**UNITY AND COURAGE**

***Whatever happens, 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 in the one spirit 28******without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God.29For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him,*** ***30******since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have***

**Philippians 1:27-30 (NIV)**

This paragraph (one quite difficult sentence to follow in Paul’s Greek) holds the keys to much in this letter, especially regarding Paul’s concerns about things in Philippi, which were undoubtedly reported to him by Epaphroditus. Although he does not explicitly say so, 2:2,3,14 imply there are some internal tensions among them. At the same time there are some external pressures being applied which made their situation difficult. Paul’s ultimate concern for them is directly related to his concern for the gospel in Philippi. His obvious hope (2:1,2) is that his and their long-term friendship and participation together in the gospel will pull them through the two-fold crisis.

‘*Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ’* (1:27a). Paul now moves from ‘*your progress and joy in the* *gospel’* (1:26) to the present scene in Philippi, which has all the potential for regress rather than progress. ‘*Whatever happens’* is the adverb ‘only.’ ‘In the light of what I have just said about my coming, but now in the meantime before I get there, let this be what I hear about you – that you are living out your (heavenly) citizenship in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.’

‘*Conduct yourselves’* is literally ‘live as citizens.’ Paul is alluding to their dual citizenship – of the empire because they are Philippians, and of heaven because of their faith in Christ. Philippi boasted of its privileged status as a Roman colony, made so by Octavian (later, when emperor, called Augustus) after a decisive battle on the plains of Philippi. So, ‘*conduct yourselves’* meant ‘live in the Roman colony of Philippi as worthy citizens of your heavenly homeland.’ This will come up again in 3:17-20, where ‘*our citizenship is in heaven’* is used as a contrast to those whose minds are set on ‘*earthly things*.’ As Philippi was a colony of Rome in Macedonia, so the church was a colony of heaven in Philippi.

Paul and the church in Philippi had a long-term participation together in the cause of the gospel (1:5), for its confirmation and defence, for which Paul was now in prison (1:7,15), an imprisonment which in its own way had brought about an ‘*advance of the gospel’* (1:12). What was anticipated in the prayer (1:9-11) is now spelt out. Whatever they do or suffer in Philippi, they must live in a way that is ‘*worthy of the gospel of Christ’* (1:27). The gospel has ethical content that is in keeping with their heavenly citizenship. Paul’s life was all about Christ and His being glorified and he now urges the same on them.

‘*Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence’* (1:27b) is a message of caution that they should not wait for his return before putting into effect his message to them. Paul now spells out three matters he hopes to hear about them (1) that by standing firm in one Spirit (2) they are contending together as one person for the faith of the gospel and (3) that in doing so they are not themselves intimidated in any way by the opposition that is responsible for their present suffering.

‘*I will know that you stand firm in the one spirit’*(1:27c). Should it be ‘*in one spirit’* as our present NIV translation has, or ‘in one Spirit’ as the earlier NIV translation had? The primary reason for making it ‘spirit,’ in the sense of ‘common mind,’ is the juxtaposition of this phrase with ‘one soul’ that begins the next clause: *that you stand firm in one* pneuma, (as) *one* psyche *striving together as one for the faith of the gospel.’* If this was Paul’s thinking, it would be a form of semitic parallelism, where the second line is synonymous with, or explaining, the first.

But there are good reasons for opting for ‘Spirit’ over ‘spirit.’ First, the phrase ‘in one spirit’ meaning ‘common mind’ occurs nowhere else in Paul’s writings or in Greek literature of the day. Secondly, whenever Paul uses the verb ‘stand firm’, he always defines the sphere in which one is to stand firm. They are to stand firm ‘*in one* *Spirit*.’ ‘*In one spirit’* would indicate how they were to stand firm but not in what they were to stand firm. Thirdly, in 2:1-4 Paul uses these two words in the manner suggested here. In 2:1 he appeals to their ‘*fellowship with the Spirit’* and in 2:2 argues that they might be ‘soul brothers and sisters’ in this matter. Just as he asked for their prayer that he might be supplied afresh with the Spirit of Christ as he faced his ordeal (1:19), so now in the midst of their ordeal he urges them to stand firm in that same Spirit. Finally, Paul uses this very same language (‘in one Spirit’) in another prison letter (Ephesians 2:18) as well as in 1 Corinthians 12:13 to describe the Holy Spirit in a passage where the emphasis in on the believers’ common experience of the one Spirit as the basis for unity. Paul’s point is that their being one in Christ is the direct result of the one Spirit’s presence in their individual and community life.

The reason they need to ‘*stand firm in spirit’* (or Spirit) is so that they can be ‘*striving together as one for the faith of the gospel.’* The verb ‘*striving’* means ‘to engage in an athletic contest.’ ‘*Striving together’* means ‘engaging side by side’ or even ‘helping one another’ in this case in the struggle for the gospel in Philippi.

‘W*ithout being frightened in any way by those who oppose you’* (1:28a) stands in-between his appeal for unity in the face of opposition and the following mention of suffering (1:29,30). The word for ‘*frightened’* is a vivid term used of the uncontrollable stampede of startled horses. Paul does not elaborate on who these ones were who ‘opposed’ the church. The Philippians knew who they were. The likelihood is that they were Roman citizens loyal to the cult of the emperor. They would have honoured the emperor at every public meeting and would be putting special pressure on the Philippian believers. In 1:30 Paul says they are undergoing ‘*the same struggle’* he is now engaged in. Because he was a prisoner of the empire, this all but identifies them.

‘*This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by**God’*(1:28b). The persecution levelled against believers, and their endurance under this persecution, are confirming signs of the opposition’s ‘destruction’ and the believers’ ‘salvation.’ Taking the first, ‘*a sign to them that they will be destroyed,’* Paul doesn’t explain how this is a sign. The answer though probably lies in the reality that believers can’t be intimidated. Along with Paul they believe that ‘*to die is gain’* (1:22) because death means ‘to depart and be with Christ’ (1:23). People who really believe this can’t easily be intimidated. In a sense they belong to the future with a certainty that people whose lives are controlled by fate could never understand. Such a united front in spreading the gospel in Philippi by people whose certainty about the future gives them an uncommon boldness.

‘*This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by**God’*(1:28b). The endurance of the church will result in their ‘salvation.’ Paul is probably using the term ‘salvation’ in a similar way to 1:19 (translated there by ‘*deliverance’*). This salvation/vindication would not necessarily be seen by their opponents but would be clear to them. Paul adds ‘*and that* (their salvation/vindication) *by God.’* Their eyes have to be on Him, particularly in view of what Paul is about to write regarding suffering.

The final clause of this long sentence (covering 1:27-30) offers an explanation for the church’s suffering. In verse 29 Paul explains the Philippians’ present sufferings in terms of their relationship with Christ and in verse 30, in terms of their relationship with him. In essence he is saying: ‘Your endurance will serve as evidence of your salvation, because the God who has given you His salvation has with that gift also ‘graced’ you to be Christ’s people in the world, which means that you will suffer for His sake just as He did for yours, and as I do as well.’

‘*For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him’* (1:29). Paul actually began with ‘because to you has been graciously given.’ The NIV’s ‘*granted’* misses the grace element in Paul’s choice of wording. Your salvation, which comes from God, Paul explains, graciously given you through Christ, also includes another grace, the grace to suffer on his behalf. This may also be the clue to ‘*all of you share in God’s grace with me’* in 1:7. Suffering should not surprise or overwhelm them. It is actually an evidence that God looks on them with favour (grace).

Their suffering is ‘*on behalf of Christ*.’ The God who has graciously given them salvation through Christ, (‘*not only to believe in him’*), has with that salvation also graciously given them to suffer ‘*on behalf of* *Christ.’* They are living for Christ in a world openly hostile to God and resistant to the love of Christ. Because they have received this gracious love, they are graced ‘*in a crooked and depraved generation …* (to) *… shine like stars in the universe’* (2:15). This accent on ‘for Christ’s sake’ also explains why in the next verse Paul links their present suffering to his.

This emphasis must also be understood in the light of 2:5-11. They are to live ‘*on behalf of Christ’* in the same way Christ Himself lived – and died – on behalf of this fallen, broken world. The Christ in whom they believed secured their salvation by, as God, pouring Himself out by taking the form of a servant and as man He humbled Himself to the point of death – death for theirs and the world’s sake – death on a cross. So Paul can now describe their salvation as including suffering ‘*on behalf of Christ.*’ Those who oppose them are of a kind with those who crucified Christ in the first place. And for believers, as with Christ, the path to glorification leads through the suffering of the cross.

‘*Since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have’* (1:30). Their ‘*struggle’* is of the same kind as Paul’s, both of what they have known of his ‘struggles’ in the past and what he is currently experiencing. Their common suffering on Christ’s behalf has been brought on by those who oppose the gospel. So, firstly, they were going through the ‘*same struggle*.’

A second point Paul makes is that their struggle is identical to the struggle ‘*you saw I had*.’ Among those who would have this letter read out to them in Philippi would be the jailer and his family (Acts 16:27-34), possibly the young slave girl set free from demonic intrusion (Acts 16:16-18) and many others who had personally seen how Paul was treated (Acts 16:22-24; c.f. 1 Thessalonians 2:2).

Paul’s final statement ‘*and now hear that I still have’* reminds them that their present suffering is of the same kind with his Roman imprisonment. It is this reality, and resource, that he will draw on as he now returns to the appeal that they stand firm in the one Spirit, contending side by side for the gospel (2:1-4).

Without direct referencing these studies have drawn, sometimes heavily, on:

*Paul’s letter to the Philippians* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament) by Gordon Fee (William B Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1995)

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*Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* by W. E. Vine (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, 1996)