

PHILIPPIANS

JOY ON THE JOURNEY

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Philippians 1.27-30
September 29 & 30, 2012

Prepared by Paul White
paul@gspc.org | 562/493.2553 x116

I. Connecting With One Another

When you were growing up what were you afraid of? What, if anything, are you afraid of now?

II. Introduction to this Study

Philippians 1.27-30 is a shift in the apostle Paul's letter. He now turns from his own circumstances (v. 12) to speak into the circumstances of the church at Philippi. These three verses begin a section (1.27-2.18) in which he urges them, as Gordon Fee puts it, "to get their corporate act together (with a common mindset and mutual love) for the sake of the gospel in Philippi." This is the language of exhortation. (*An address or communication emphatically urging someone to do something.*)

Another commentator, Carolyn Osiek, argues that Philippians 1.27-30 "can be seen as the central statement of the letter, the real message Paul wants to get across to the Philippians." If he is to visit them again—which he hopes to do—these verses say how he wants to find them.

And, of course, they have something to say to us about our own character and conduct as Christians, wherever we live.

III. Study the Text

- a. Read the passage through out loud in your group. What is your initial impression? What questions do you have? Before studying this passage more deeply, how would you summarize Paul's message here in your own words?
- b. Look at verse 27. To what is Paul referring when he starts the verse "Whatever happens...?"
- c. The Greek word in 1.27 that is translated "conduct yourselves" (NIV) is *politeuesthe*. (Can you see an English word we draw from this Greek one?) This word means to live as citizens, to exercise your citizen's rights, to conduct yourself in a manner worthy of citizenship. It is a political metaphor.

Look ahead to Philippians 3.20. What citizenship does Paul want the Philippian Christians to focus upon?

Note: Philippi had been made a Roman colony by Caesar Augustus in 42 B.C. This brought the prestige and privileges of Roman citizenship to the people. Many retired army generals settled there. In essence, it was a military city, a "little Rome." What challenges does this context add to Paul's appeal?

- d. The second half of verse 27 urges the Philippians to "stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel..." Paul switches metaphors here as the Greek word translated "striving together" carries the sense of athletes united and equally intent on winning the game. What type of "game" does Paul wish them to strive together to "win"?
- e. "...without being frightened of those who oppose you" (1.28a). The word "frightened" carries the nuance of being "intimidated" or "thrown into consternation." Who was intimidating the Philippians? Commentators have struggled with this question, but Fee's conclusion makes a lot of sense:

...the best guess is related to the fact that Philippi was a Roman military colony, whose populace for very good historical reasons were devoted to the emperor. In fact the cult of the emperor, whose "divine" titles were "lord" and "savior," apparently flourished in Philippi, so that every public event also served as an opportunity to proclaim "Caesar is lord"—in very much the same way as "The Star-Spangled Banner" or "O Canada!" is sung before public events in North America.

Knowing this, what tension would the Philippian Christians be experiencing? What conflict in their hearts? (Read again 3.20)

- f. "This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God" (1.28b). What will be a "sign" to the Philippians' opponents? How will that speak to these opponents of their destruction and the Philippian's salvation?

Note: re-read 1.21-24. If the Christians in Philippi can embrace and adopt Paul's attitude (*To live is Christ, to die is gain*) then they will not be intimidated by anyone or anything. They will know they belong to a future that is certain and their opponents to one that is not.

- g. Read verses 29 and 30. Christians should not be those who *seek out* suffering, but neither should they be those who go out of their way to *avoid* it. The implication here is that if the Philippian Christians hold fast to their faith and live with spiritual boldness then suffering *will* come. The same may apply in our lives. How we view the suffering if/when it comes is what Paul wants his hearers to understand.

Have members of your group look up these verses and read them out loud to the group: John 15:18-20; John 13:16; Philippians 3:10; Acts 5:40-42; Romans 5:3-5. What do these verses tell us about how we should view suffering "on behalf of Christ"? What is your reaction to this?

IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. What does it mean to you to be a "citizen of heaven" and also a citizen of the United States? Is there any tension there? Why or why not?
- b. *The greatest single cause of atheism in the world today is Christians: who acknowledge Jesus with their lips, walk out the door, and deny Him by their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable.* Brennan Manning
- What does it look like for you to "conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ"? What effect does our conduct have on other believers? What effect does it have on non-Christians or those antagonistic toward Christianity?
- c. How can you be a part of "striving together as one for the faith of the gospel"? Where do you see obstructions to unity within the church? Respond to this saying: *In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things, charity (love).*
- d. What do you think it means to "suffer" for Jesus? What might that look like for those of us who live in the relative comforts of North America in the 21st century?

V. Pray

Spend some time in prayer:

- a. For our pastors, staff, and elders—those God has called to lead Good Shepherd—that they might "strive together as one for the faith of the gospel."
- b. For one another, for our church, and the witness of the larger Church, that our "conduct" would be "worthy of the gospel of Christ" and point others toward God's love in Jesus.
- c. For Christians throughout the world who suffer for following Jesus. Pray for their strength, their protection, their boldness, and that they would be filled with the peace of Christ.