Philippians 1:27–30 Fighting Fit

1. Introduction

a. For most of chapter 1 Paul has been focusing on his relationship with the Philippian church, encouraging, praying and commending them. He has shared his life vision with them as he faces an uncertain future at the hands of the Romans, expressing his desire to come and see them again – and his overwhelming desire is to bring glory to Jesus whether he lives or dies.

b. Now he speaks to the Philippian church exhorting them with his insight to help them in the fight. The conflict they are caught up in, living in an environment that is hostile to the gospel, is exactly the same is the one Paul is experiencing. It's the same for us – living in days that are becoming increasingly darker. But the light shines more brightly in the darkness

   i John said, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." If the light is in you, the world cannot extinguish it. What Paul says in these verses is of vital importance to us, because it will help to strengthen us for the days ahead.

c. Imagine a war zone like Ukraine – what would you expect to see? Soldiers in combat dress living in difficult conditions, carrying weapons and watching out for the enemy. But what if all you see is people in everyday clothing playing games or listening to music, lounging around a swimming pool sipping drinks with no weapons in sight.

d. The army that was supposed to be fighting has forgotten its mission. It thinks that its mission centres around its own comfort and having a good time. Having forgotten its mission, it would quickly fall to a hostile enemy. If they were attacked by the enemy, the soldiers would probably try to desert, claiming, "I didn't sign up for this!"

e. Sadly, there are many Christians who are like that army. They were sold a gospel of "Come to Jesus and he will give you peace and happiness; he will help you to overcome all your problems; he will give you abundant life." True – but it only portrays one side of the picture; they missed out on the "In this life you will have tribulation" [John 16:33] and "Count it all joy, my brothers when you meet trials of various kinds" [James 1:2]. So they sign up thinking about enjoying the good life with Jesus. But then the bullets start flying, bombs dropping and people are getting hurt, they turn tail and run, shouting "I didn't sign up for this!"

f. The bible makes it clear that the Christian life is not a playground, but a battleground. God didn't save us so that we can live comfortably, happily, and self-centredly in a bubble of isolation from the world. He has conscripted us into His army. Jesus has commissioned us to take the gospel of the Kingdom into enemy territory to win captives from the kingdom of darkness. The mission we have been called to will involve active combat against the enemy. But if we forget our mission and just get caught up with our own comfort we will be quick to desert the cause when the enemy attacks.

g. This passage is a reminder that there are tactics and strategies to learn from the scriptures. There are no get-out clauses for old age, so we can't opt out and rest on our laurels claiming retirement benefits, we're just as much on the front line as we were 20, 30, 40 years or so ago.

2. Prepare for war

Philippians 1:27-30 *Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, [28] and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. [29] For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, [30] engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.*

a. In this first chapter of Philippians there is a progression in the way that Paul addresses them. First he addresses them as **saints** who have been saved by grace and who enjoy peace with God. Then he addresses them as **servants**, or as his fellow-servants, in the proclamation of the gospel. But now in these closing verses he addresses them as **soldiers** standing together in the fight.

b. Paul was writing to a church that he saw had got many things right. It bore all the marks of a great church, and Paul wanted it to remain great. He is not writing to correct them, but to remind them and encourage them – something we all need. Paul outlines three aspects of their warfare as soldiers – a good defence, a good offence, and a positive attitude.

c. Few of us in the church in the West have ever had to endure severe persecution for our faith. We think of Christianity as something that increases the well-being of our daily lives. If we only focus on the benefits of being in Christ, we may begin to lower our guard and become an easy target. We face the same enemy, and what Paul has to share here will stand us in good stead as we face the fight and will enable us to fulfil what we have been called to do.

d. In these verses Paul gives 4 strategies, that will enable us not just to stand, but to be victorious. They will build stability in us so that we can have confidence when we find ourselves caught up in the conflict. Like four legs of a chair, when they are all present and functioning as they should be, they will bring stability to your life.

3. Consistency

a. Paul begins this exhortation with the word "only" which is a transitional word. It brings emphasis to what he is about to say. He's saying concentrate on these things because they are important. In v27 he gives us the first leg of the chair and that is **consistency**.

Philippians 1:27 *Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel…*

b. The Philippians are living in a free Roman city, and Paul knew that Romans took great pride in their citizenship and took seriously the responsibilities associated with that citizenship. Paul appeals to their strong sense of duty and responsibility as good citizens and connects it to their heavenly citizenship.

c. The words translated "*manner of life*" in Greek is ***politeuesthe***, and it refers to your political affiliation. But not politics as we understand it today – we tend to think of politics in a party political and governmental sense. From its root, in English we derive words such as *Polite*, *Policy* and *Police*, all of which are connected to citizenship.

d. The first thing Paul does is to get them to look at how they were living their lives, their manner of life, how do they conduct themselves as they go about their lives in Philippi? They were to conduct themselves according to the laws and customs of the state. This would mean a lot to the Philippians; Philippi, although some 800 miles distant from Rome was fiercely loyal to the ideology and culture of the Roman Empire. Community was right at the heart of their way of life, and the Philippian church would have been very much involved in that community.

e. Now Paul points out that the way they conduct their lives must be worthy of the gospel of Christ, which takes it to a higher level. Paul wants them – and us – to see that the world is watching – and if the way they were living their lives was lacking, it would have a negative impact on the way the gospel was received.

   i The word "*worthy*" [v27] – "***axios***" in the Greek has to do with balancing the scales. Old fashioned scales consisted of two plates joined by a pivot. You put a known weight on one side and whatever you're weighing on the other, and when the pivot is in the middle the two weights are equal.

f. So our manner of life should balance, or weigh as much as the gospel we claim to be committed to; our practice must match our proclamation. How we dress, speak and act must line up with what we read in God's word. We are interdependent members of the community of faith, with our heritage firmly rooted in heaven. This is a theme that Paul consistently put before the early church:

1 Thessalonians 2:13 *…we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.*

Colossians 1:10 *…so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.*

Ephesians 4:1-2 *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, [2] with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love…*

g. Paul reminds the Philippians they are citizens of two worlds. They are citizens of the Roman world, but they are also citizens of heaven – these two worlds are at war with each other. Heavenly citizenship had to take priority over their human citizenship. The Caesars could not tolerate this priority even though the Philippians' heavenly citizenship made them better human citizens, better neighbours, better workers, better soldiers, better teachers, better parents, better children.

   i It's the same for us today – we're not citizens of the Roman Empire, but we are citizens of the UK. And we are also citizens of heaven. What Paul is calling for here is a consistent walk, day in, day out, where we live the gospel and shine with the light of Jesus in everything we say and do, so that those who are watching us see the difference a life yielded to God can make.

4. Unity

Philippians 1:27 *Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel…*

a. Paul wants to hear that they are standing firm together with one spirit and one mind, striving side by side for the gospel. Note that this is a consequence of the first part – walking worthy – he says so that you are standing firm. You can't do this bit unless you are already doing the other bit.

Ephesians 6:13 *Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.*

1 Corinthians 16:13 *Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.*

b. Here's our next Greek word – ***stekete*** – which means to stand your post, which military language. Even in the face of great opposition you stand firm. Paul is speaking from his own experience. As a prisoner of Rome he doesn't know if he will live or die, but he faces his future with complete confidence. His confidence is in God, and whatever the outcome, he will not be shaken. Maybe he had Psalm 46 in mind when he wrote those words.

Psalm 46:1-3 *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. [2] Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, [3] though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.*

c. We must stand firm in our individual walk with the Lord, but the context indicates Paul was thinking of our corporate life together as a local fellowship of believers, and especially in our functioning in the house of prayer. Paul doesn't directly refer to it here, but the Philippians, as Roman citizens, would know how the Roman army fought in battle. One of their most effective tactics which could be used both defensively and offensively was known as a "***testudo***."



i This is a great illustration of how Paul sees us as standing firm together, moving forward as one, with one spirit and with one mind. He is meaning that quality of inner strength or conviction that keeps us moving forward with a common purpose, contending for the faith as one unit –one man – totally committed to one goal.

d. This is confirmed by our next Greek word – ***sunathleo*** – from which we get our word athlete or athletic. It literally means "*struggling with*" or "*contending alongside*." It means functioning as team together, working together for one another.

i When we stand together, we can endure the fierce onslaughts of adversity and the subtle attacks of the enemy. But if we isolate ourselves, or if we're abandoned by those who should be there to uphold us, we are much more likely to fall, or to be distracted or disarmed.

ii What does one spirit and one mind means – what does it look like? The Bible is very clear when it comes to unity, and Paul spells it out in Ephesians 4:

Ephesians 4:3, 13 *…eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace… [13] until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ…*

e. Biblical unity is neither unanimity – where we all *think* the same – and neither is it uniformity – where we all *act* the same. Within the unity of the Spirit there is room for difference of opinion and interpretation. Debate can be helpful as long as it doesn't cause division. Doctrine is important, but I think that God is less concerned with our doctrinal purity than he is with the way we carry our hearts.

   i Paul shows his affectionate fatherly heart for the Philippians and the freedom he feels with them in the statement that he makes later in this letter:

Philippians 3:15 *Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.*

f. Biblical unity does mean harmony. Harmony is where two or more different musical notes played together produce a pleasant sound. In an orchestra, you have instruments that produce their sound in a number of different ways – string instruments, woodwinds, brass and percussion – producing sound by different means, and the quality of their sound is very diverse. The key to harmony is blending these sounds together so that they paint a picture of sound.

   i It only takes one instrument to be out of tune or out of time, or to play a wrong note, and it breaks the harmony.

g. Jesus' prayer for unity in John 17:

John 17:20-21 *"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, [21] that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*

5. Bravery

Philippians 1:28 *…not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.*

a. Paul doesn't tell us who the Philippians' opponents were, but clearly they were facing some powerful opposition. Have you ever been out on the Forest and seen a group of ponies stampeding –it's an awesome and frightening sight. That's what Paul is talking about here – *frightened* in its Greek origin describes a horse that is rearing up in terror or uncontrollably stampeding.

b. Paul is saying don't give in to fear when you encounter opposition, keep standing your ground, don't run. For the Philippians opposition would have included physical danger or damage to property. In our generation we don't face the same physical opposition that they did in Philippi. Nevertheless, we must be prepared for an increase in opposition because of our faith in Jesus.

c. Many times in the bible God tells us not to be afraid or not to fear. Those verses point us to a very encouraging truth. God is not saying that there is nothing frightening, or threatening, or fearful in the Christian life. Because there are things that are frightening and threatening, here's an encouragement to you from God. Despite the fact we do have reasons to be fearful and discouraged, we have greater reasons to trust God and not be fearful. That's exactly what Paul is doing here.

d. And if we find ourselves in a time of opposition, how are we to respond? Don't be intimidated or frightened, don't retaliate or give in. God gives us the supernatural response – don't be intimidated. We go on with our business as usual and don't allow these agents of Satan to terrify or intimidate us.

6. Agony

Philippians 1:29-30 *For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, [30] engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.*

a. V29 contains two parts, and the first part guarantees the second part. The first part is that we believe in Jesus and the second part is that we will also suffer for his sake. Paul says "*it has been granted to you.*" Who by? It's God's gift to you. We are balancing the scales again – on one side is the privilege of believing in Jesus, knowing him and living in the good of all the benefits that that relationship brings us. On the other side of the scales is the prospect of suffering for his sake.

b. Paul sees suffering differently to us. He sees suffering for Jesus as a privilege that has been granted to us. We'd rather concentrate on the love and the kisses of his word, and we'd rather not think about the opposition and the hardship, the persecution and rejection that he promises us. This isn't a popular message, but it is very clearly there in God's word and so we mustn't shy away from it.

c. So for the last of our Greek words today, *granted* is ***echaristhe*** which is a derivative of the word the bible uses for grace. It literally means that it has been freely bestowed as a gracious gift, and is a word that Paul frequently uses to speak about God's salvation.

Romans 6:23 *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

d. Not all suffering we experience falls into this category. Some is down to our stubbornness, stupidity, disobedience or rebellion. Sin causes suffering and the bible is very clear that we reap what we sow. But God has a different remedy for that, it's called repentance and forgiveness.

e. The important thing to take away from what Paul is saying here goes back to that word "*granted*" coming from a root word that speaks of God's grace. God's grace is involved in our salvation – we are saved by grace; our salvation is dependent on the grace that God extends towards us. We must also know that God extends that same grace to us when he calls us to suffer for his sake. With the suffering comes the grace that enables us to endure it. Therefore, it is nothing to be feared, because if we can stand before God, we can stand before anyone.

7. Conclusion

a. If you understand. as the scriptures tell us, that Jesus is of infinite worth, then you must live like He is. That's the way you walk in a manner that is worthy of the gospel of Christ. And that gospel is of infinite value, so you must live to show it. You're also a citizen of heaven, which is of infinite preciousness; so again, you must live in a way that shows it here. So, to walk worthily of the gospel of Christ is to live in such a way that you show the gospel's infinite worth. In that way you will be a living testimony to the glory of God that those who are watching you cannot fail to see.

2 Corinthians 4:5 *For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.*