

Lesson 6

The Conflict of the Gospel

Philippians 1:27-30

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Have you ever had an opportunity to witness to someone about Jesus Christ and that person became quite antagonistic and even belligerent which resulted in your pulling back into your Christian shell, determined only to speak to Christians with pious platitudes and forget confronting people with the gospel of Christ? It doesn't take too long for a faithful witnessing Christian to realize there is a tremendous spiritual conflict with the non-Christian world over the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- B. The reality of this conflict is the message God wants to communicate to us through the Apostle Paul. In these four verses, there are many military and athletic terms used to point out that when the Christian begins to witness he will find he is in a battle and a contest that is for real. As he was chained to a Roman soldier, Paul would use many military metaphors. The words "stand firm," "contending", "those who oppose you" and "struggle" tell us there is a spiritual war on and a price must be paid to be a faithful soldier of Jesus Christ.
- C. The Philippian Church in many ways was an outstanding church but it was not perfect. It had some glaring faults. One of these faults was that the church was not in the spiritual battle as it should have been. They were not living in a way becoming of the gospel. They were not fighting the good fight of faith in proclaiming the gospel. They were not telling people of the gospel of Christ because they were afraid of persecution. They were backing off from their evangelistic responsibilities. This is a very serious charge to the Philippians or to any local church.

II. LIVING OUT THE GOSPEL 1:27

- A. Walking Worthy of the Gospel (27a): ***Whatever happens, conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.***
 1. Note the words "whatever happens." The Greek literally says "only." Paul is saying, "If you don't do anything else, do this: conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel. Above all, at all costs, do this." This was a priority. This was crucial to being an effective Christian. Apparently Paul had heard the Philippians were getting a little shaky on their willingness to suffer for the gospel cause. He exhorts them to have a manner of life that is becoming to one who believes the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 2. The word "conduct" means "to conduct as a citizen." These Philippians were Roman citizens and were proud of their political heritage. As citizens of Rome, they had certain standards or rules to live by. With Roman privileges, came certain responsibilities to the State. Obviously Paul is looking beyond earthly citizenship to heavenly citizenship. Every Christian is a heavenly citizen and with this privilege comes certain responsibilities to live for Christ. However, it

stands to reason that good heavenly citizens will also become good earthly citizens. This world is to see that the Christian is different in actions and attitudes, for he is a heavenly citizen first and then a citizen of some State. NOTE: Paul is exhorting the Philippians to live out the name of Jesus Christ in the world – to make the truth incarnate. They were to live as citizens of the Kingdom of God in a pagan world which desperately needs to see the truth embodied. ILLUSTRATION: The godless philosopher Nietzsche once said to Christians, “Show me your redeemed life, and I will be inclined to believe in your redeemer.”

3. This verse tells us the gospel is not only a message to be believed but is to be lived. The gospel is a standard by which the Christian is to measure his conduct, so that the Christian asks himself, “Is what I’m doing worthy of the gospel? Is all that I’m doing reflecting in a positive way the gospel of Christ so men will turn and follow Christ?” The gospel is not just something a Christian believes at a point of time and is saved. He does that, but the gospel of Christ has claims on and ramifications to the Christian’s life every day he lives, for the world is watching to see if Christians practice what they preach. NOTE: There are many other standards of conduct which men live by. What the world does. What my peers do. What other Christians are doing. Yet, the biblical Christian looks only to Christ and the gospel for his standard of conduct. The question is not what does the world say, or my peers, or any Christian friends but what does Christ say in His Word. The ultimate question is, “Is my life lived worthy of the gospel?” If we would ask ourselves before every action or attitude, “What would Christ do and will it glorify the gospel?” then we would solve most of our right and wrong problems.

B. Standing Firm for the Gospel (27b): ***Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know you stand firm in one spirit,***

1. Paul is appealing to these Philippians to be united in the gospel regardless of whether he is there to watch over them. He wants them to be consistent in their witness and tell others because they love Christ and know God is looking on. NOTE: Do we have to be jacked up emotionally to witness? Do we witness only because others are looking on? Do we let down on our witness when no other Christians are around? If we do, then we are just a babe in spiritual matters, for a mature Christian witnesses in an unemotional way with a consistent habit pattern.
2. Christians are to “stand firm in one spirit.” To stand firm means “to hold one’s ground, not retreating at any cost.” This tells us how the Christian should react from a defensive point of view to opposition. Stand firm is a military word and is very appropriate, because the Praetorian Guard, the elite Roman soldiers, who Paul had been talking to for two years, took a vow never to retreat. They sometimes were defeated but would not retreat. Their ranks were cut down where they stood. They stood together in one spirit and died for the glory of the Roman Emperor. NOTE: What’s the point? When Christians receive opposition from the world because of telling the gospel, Christians are to close ranks and stand together in one spirit, planting their feet in the truth of Christ, refusing to let the enemy in any way break their ranks. Rather than break ranks and give up the gospel, Christians must stand and fight side by side and die, if necessary, for the glory of their King, Christ. When opposition comes, close ranks, stand firm,

stand tight, stand together and the enemy will be defeated and flee. It is better to die than to compromise the gospel when persecution comes.

C. Contending for the Gospel (27c): ***Contending as one man for the faith of the gospel ...***

1. Christians are “to contend for the faith of the gospel.” The word “contend” is a military term meaning “contending,” “striving,” “advancing,” “charging.” It was used of a charge in battle. The word “contending” could possibly have a reference to the Greek and Roman military formation known as the Phalanx. The Phalanx was a group of 250 soldiers who were shaped in a square with close files and deep ranks. The first five ranks extended their spears, which were fourteen feet long, and the others rested their spears on the shoulders of the men in front of them. The Phalanx would just keep coming. As soldiers would fall in battle, others would close ranks. But always the Phalanx moved forward.

The point is obvious. As Christians stand together in unity and always moving forward, they become an invincible force through whom God does His greatest work.

This is an offensive word. The Philippians were to contend together, strive together, press forward together with the gospel cause. Opposition to the gospel is a time of opportunity. It is a time to advance not retreat. When persecution comes, Christians are to reach by pressing on and moving ahead for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

2. Christians are to contend together as “one man” for the gospel. Literally this means “one soul” and some have translated it “one mind.” The point is clear—Christians are to be united together around the gospel of Christ. The goal, the drive, the ambition, the purpose and the end of all Christian living is the glorification of God through the propagation of the gospel. There must be Christian unity if the gospel is to make an impact on the unsaved world. There must be one mind, one soul, one heart for the gospel. NOTE: Apparently this was not totally true of the Philippians. There was a division in their ranks. There was disunity in the church. Instead of striving together, they were striving with each other. When Christians are fighting one another, the gospel is hindered dramatically. If Christians are warring within, they cannot fight the enemy without. Satan knows the secret to defeat the gospel – divide and conquer. Satan loves to split churches. Satan knows if Christians use up all their time, energy and resources fighting one another, they will not fight together for the cause of Christ against Satan and the kingdom of darkness. Satan will bring division wherever he can. He will get elders fighting elders, pastor fighting elders or deacons. Deacons fighting elders. The congregation fighting elders and deacons. The congregation fighting one another over petty issues so as to stop any evangelism and the spread of the gospel. Christian unity is essential to the progress of the gospel. A united church can take a stand against the most terrifying opposition. ILLUSTRATION: Charles Simeon says that Christians should regard the smallest symptom of disunion as they would the beginnings of a conflagration in the house wherein they dwell. “Everyone,” Simeon says, “should have his personal feelings swallowed up in an attention to the common cause.”

III. TELLING THE GOSPEL 1:28

- A. Terrifies the Christian (28a): ***Without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.*** -- In the New Testament days, there were many opponents (enemies) to the gospel, and apparently this terrified, startled and shocked the Philippians. The word "frightened" is used of horses which have been startled and caused to stampede. These Philippians were frightened of their adversaries. In those days, the opponents to the gospel were many. The legalistic Jews preached salvation by works rather than grace. The worldly Gentiles were sensualists and despised the moral code of the gospel. The Greek and Roman intellectuals thought the gospel rationally unacceptable. One thing for sure, whoever the opponents of the gospel were, they were backed by the chief adversary, the Devil. NOTE: Today we have the intellectuals who hate the supernatural aspects of the gospel. The legalists, who teach men must work for salvation, hate the concept of grace in the gospel. The new morality advocates despise the absolutes of the gospel and its high moral code. The New Agers hate the narrowness of Christianity which claims Christ is the only way. Things have not changed too much in two thousand years. We must not be afraid of the enemy, for we have Christ and the gospel of Christ which is able to save all who believe. In spiritual things, Christ plus one is a majority. NOTE: It is a natural response for the Christian to be startled and frightened at the reaction most in the non-Christian world give to the gospel. Even the Apostle Paul was afraid at times (***Acts 18:9-10: One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city."***). Paul even had to request prayer that he would speak boldly for Christ (***Eph. 6:19-20: Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel,, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.***).
- B. Destroys the Unsaved (28b): ***This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed,*** -- The fearlessness of Christians in their witness to the world shows God is with them. As the persecutor sees the Christian stand firm, not wavering, not giving an inch concerning the gospel, this is a sign to him of his lost condition, and he will be stirred and convicted about spiritual realities, realizing the gospel is true. He will be forced to come face to face with his own spiritual state. He will also realize if he does not believe and repent, he will be condemned forever in an eternal hell.
- C. Delivers the Saints (28c): But that you will be saved – and that by God. -- **The fearlessness of the Christian is also a sign to the Christian that God is with him and that salvation is real. He sees God at work in his life and he knows he is a truly saved person** (2 Cor. 2:15-16: For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life.). NOTE: **We must remember the true Christian may be respected and even liked by the unsaved world but the unsaved world will never accept the Christian. Why? Because darkness cannot accept light. The Christian and the non-Christian are on two different wavelengths. The philosophy of the world and the philosophy of Christians can never meet because two mutually antagonistic forces can never converge. NOTE: We must remember that any local church which is committed to aggressive evangelism will be a controversial church. When a local church ceases to be controversial, then it should pack up and stop existing. The church which wants respectability and acceptability with the world, has ceased to be a vibrant vehicle for the gospel.**

IV. ACCEPTING THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE GOSPEL 1:29

A. **The Gift of Faith (29a):** For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, -- Paul is looking at one's initial salvation from the divine viewpoint. He states when the Philippians trusted Christ as Savior and Lord the very act of faith was a gift from God. It was purely by the grace of God that any of them came to know Christ, for it was God who sovereignly called them to salvation. Faith is a gift from God but also a responsibility of man, and no one will ever become a Christian until he has, by an act of the human will, invited Christ into his life through faith. Yet, when this is done, it is a gift from God. This is a great mystery and inscrutable to the human mind. **NOTE: All Christians may not believe theologically that faith is a gift but they do believe it practically. All Christians thank God for their salvation. They don't pray, "Thank you for my innate intelligence to know God and my own free will which brought me to God unaided." No one prays like this because in their hearts all Christians know God saved them. We all know God worked in our lives and created faith within us but it all remains a mystery to us.**

B. **The Gift of Suffering (29b):** but also to suffer for him, -- The Philippians were not only given the gracious gift to believe in Christ but they were also given the gracious gift to suffer for Christ. It is granted by God's grace that a person should trust in Christ, and it is also granted that a person should suffer for Christ. God has planned that Christians should suffer for the gospel of Christ. The suffering in this context is not caused by sickness, calamity, heartbreak or normal circumstances of life but suffering as a result of taking up the cross and witnessing for Jesus Christ, willing to pay the price no matter what the cost. Such suffering for the gospel is a blessing and a gracious privilege (2 Tim. 3:12: In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...). **NOTE: Often witnessing for Christ becomes tedious, burdensome and discouraging because of the opposition and lack of visible results. Yet, we must remember it has been ordained by God that all Christians should and will suffer for Christ and this is proof of our salvation. The rewards for Christians will come in eternity when they appear before the Lord Jesus Christ.**

I once read about an elderly missionary couple who had been working in Africa for years in the days when Teddy Roosevelt was president of the United States, and they were returning from Africa to New York City to retire. These missionaries had no pension, their health was broken and they were defeated, discouraged and afraid. When they went down to the wharf to board the ship they discovered to their amazement that they were booked on the same ship with Teddy Roosevelt who was returning from one of his big game hunting expeditions. The missionaries went aboard ship and no one paid any attention to them. They watched all the tremendous fanfare for the President and how everyone was making such a fuss over the famous man. As the ship moved across the ocean this couple became more and more discouraged, especially the man. He said to his wife, "Dear, something is wrong. Why should we have given our lives in faithful service for God in Africa all these many years and no one cares a thing about us? Here is a man who is a President but we are children of God and no one gives two hoots about us." His wife said, "Dear, you shouldn't feel that way. Try not to be bitter about it." But he said, "I can't help it; I just can't help it, it doesn't look right. After all, if God is running this world, why does he permit such injustice?"

As the ship neared the American shore, his spirit became more and more depressed. He said to his wife, "I'll wager that when we get to New York,

there will be another band and fanfare over his arrival, but there will be no one to meet us.” Sure enough, when they arrived, the ship docked and a band was waiting to greet the President. The mayor of New York City was there and other dignitaries. This missionary couple quietly slipped off the ship and found a cheap flat on the East side hoping the next day to see what they would do to make a living in the city. But the first night the man’s spirit was broken and he cried out to his wife, “I can’t take this, it’s not fair, God is not treating us fairly. His wife tried to encourage him and she suggested that he go in the bedroom and tell the Lord the whole thing.

So he went in and about a half hour later he came out again and his face was different; his wife could see it. She said, “Dear, what happened? Everything is different I can see. You feel better, don’t you?” “Yes,” he said, “the Lord settled it with me.” “Well, she said, “what did He say?” He said, “I went in and knelt beside the bed and I poured out the whole thing to God. I said, ‘Lord, it’s not fair. We have given our lives, we’ve given our blood and sweat and tears in Africa, our health is broken, we have no place to go.’ And I told him how bitter I was that the President should receive this tremendous welcome over nothing. Especially I felt bitter about the homecoming he received when no one met us when we returned home.” And he said, “You know, when I finished it seemed as though the Lord put his hand on my shoulder and simply said, ‘but you’re not home yet.’” **POINT:** Beloved, when we get discouraged with the little earthly reward we receive for suffering for the gospel of Christ, remember, we are not home yet. What a homecoming that will be! It will make all the glitter of the world fade into nothing!

V. RECOGNIZING THE CONFLICT OF THE GOSPEL 1:30

A. Since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, -- **The Philippians had seen how Paul had suffered for the gospel when he was in Philippi. How he would rather be mocked, beaten, cast into prison and die, if necessary, rather than give up the gospel of Christ. Undoubtedly Paul at times struggled with the whole idea as to whether it was worth it to follow Christ with all the hassle involved, but each time he came back to the final purpose of life – Christ and His gospel. NOTE: Oh, how we need Christians today who have convictions and will pay the price to follow Christ. There is no place for gospel cowards in the cause of Christ (Mark 8:38: If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels).**

B. And now hear that I still have. -- **Wherever Paul went, the gospel went. When he preached, the gospel, there was conflict with the unsaved world. The word “struggle” is an athletic term. It is the picture of a gladiatorial contest in which the gladiator is in a life and death struggle. NOTE: We Christians are at war with the opponents of the gospel, who are headed up by Satan and his forces. We are in a life and death struggle because the eternal destiny of every created being rests on what he or she does with the Christ of the gospel in this earthly life. NOTE: Christians, we must fight as skilled and hardened soldiers, and we must compete as disciplined and determined athletes if our manner of life is to glorify the gospel cause of Jesus Christ.**

VI. CONCLUSION

A. **If you are here without Christ, are you aware of the fact that your soul, your eternal destiny, hangs in the balance this very hour? The Bible is clear that all men**

are lost and spiritually separated from God because of their own rebellion. There is no hope for you in eternity apart from Jesus Christ. Judgment is your lot except you turn to Christ.

B. Will you humble yourself and call upon God to save you? Will you in simple faith trust Christ as your Lord and Savior? The gospel is God's power to save all who believe in Jesus Christ.
