

# Dear Philippians, IV

## *Granted Suffering*

February 23, 2003

### ANCIENT INSCRIPTION

The AGORA (market place) of Philippi was an open courtyard surrounded by venders, shops, and permanent buildings.

- These STONES are the cornice of a building or the agora.
- They WROTE on them like we wrote “Jesus Christ ...” on ours.

Even though Philippi is in Greece it’s not written in Greek, it’s Latin; demonstrating how Romanized Philippi had become.

This inscription is difficult to translate: it’s incomplete, abbreviated, and there’re no spaces between the words. But, we can make out three obvious words: PROVINCE; MACEDONIA; PHILIPPI.

Paul shifts from his own suffering (not knowing if he’ll end up released or executed) to the Philippians’ suffering and how they should conduct themselves regardless of what happens to him.

<sup>27</sup> 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 one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel <sup>28</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, <sup>30</sup> since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have. — *Philippians 1:27-30 NIV*

The Philippian church was experiencing public rejection, humiliation, and persecution (as Paul had in Acts 16). Romans had a strong dislike for Christians because unlike the Romans:

- Christians were intolerant of every other religion.
- They rejected the Roman gods who protected the Empire.
- They even abandoned their own ancient Jewish traditions.
- They worshiped a crucified criminal *instead of* a god.
- Their bizarre faith disrupted and upset good families.

To the Romans, Christians were arrogant, intolerant, atheists.

## WORTHY MANNER

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. –  
Philippians 1:27 NIV

The word conduct specifically refers to citizenship; the NLT reads, "... as citizens of heaven." The Philippians understood the dual citizenship required of Roman soil in a foreign land. Paul plays off of their ambassador-like status; even though they were in Greece, they'd do nothing unbecoming a Roman citizen.

- This was their "Rome away from Rome." ... "Rome sweet Rome?"

Q: How much more then should they conduct themselves in a manner worthy, courageous, and befitting to their identity in Christ?

And he then gives them three immediate ways to accomplish this:

### 1. Stand firm in one spirit

... I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. – Philippians 1:27-28 NIV

Think of a soldier holding his ground shoulder to shoulder with his comrades against the charging enemy before him. There're three *outs* that make up the best defense:

#### a. Watch out for attacks

Q: Do you know which direction the enemy will be coming from?

It may be lust, indulgences, drunkenness, gossip, infidelity, bitterness, anger, or harassment at the hands of another.

#### b. Seek out some allies

When our faith is attacked, nothing is more helpful than like-minded Christians to support us and remind us of the truth. Before the trials and persecutions come, we need to seek faithful and faith-filled friends who'll help us stand firm.

#### c. Reach out for assistance

We'll end up defeated if we don't ask for help when we need it.

### 2. Contend as one man

... I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. – Philippians 1:27-28 NIV

- Standing firm is about holding our ground; not compromising.
- Contending is about taking new ground; advancing the gospel.

Picture those soldiers marching forward into enemy territory; Each man a strategic part of the unit. It's not enough to stand firm and barricade ourselves in a church culture, safely guarded from the world.

- To act in a worthy manner is to advance the gospel.

Here's the who, what, when, where, why, and how to the best offense:

**a. Identify what you believe; why you believe it; and how you should live it**

I can't communicate a message I don't understand. None of us will ever fully mine the depths of the gospel; but each of us should be able to explain the basics of our faith.

**b. Identify who else believes it**

There may be allies at your workplace, school, club, where you hang out. It only takes a couple simple questions to find 'em: Do you go to church? Do you read the Bible?

There's a power that comes from unity that is very much worth the risk of ridicule or rejection. With the disciples and Jesus, Peter cut off the ear of one of the men seizing Jesus (Jn 18:10) but once alone he fearfully denied Christ to a slave girl (Jn 18:17).

**c. Identify where to pray and when to encourage**

We don't identify other believers in order to argue about whose church is more theologically correct; if hymns are relevant; or whether or not Adam had a belly button.

- So you're Army I'm Navy and they're Air Force; we're allies!

Let's contend as one man! And pray for the people around us. And encourage each other to grow in grace, humility, and boldness. So, hold your ground, take new ground, and with everything:

**3. Show courage with those who oppose**

... I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. – Philippians 1:27-28 NIV

*Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point, which means, at the point of highest reality. – The Screwtape letters*

It says, “Without being frightened in any way.” (Phil 1:28) There’s a couple ways to show fear; one is to run and hide; but more often when our beliefs are opposed we get aggressive.

- Courage is not yelling louder than your enemies

Picture a discussion about “homosexuality being taught in public schools” degenerating into condemnation and accusation. All of a sudden the Christian’s message is so devoid of love, joy, peace, patience, and kindness it works against the Kingdom.

- Don’t walk away and call that persecution.

Courage worthy of the Gospel of Christ is the ability to display the fruit of the Spirit in the face of hostile opposition.

- My beliefs can be Biblical and yet my response ungodly

The goal is not to win the argument: The goal is to love that person as Christ would love that person in order to reveal to them and those watching the Kingdom to which you are a citizen.

- It’s easy to be gracious in response to acceptance; the true test comes with those who oppose.

This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. – Philippians 1:28 NIV

How we handle oppression, rejection, and true persecution for what we believe speaks far louder than any words can.

- Paul said it’s like my struggle; when I sang in the cell.

This is what reveals a depth of conviction that they lack; an assurance they’ll understand, and a connection they’ll desire.

For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him ... – Philippians 1:29 NIV

Q: Granted? Suffering? What is it a gift?

If standing firm in the struggle and contending with grace and humility is a sign for unbelievers then it has eternal value. Then pain and persecution aren’t a discredit to the power of the Gospel; but an opportunity to partner with Christ to reveal it!