

Sermon Notes, January 14, 2018

Lives Worthy of the Gospel of Christ, Philippians 1:12-30

At the heart of what Paul says here is that he wants to identify what kind of conduct will really communicate Jesus Christ powerfully to those outside the family of God that we're all trying to influence for Christ.

1. At the top of his list in v. 27 is stability. Paul uses the phrase standing firm. He says, "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." That's how he starts. Talking about being consistent in the faith. Being steadfast in Christ in your behavioral patterns. Paul says, "Listen. You want to mark some lives? You want to turn some heads? You want to create some interest? You want to point some people to Jesus Christ? Then live consistently before them. Lead stable, steadfast, Christian lives over a long period of time!"

2. The next thing he says that will really capture the attention of people outside the family of God is Christian unity. Or Christian community. He says, "I want to hear that you're standing firm in one spirit. You know, together with one mind. Striving together for the faith of the gospel!!"

One spirit, one mind, striving together for the advancement of the gospel.

Do you want to know what else really turns off non-Christian people, what sort of turns the lights out for them on their interest of spiritual matters? Christian hostility. Christian in fighting. Paul is saying in effect, "Show those outside the family, by how you live and how you love and how you relate, show the people outside the family that maybe the Church is the only hope for a relational community that really loves, a community with integrity..."

3. "Finally, Paul says, learn how to suffer with dignity. "If you really want to glorify Christ before men, if you really want to make a mark on people's lives, then learn how to suffer with dignity." Verses 29 & 30. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for Him.

When Paul gets into a troubled situation, he is not overthrown; he is not cast down. It *doesn't mean* he doesn't weep, doesn't mean he's not grieved, doesn't mean he doesn't struggle, but this is what he does. What he does is he says, first of all, "This will make me more like my Savior. Through this happening, I'm being saved. And my life is a testimony of God's great grace and my life is lived worthy of the Gospel of Christ."

Perhaps more than anything else you can do for the cause of Christ, suffering with dignity, suffering with an eye on eternity, suffering but not losing hope, that will rock people to the core of their being—Christians and non-Christians alike. Suffering with dignity may enable you to mark more lives for Christ than anything else you do or say in this life.

George Barna writes this. "During this decade, the church will be pressured from all sides to give up the battle. The intensity of the spiritual warfare unraveling in our midst will accelerate. Each of us will find it tougher to muster the courage, the resolution and the energy to combat evil."

This week I asked myself, how can we make an impact, how can we mark more lives for Christ and really make a difference for Him in our world? And I realized that the very best way we can make a difference and glorify Christ and advance His cause is when we demonstrate the exact three manifestations of Christian maturity that Paul mentions in this section.

When I encounter people like that in the church it challenges me to do the same. When we demonstrate a spirit of unity and brotherliness, that love that Jesus says is the true mark of a Christian, that unity and love, Jesus says that will make the world stand up and take notice. So, whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. And that surely includes this. Perhaps more than anything else you can do for the cause of Christ, suffering with dignity, suffering with an eye on eternity, suffering but not losing hope, that will rock people to the core of their being.

We live in a world that is openly hostile to God and resistant to His love lavished on those in the world in Christ. But we who have received this gracious love of God in Christ are also given the grace to,

"Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that we may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation." Then we will shine among them like stars in the sky as we hold firmly to the word of life—Let us shine out as stars in this wicked and perverse generation."

All the while remembering what Paul says, "It has been granted to you (to us) on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for Him."