

We need to know the Gospel, first of all. It centres on Christ, the eternal Son of God. We need to be clear and sure about the virgin birth, His miracles, His atoning death, resurrection, coming again, about the new heaven and new earth, the necessity of

regeneration and sanctification, and for a response of repentance and faith. The Gospel is not a vague message of goodwill, or moral appeal or soothing words to people in trouble. It centres on Christ, and it can be stated and defined. Much that passes as Christianity nowadays is not Christianity at all.

Hold out, hold on to, the word of life (Philippians 2:16). **Contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints** (Jude 3). **Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have** (1 Peter 3:15). We must be able to explain our faith, meet objections and give a reply. We must be prepared to suffer for the faith. It may cost us our job, our liberty or our life, as in previous ages.

Samuel Rutherford had his mind made up about how he would act if he had to choose between his friends and the Truth. He would walk with Christ even though the wind was in his face, rather than seek the sunny side of the brae without Him. He was willing to die for the Gospel, and in fact regretted that he was denied a martyr's death in Grassmarket, Edinburgh. Just after he was summoned to stand trial in Edinburgh, he fell ill and died in his rooms at St. Andrews. And he went to be "where few kings and great folk come" – Immanuel's land.

In relation to our enemies and opponents – do not be frightened

Without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you (Philippians 1:28). μη πτυπομενοι is the Greek word that refers to timid horses who are startled. Suffering is part of the Gospel. Paul knew all about it – beatings, prison, and privations. He was but one of many who suffered for the Gospel. **All who desire to lead a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution** (2 Timothy 3:12). Jesus warned, **Woe to you when all men speak well of you** (Luke 6:26).

We may not be foolish, tactless or un-Christian, but even if we are as wise and gracious as we can be – we shall suffer. D.L.Moody once asked a young preacher, "Did you preach the Gospel?" "Yes". "Was anyone converted?" "No". "Was any one annoyed?" "No". "Then I doubt whether you preached the Gospel."

Suffering is to be seen as **a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved** (Philippians 1:28). It is proof that you are a Christian, if you are suffering for the Gospel. Do not be frightened. Your persecutors can kill the body, but they cannot kill the soul. The only one to be afraid of is God – he can destroy the soul and the body in hell (Matthew 10:28). **But God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power and love and a sound mind** (2 Timothy 1:7).

Two final words of encouragements

Stand firm.. Contend for the faith of the Gospel... without being frightened. This is a tall order when we feel so weak, all alone, defenceless, overawed by difficulties and opposition. But we are *not* alone. Paul reminds them, **It has been granted to you on behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for Him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have** (Philippians 1:29,30). Paul is no armchair adviser, no theorist. In giving these words of counsel, he speaks from personal experience, not only in the past, but also in

the present. It helps us to know we are not alone, that other Christians are going through the same struggles and experiences, and that they are still standing firm, contending for the Gospel, refusing to be cowed and frightened. The same grace which they enjoy is also available to us.

Secondly, God allows suffering. In fact, it is given by Him. He gives us to believe and He gives us to suffer for Him. A higher hand is ruling our affairs. There is purpose in our sufferings, for suffering brings Christ nearer. It strengthens our awareness of Him. It encourages fellow Christians. The way we face suffering challenges others. It glorifies God. God is sovereign. A scoffer in the early church period once said, "What is your carpenter doing now?" The Christian replied, "Making a coffin for your Emperor."

If God allows this, we may be sure He will not desert us in our hour of need. If He has called on us to suffer, He tells us to stand fast, defend the Gospel, to be fearless, His grace will be there to enable us to do these things. He supplies us with His whole armour to enable us to stand (Ephesians 6:13). **The Lord is able to make him stand** (Romans 14:4). **Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus** (2 Timothy 2:1).

Conclusion

All of us are living under pressure, some more than others, and at some times more than others. It would be easy to be overwhelmed with fear, discouragement, a sense of isolation and weakness. We wonder how much longer we can hold out. This is the situation Paul addresses here. He tells us to stand firm in Him, to be united in defending the Gospel, and have no fear. There are lots of others in your shoes. They are overcoming, and so may you. The help available to them is available to you. God's hand is in all this. This situation is given to you in His sovereign power.

He has a purpose for you, for those persecuting you, and those who are looking and watching the situation. He will enable you to stand firm, defend and banish fear. **I will never leave you nor forsake you** is never more true when we feel the pressure most.