

Philippians X – “Standing Fast in the Union” (Phil 1:27-30)

Introduction – Paul said, “to live is Christ.” To live, therefore, is the Messiah, the anointed King and Savior of the world. Paul now turns to the church, the Philippians, and exhorts them to remember their citizenship to this Messiah and His kingdom. Our union with Christ is a union to his kingdom-family by means of the Holy Spirit, to the victory of the gospel in the world, and to the sufferings of Christ – His means of that victory.

Let This Be the One Thing (v27) – When Paul writes, “only”, his admonition is like a waving finger, “*I want to hear this one thing about you.*” And he addresses the temptation we all face, “*whether I come and see you or am absent.*”

Exercise Your Citizenship – is probably a better translation than “*let your conduct*”. Paul will use this word again in 3:20, “*our citizenship is in heaven.*” Paul is certainly playing on their dual citizenship. This Roman colony was very proud of its connection to the empire. But the Christian Philippians could not declare “Caesar is Lord”, nor live as though the empire was the ultimate authority. Someone Else is King of kings and Lord of lords.

Public Citizenship – The world is fine if you want to have your own little private religious experiences and beliefs. Rome was fine with it. Pluralistic America is fine with it as well. But if Jesus is Lord of the world (which is the point Paul is getting to in 2:5-11), then He is Lord of our homes, our schools, our businesses, and our governments. This was why Paul was getting into trouble. This is why we should get into trouble.

Worthy Citizens (vv27-28) – Paul does not mean that we are to *earn* our citizenship when he says that we should live as citizens worthy of the gospel of Christ. He means that we should live ‘suitably’ or ‘becoming’ of our citizenship. When the bride is displayed, she should suitably fit her husband. When the body is seen, it should fit the head. How should we then live?

Stand Fast By One Spirit – Defensively, we are to stand fast together. We do this by faith, not by works. This is the gracious work of the Holy Spirit upon the body of Christ. It is by one Spirit that we have been baptized into one body (1 Cor 12:13) and it is by one Spirit that we all have access to the Father (Eph 2:18). It is by one Spirit that we pray, “*deliver us from evil*”.

Strive Together With One Mind – Offensively, we are to fight alongside one another, striving for the faith of the gospel. We are to do so with “one mind”, that is, with great unity, not unlike the crew-boats, the ‘rowing eights’ on the waters of Lake Washington in the spring. You cannot ‘strive together’ by yourself.

Unintimidated By Our Adversaries – As Paul, a Roman citizen, lived before the Romans, and as Daniel and his friends, Babylonian citizens of a sort, lived before the Babylonians, our ultimate allegiance to the King and Lord of heaven and earth and our trust in His complete sovereign care should get us into trouble and yet keep us in great peace and confidence.

The Results (v28b) – Two different signs come forth from such community.

An Omen of Utter Destruction – Pressing towards the climax of this section (2:10-11), Paul knows that victory over God’s adversaries is sure. As the gospel goes forth, proclaimed by a united, spirit-filled, victorious church, we are an aroma of death and life to the world around us (2 Cor 2:14-16). Either way, our presence is noticed.

Proof of Final Vindication – Remember, it was only 10 verses ago that Paul was quoting from Job 13:16 and speaking of his vindication/salvation before God. We have the same hope because we are in Christ.

Why Is This Happening To Us? (vv29-30) – Jesus came into the world to destroy sin and Satan and the work of death. We should be strong people with life and health and prosperity. So what is going on?

The Gracious Gift of Suffering – First, let us note that the gift of faith is simply assumed – there is no place for disputing in Paul’s mind over this. It is the given. Second, not only are we graced with faith, we are graced with suffering for the sake of Christ. Our union with Christ is deeper than we can imagine (Gal 2:20). Our union with His Spirit binds us as one body. And our union binds His church, His body, as the instrument by which the gospel is taken to the ends of the earth. It is not just that we are hated because they hated Christ. We are hated because we are Christ in the same way that your body is you. This means that a Christian never suffers outside of Christ, but always as a part of the Messiah’s family, society, or body. This is how Christ is reigning in the world – a pattern of humiliation and suffering through His body on His behalf.

The Same Conflict – The word, “conflict” is the word used to describe the place of a contest, arena or stadium. It could refer to the wrestling matches or great fights in the Coliseum. Paul reminds them that they saw this conflict in him while he was in Philippi and now they hear of it again in Rome. But this is not simply the struggle of one individual. It is the struggle of a people – together in Christ.

Conclusion – There is an over-simplistic optimism that is unable to handle a theology of Christian suffering. The scriptures, however, instruct us that afflictions are used by God to spread His gospel and purify His church. And so, our struggles and sufferings are not a sign of defeat any more than Christ’s sufferings. Quite the contrary, the struggle is a sign of the kingdom’s advance. We are exhorted to stand fast, to struggle together, and to remain unafraid as we live as citizens of a heavenly colony.

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