

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Conduct Worthy of the Church

Scripture: Philippians 1:27-30

Code: 50-11

Well, this morning, Lord willing, we're going to attempt to finish Philippians chapter 1. So open your Bible, if you will, and we'll look together at the last four verses, verses 27 through 30. Then when we return, we will take up with chapter 2.

I don't know about you but I remember the wonderful moments in elementary school when the teacher left the room. Do you remember those? Those were always glorious experiences. I remember those wonderful occasions in high school when the teacher never even showed up, which was even more wonderful, and we had the opportunity to waste time, act irresponsibly or even downright rebellious. We all know about those kinds of times. As a parent, you know how many times you have asked your baby sitter if the children behaved themselves and you got a blank stare and the knowing look and you wondered to yourself, "How is it that they seem to be so much under control when you're around and so out of control when you're not."

Well I think Paul had a little of that teacher/parent apprehension here with regard to the Philippian church. His concern about them, as good as the church is, as deeply as they love him, as graciously as they have acted toward him, as kind and generous as they are, he still knows that in his absence they could begin to show signs of defecting, signs of spiritual irresponsibility, signs even of downright rebellion. He has had enough experience with churches to know that it doesn't take very long even for good churches to become infected with the wrong things. He is greatly concerned about Christ's testimony at Philippi. He is concerned about the church whether he is there or not. And so in this section, verses 27 to 30, he calls on the Philippians to behave in a way that will match their message, to behave in a way that is consistent. He is calling for integrity. He is calling for spiritual commitment. He is calling for credibility in conduct. And he adds, "Whether I am there or not, this is what I expect of you." This rich little section then hits at the very heart of the need for the church to behave itself in the way God has designed. It's a section on the behavior of the church. We could have entitled it, "The church behaving itself." That is exactly what is in his heart.

As we come to verse 27, the previous autobiographical tone of this first chapter disappears and Paul turns away from looking at himself and talking about his own joy in the ministry to pleading with the church. He is no longer concerned about himself, he is concerned about them. And he wants them to look in their own hearts and see if there's real spiritual integrity there and he wants us today to do the very same thing. Now remember that in the prior passage Paul had shared his dilemma. his dilemma was, on the one hand he wanted to depart and be with Christ which was better for him, but

on the other hand he wanted to live and be with the church for its strengthening which was better for them. And both of those were strong desires so that he couldn't even chose between the two. However, he is sure in his heart that he will live a little while longer because the need of the church is so great and he was right. He lived two, three, four maybe even five years after this time.

But the point that he wants to make to the Philippians is this, whether I live or whether I die, whether I come to see you or whether I don't is not essential. It does not really matter. What is essential is the character of your conduct. I think this to be a very fitting message for me to preach today. In the truest sense it is immaterial whether I'm here or not, it does not really matter whether I am here. I will not always be here. That is not the issue. It is not even essential that I be here. What is essential is the character of this church. What is essential is the behavior of this church, the integrity of this church. And so I can easily put myself in Paul's position saying to you what he said to the Philippians in verse 27, "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ so that whether I come and see you or remain absent I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel, in no way alarmed by your opponents which is a sign of destruction for them but of salvation for you and that too from God, for to you it has been granted for Christ's sake not only to believe in Him but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear to be in me."

Paul says I'm concerned about you. It isn't important whether I come or don't come, whether I'm absent or present. What is important is that you conduct yourselves in a manner that is worthy of the gospel of Christ. That is the message that is not only in our text but that is the message as God would have that is on my heart this morning.

Let's look back at that opening statement in verse 27. "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ." That would be my word to you this last Sunday while I'm to be gone for a couple of months, only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that when I hear, I hear the things that I want to hear. And I will hear by regular contact, I trust, and I want to hear the things that would please my heart and the heart of God.

You'll notice the first word is "only." And that is very very important. The first word, only, is in the crucial emphatic position in the Greek sentence, that is it is first in Greek as it is in English. And it stands for one essential issue. Paul has reduced his exhortation to one thing. This is the bottom line in Christian experience. This is the bottom line in church life. This is the essential of worthy behavior, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. That is the sum and circumference and substance of all that is required of you. Paul says I want your life, I want your behavior as a church, as a Christian community in a pagan culture, to be worthy of the gospel that you believe and the gospel that you proclaim. In chapter 2 he reiterates similarly in verse 15 that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent children of God, above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life

so that in the day of Christ I may have cause to glory because I didn't run in vain nor toil in vain. You are to be above reproach to hold fast the word of life. You are to conduct yourselves in a worthy way.

Now his choice of words is most rich. The verb there "conduct," the phrase, "conduct yourselves," is a very interesting verb. It literally at its root and its original meaning meant to behave as a citizen of a polis, from which we get the word political, a city state, a free state. You're to conduct yourselves in a manner that would be proper behavior for a citizen. And he's not talking about a citizen of earth, he's talking about a citizen of heaven, a citizen of the Kingdom of God.

But choosing this word was judicious on his part because of the culture in which he was involved. Let me tell you why. The Roman world had, of course, very strong political formations. Some cities like Philippi were known as Roman colonies. What that meant was that Philippi was a little Rome. It was a small scale version of Rome. They were very proud about that. To be a Roman citizen was the epitome of a human dignity. And though Philippi was nearly 800 miles from Rome, it was very near in mindset life style and attitude. There was great pride about the fact that they were a Roman city state. It spoke of their protection. It spoke of their high esteem in the eyes of Rome. It spoke of their culture. You will remember that even when the Apostle Paul initially went to Philippi in Acts chapter 16, Roman citizenship was an issue. In 16:20, "These men are throwing our city into confusion being Jews and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe being Romans," they said. Being Romans.

In other words, here are the Philippians claiming to be Romans even though they don't live in Rome. But they had all the rights and privileges of Roman citizenship. And in the Roman colonies the Roman citizens never forgot who they really belonged to. Rome was their mother, if you will. They spoke the Latin language. In Philippi they wore the Latin or Roman dress. They called their magistrates by the Latin or Roman names. They insisted on being stubbornly Roman. And they were deeply into Roman citizenship with all that it meant.

Now what did it mean? Well let me simplify it. To the ancient Greeks the polis, p-o-l-i-s, or state, free state, was not just a place to live. There was tremendous pride in that. And whatever your place was you were proud of, and particularly if it was a Roman colony, the people viewed their polis, their city state as they have been called, as a partnership with other people to obtain the highest good for all society. There was very little living for oneself. The good of the city, the good of the state was in the minds of the people. The individual citizen, for example, developed his abilities, his talents, his skills, his successes not for his own sake but for the community and the sake of all. Mutuality, interdependence, the pride of the state was the issue. To live as a citizen then would ring the bell in the mind of the Philippians. Paul using that word that we have translated conduct yourselves was really saying live as a citizen of a free state. And that was so full of meaning they would know exactly what that meant...live for the good of others, not for yourselves; live being proud about what state it is you're identified with; live consistent with the values of that state and the goals of that state and the

expressions of that state and the culture of that state. And that is exactly what he wants to say.

And when he says to the church, "conduct yourselves," he is saying to the church, live as a citizen of heaven. Chapter 3 verse 20 of Philippians he says, "Our citizenship is in heaven." That is what he has in mind here. And he is saying live according to the values and customs and culture of the heavenly kingdom. Live for the good of others not for yourself, and may all your talents, abilities, endeavors, successes be directed at the community rather than yourself. And believers are called on to live in partnership with others...to live as a member of a spiritual kingdom, namely the church. To live as citizens governed by the law of God, by righteousness, faith, love, service, worship. And the Bible is very clear that through the gospel we have been translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son, Colossians says. We have been made citizens of a new community, a spiritual fellowship, the heavenly church, Hebrews 12:22 and 23. That's Paul's point. We are to live as citizens.

Now listen, folks, it is absolutely essential that you understand that is the bottom line in the Christian life. You must conduct yourself as a citizen of heaven...not of this world, not of this passing world.

Now how does a citizen of heaven conduct himself? Follow verse 27, "In a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ," consistent with what we know, consistent with what we teach, consistent with what we preach, consistent with what we believe. That is integrity. That is integrity. You see, the thing that is stripping the church today of all of its credibility is that it says one thing and does another thing, that it lives one way and preaches another way. It is only when the church lives true to its message, and by the church I mean you and me, it is only when it's embodying in its behavior its beliefs that it has integrity, and only when it has integrity is the message clear and believable. The greatest weapon the church has is its integrity. And when the church does not conduct itself in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, it cuts itself up in terms of its ability to be a whole person representing the body and person of Christ. The church cannot live beneath its theology, it cannot live beneath its message. Paul insists on this highest standard. And I would insist on it with you...whether I am here or gone is not essential, it does not matter, it is not important. The spiritual resources are all here and the message is very clear, says Paul, you must live as a citizen of heaven in such a way that you are consistent with what we believe, what we preach. And that, my dear friends, is the issue in the church today. The church is impotent. The church is being mocked across the country. Why? Because it doesn't have any integrity.

When he mentions the gospel of Christ here, what he refers to is the good news of salvation, the good news of eternal life which God has sent into the world, that men can be saved from sin unto holiness. And the church has to live that out, that we have been delivered from darkness to light, from death to life, from sin to righteousness. We have to live that reality. We have to live as if we were proud citizens of a great state, only vastly more significant than any earthly state. We are to be true to the citizenship in the heavenly kingdom where Christ reigns and where His word is law. And

what is the essence of living according to the gospel? "If any man be in Christ he is a new creation, old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new." And what does the gospel tell us? The gospel tells us that men are transformed into new life and we must live that new life or we deny the gospel in our behavior.

People look at the church, they hear you preach the gospel, they see lives that don't reflect holiness, virtue and salvation from sin and they say that gospel doesn't do anything, that's not good news. They see pastors in immorality, they see church members in immorality, they see people cheat on the job, they see people lie, they see people steal even books at a booksellers Christian booksellers convention and the world says, "What message do you offer?" And we say, "Deliverance from sin." And they say, "O really...you don't look very delivered." The life of the believer, the life of the church must demonstrate the gospel which is taking us from sin to righteousness. We have to be true to our citizenship. So the main verb in this one long sentence from 27 to 30, the main verb calls for consistent conduct on the part of the church. We are to live lives that are worthy of being called Christians.

And then Paul adds, "So that whether I come to see you or remain absent, I may hear about you." My presence is not the issue. Don't depend on me. And I say that to you from my heart. Don't depend on me. There's no reason, Paul says, to wait for me to show up to begin a new level of commitment in the church, there's no reason for that. And I say the same, there's no reason to go on hold until I get back, there's no reason for that. It must be there because this is the church of Christ not because of some man. There are abundant spiritual means of grace available to you as there were to the Philippians, there are abundant spiritual resources available to you as there were for the Philippians. It does not matter whether Paul is there. It does not matter whether I am here. Any pastor wants to know that his people will go on living consistent with the gospel, that the holy truth will be revealed in their lives whether he's there or not.

And Paul had reasonable fears about this. He said to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, "I know that when I leave wolves are going to rise up, evil men are going to come in." And it happens. He wrote to the Galatians and says really more than one church was involved in Galatia, that was a whole area, there were many churches. And he says, "How so...how can you be so soon removed from what I taught you?" That's the pain of ministry. So Paul is saying, "Look, I call you to worthy behavior whether I'm there or not."

Now what is that worthy behavior? How am I understand it? Four ways...Paul gives us four characteristics of a church that is behaving itself...four characteristics of a church that is behaving itself. He's very much like a parent who is saying I'm going away, I'm leaving you in the care of these other people...now I want you to behave yourself. And you've given that speech many times. That's what he's doing. That's what I'm doing in a sense today. I'm leaving, I want you to behave yourselves. And here are the four elements of your behavior that concern the Holy Spirit...standing,

sharing, striving and suffering. And that takes us through the flow of this text.

First of all, a church that is behaving itself is standing, verse 27, "I want to hear of you that you are standing firm." Stop at that point. We need to make a whole point out of just that because it's so basic, that you are standing firm, from stekow which literally means to be at post in a war. The word is used to refer to a soldier who will not budge from his post, that you will be at your post and not move...no compromise with error, no compromise with sin, an unyielding maintenance of their testimony for the Word of God and the Christ of God. Stand firm, don't move, doctrinally, don't move in terms of conduct from where you are to stand.

He says it again in chapter 4 verse 1. "Therefore my beloved brethren, whom I long to see, my joy and crown, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved." Using the same verb in an imperative form, stekote, stand firm. He's calling, beloved, for loyalty to the Lord. Loyalty in life is the issue here. To stand firm in Paul's mind has to do with spiritual character, has to do with godliness, purity, virtue, holiness, obedience. And you find that particularly if you go back a page or so into the last chapter of Ephesians. You'll notice in verse 11 he says you are to stand firm, and that's the same term, against the schemes of the devil. Verse 13 at the end of the verse, having done everything to stand firm, and again he says it is a matter of resisting, resisting the devil in the day when he comes to do evil.

Now mark this, will you, please. When he talks about standing firm then, he has in mind resisting the devil, resisting temptation, corruption both doctrinally and in behavior, because they go hand in hand. He has in mind the matters of resisting temptation. And the military metaphor is that of holding a critical position while under tremendous attack. You're standing, you're holding a position under tremendous attack. Now in order to stand firm, he says in Ephesians 6, you have to have the full armor of God because you're standing not against flesh and blood, verse 12, but rulers, powers, world forces, spiritual forces of wickedness, demonic hosts, demonic hosts, seducing spirits he called them in Paul's letter to Timothy.

So, we are standing against Satan and demons. And you have to have your loins girded with truthfulness. That's spiritual commitment. You have to have a breastplate of righteousness or a holiness or purity. Your feet need to be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, that is you know that God is at peace with you, you are at peace with God, God is on your side and you stand your ground knowing he will defend you. You take the shield of faith, you believe God. The helmet of salvation, your confidence in His glorious ability to keep you until the day when He takes you to heaven and you have in your hand the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. That's how you stand firm.

And I say to you what Paul said to the Philippians...get your armor on, folks, and stand firm. The one thing I don't want to hear when I'm away is that somebody or some group in our church defected to a false teaching. I don't want to hear that somebody in our church ran off with somebody else's wife.

Or somebody on our staff got involved in immorality. I want to know that when I'm gone and come back you will say to me, "We have stood firm, the church has stood its ground against the onslaught of Satan and his demonic hosts." And I'm just experienced enough to believe that Satan may bring about an all-out attack in my absence not that you are weaker without me but that sometimes you might perceive yourselves to be so. That's not necessary. But I look at the church around and I see so many people collapsing, so many leaders falling, so many men going into sin and immorality. The thing that frightens me more than that, more than the leaders falling into immorality is the eagerness of the churches wanting to put them back in leadership, because that shows me that the system is corrupt at the very grass roots level. It's not just corrupt leaders that bother me, we could deal with that properly and show the world that the church had integrity. But instead, by trying to push those people back into leadership we show the world the church hasn't got any more integrity than its leaders do. That's what's frightening. The collapse of the leading soldiers in our army is epidemic and it has impact of the troops at every level.

I preached in Dallas to the...to a special banquet down there and I used 1 Corinthians 9:27 where Paul says, "My greatest fear is that in preaching to others I myself would be disqualified." And he says, "In order not to be disqualified, I buffet my body to keep it into subjection." Why? Because it is the misuse of the physical body that disqualifies a man permanently from ministry. And he knew exactly what he was talking about because in the prior couple of sections, back in chapter 6, he had discussed how immorality was such a vile use of the body. But when the leaders fall and the church pushes them back, then the church simply demonstrates its own weakness. Stand firm against Satan, against the lies of hell, the doctrines of demons, the seducing spirits, the temptations of the flesh. And like Paul, I want you to be sure that you do not fall, hold your ground. How do we do that? Get on the armor. If you feel a little weak, get out that section and read it and let the Spirit of God apply it to your heart. This is an essential element of worthy behavior, stand firm...doctrinally, stand firm in behavior.

A second word that Paul brings up is implied in the next section, that's the word sharing. In our standing firm there must be a sharing. These flow into one another as is obvious since they're in the same sentence. So he says, "I want to hear that you are standing firm in one spirit with one mind." Those two beautiful phrases express to us Paul's desire for mutuality. It's not just standing firm alone, it's standing firm together in unity, supporting one another. Purity first, unity second. Purity and unity. Believe me, friends, the battle for unity has gone on in the church since its inception. It was going on in Philippi. In chapter 2 he says in verse 1, "If there's any encouragement in Christ, if there's any consolation of love, if there's any fellowship of the Spirit, if there's any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose." And over in chapter 4 he acknowledges that it was an issue. Verse 2, "I urge you, Euodia, and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. Indeed, true comrade, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle." Help them get together. We want harmony in the church. The church is still battling that. There's not a day that goes by that we don't

discuss...we've got to get those two people together so there can be harmony between the two of them. An endless issue in the church, discord, disunity, bitterness.

It should be noted that the battle for unity still rages today. It is called for over and over, I won't even take the time to go over it. But particularly is it the passion of Paul, whether it's Romans 12:5 and 12, 1 Corinthians 1:10, 1 Corinthians 10:17, 2 Corinthians 8:11, Galatians 3:28, Ephesians 2:11 to 22, Ephesians 4 verses 3, 4, 13, and on and on and on, he's over and over and over calling for unity. The church must maintain unity. Why? Well it was the prayer of Christ that they may be one, Father, as you and I are one, John chapter 17. It was the passion of Christ in John 13 when He said, "By this will all men know that you are My disciples," verses 34 and 35, "that you have...what?...love one for another." Love one for another.

How is that generated? Go back to Philippians 2. Here is the key, verse 3, here's how to have the same mind, the same love, united in spirit and intent on one purpose. How does a church get that way? "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit." That's the remedy. Couldn't be more clear. "But with...here's the other side...humility of mind, let each of you regard one another as more important than himself. Do not merely look out for your own personal interest but also for the interest of others." You know why you have conflict in a church? Because you have at least two people concerned about their own interests. You will never have conflict where you have two people only concerned about one person's interest. There is no conflict. Conflict is always the result of competing interests...always. And the remedy is that simple. Stop looking out for yourself, it doesn't matter what you think. It doesn't matter what you want. It doesn't matter what you prefer. What matters is unity. And the question is, who is going to sacrifice? Who is going to humble himself?

You say, "Well, now wait a minute. I'm right." That's the problem. That's the problem. You have elevated being right over unity.

Now I'm not talking about sacrificing truth. I'm dealing with preferences. Who's your model? Verse 5, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was in Christ Jesus." He had every right to be in the form of God, didn't hold on to it, emptied Himself, took the form of a bond servant, became a man. And you know that wonderful passage. Beloved, it is essential that we have unity in the church. And let me put it to you another way. It doesn't matter what you think. It doesn't matter what you want. It doesn't matter what you prefer. It doesn't matter what your idea is. What matters is unity. And if you have to make the sacrifice, God bless you, God will honor the unity. God will honor the unity. You never have discord unless you have more than one person competing for more than one perspective. As soon as people defer to the other, unity is there. So selfishness always brings disunity. That's what he said. Do nothing from selfishness, or empty conceit.

Now let's go back to verse 27. He says, "I want you to stand firm in one spirit with one mind." Now some have suggested one spirit means the Holy Spirit, based on 1 Corinthians 12:13 that we've all

been made partakers of the same Holy Spirit and so forth. And I would agree that the Holy Spirit is the source and power of our unity, Ephesians chapter 4 talks about the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. But it is best to see this not as the Holy Spirit but small "s" as it is in the New American Standard, our human spirits, or our attitude. It's simply a spirit of unity, or an attitude of unity in godly congregation. One translator called it "inner compactness." Good phrase. Inner compactness. Paul says, "My prayer for you is that you would share...that you would have an attitude of unity, harmony." I pray that for this church. I've been here 20 years, I've never seen such all out attack on the unity of this church as I have experienced. And I know there's going to be more of it coming at you in my absence.

We don't even understand it. We don't even know why it comes or where it comes from. And I...except for to say it's the seducing spirits and the lying demons behind the scenes. There is no human rational reason for it. We can't identify any. As I have said to people, "Nobody has run off with the money, nobody is in to adultery, nobody is willfully violating what we know to be biblical principle and yet there's all this upheaval." And it is supernaturally energized by the kingdom of darkness. I have never seen anything like it in my years of ministry. People criticizing unjustly other people, blaming people, holding grudges against people, bitternesses against people, terrible distrust and mistrust floating all over that can't even be identified or reasonably explained. All of it deadly to the church. I have seen it from the elder level down where you even have elders who resign and leave the church, and we've had that. And it's inexplicable to me, inexplicable.

But what I did say to the elders was, we're going to find out who is spiritually strong and who is not in the fallout of this Satanic and demonic attack. And I'm not passing the buck. I'm not making demons responsible for human failure. I am telling you this is a supernatural issue. We are not wrestling flesh and blood. I have seen it. There is no explanation for it from a human viewpoint. But I say this to you, we have to work hard at maintaining the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. And what that means is you give up your rights, you give up your opinions, you give up your preferences, you give up your wants and you seek peace. By the way, a key element in that is forgiveness...tender hearted, forgiving one another even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you. You ought to forgive, He forgave you. And internal harmony is crucial to external witness.

The thing that I fear so much, and this is what I'm seeing for a year now, is all of our great energies and all of our leadership and all of our time and all of our efforts are literally going inward to try to figure out all this disagreement and all this internal turmoil and the whole aggressive outreach ministry of our church is on hold while we're battling at this level. Now I believe the Lord has allowed it. And I have begged Him to end it. And I submit to His sovereign intention. But I know we have to pursue unity with no thought for personal matters. It doesn't matter what I think. It doesn't matter what I expect, what I feel about something. It doesn't matter what I deserve. Only one thing matters, that's unity...that's unity.

I remember there was discord at the First Baptist Church of Dallas on one occasion. Dr. Crisswald(?) had been there 40 years, I think. He had never had it in his ministry. He was so distressed by this unity that between Sundays he had prayer kneeling benches installed in the whole church. The people came one Sunday, there weren't any. They came the following Sunday and every single pew in the church had a kneeling bench like a Catholic Church has. And he said to the people on that Sunday, he said, "The devil is trying to tear us up on the inside and I'm calling this church to prayer. Flip down those benches and get on your knees." The whole church went to prayer against the discord and disunity that had been brought against them by the enemy.

I feel a little bit that way. I might have done the same thing except we don't have any money for the benches. But your agenda isn't important. And my agenda isn't important. What is important is unity. And that's what Paul says. "Look, the bottom line is your behavior, church, behave yourself." Now what does that mean? That means you behave yourself in these ways. First of all, you stand firm, you don't fall into error and sin. Secondly, you share in one spirit with one mind. I don't think we need to dissect those two phrases as if they mean something different. Spirit, pneumati; mind, psuchecould best be translated soul...spirit and soul are the same thing, the immaterial part. He's simply saying your inner part, your attitude must be one of sharing and humility and oneness. I plead with you to work for unity whether I'm here or not.

But it's unity with a purpose. That brings us to the third word, striving. It's unity with a purpose. It's not just unity for unity's sake. Let me tell you something, folks, if you want to get in an exercise in futility, you just try to build great unity without some objective. You can't do it. Let me show you what I mean. Paul introduces a magnificent term in verse 27. He says, "Striving together for the faith of the gospel." Great term he uses here, sunathleo. We get the word "athletics" from it, athlete. It means to struggle along with someone. It's talking about team sports. Great word. Struggle along with someone as a team of athletes struggling against the opposition to win the victory. And now he moves from the metaphor of a military soldier standing at his post which was bound up in the word standing firm to a team of athletes struggling together against a common opponent to win the victory.

Now let me tell it to you simply. You will never maintain a real unity in a static situation. If a church just stands around and tries to have unity, it will never have unity. The only way to maintain unity, get it, the only way to keep an internal oneness to share common life is to be engaged in a common struggle. Basic...basic. When...why is that true? When everyone's focus is on the common goal and the common objective and the common victory and there's a desperation about winning, nobody really cares about the internal issues.

We have all read through the years about athletic teams like this that fought and quarreled and argued and even had fighting matches in the dugout or in the locker room. Terrible discord until the championship game was on the line and then they came out and they were like one well oiled

machine. Why? Because all is forgotten in a common objective gained through a common struggle. Any general in the face of the earth knows that that which motivates unity among the troops is the sense of victory. Any coach knows that which makes unity a reality on a team is when you stop being concerned about the internal discord and you focus on the objective. And the only thing that concerns you is how you going to get there, not who gets the credit, not whether you like the guy next to you.

I remember when I was in college we had a guy on our college basketball team, the first year I played, who was easily the finest basketball player we had, and maybe one of the finest in the history of the school. I think it was the opening game of the season he scored about 36 points. He carried about a 30 plus average for about ten games into the season and then he was kicked off the team by the coach. The reason was, we couldn't win with him. He scored a lot of points but we couldn't win because he didn't understand what it was to be on a team. It was a sad thing and I'll never forget it because the kid had a tremendous amount of talent. But he was a total detriment to the accomplishment of the goals of the team.

And the same thing is true in the spiritual arena when everyone sees the common goal and moves to the common goal, the internal stuff becomes absolutely inconsequential. And if the church can get its focus on the fact that it's engaged in an incredible spiritual warfare and it doesn't matter, all that petty stuff that is sucking up so much time and energy, what matters is to communicate the saving gospel to a lost world, what matters is to so impact this society for Christ that the elect receive the truth and are redeemed through the instrumentality of our fellowship. That's what matters. With no opponent, with no conflict, with no contest, unity will be lost. That's why generals through the years and coaches have erected straw men to get people to fight an artificial enemy rather than no enemy. And when a church begins to see itself as an end in itself, it is a disaster. This...when you come here that isn't the end, that's the beginning. You're here to be trained to go and reach the world. We face a hostile world. We face a world that rejects God and rejects Christ and it's time for us to stand up and fight that battle. And I'll tell you right now, the army that faces death doesn't have any internal quarrels. It doesn't. It's only concerned about defeating death. Petty internal conflicts are lost in a battle for real issues.

And what is our battle? Back to verse 27, for the faith of the gospel...for the faith of the gospel. What does he mean? The Christian faith, the truth in Christ, the once for all delivered to the saints faith, Jude 3. We are in a conflict to preserve and protect the faith from those who attack and destroy. We are in a conflict to proclaim and preach the faith to those who reject it. Don't lose your prospective, folks. You have a two-fold striving. We are a team, we are athletes together and our common goal is to preserve the Word against hostility and to proclaim the Word to the very hostile people who attack it. Tough battle. Don't lose your prospective.

So many churches spend all their time fussing and fuming about piddly internal stuff that doesn't even matter when they need to be lost in the preservation of and proclamation of the Word of God. So standing was a military analogy. Striving is an athletic analogy, it calls for team work against an opponent who threatens to defeat us all personal matters aside...all personal matters aside. We must proclaim the truth.

The greatest message I could hear while I'm gone is that the church is reaching out evangelistically touching the world, struggling to proclaim Christ to the rejecting world, making a maximum effort. I was interviewed on the radio and somebody said to me, this is a national radio program the other day, they said, "What do you think the church should do about the temptation, The Last Temptation of Christ? What do you feel the church should do?" I'll tell you this, I said on the air, I said, "That is an abomination, that is blasphemy against Jesus Christ but I'll also tell you this, that's not new. Just about everything they put out blasphemes God, blasphemes Christ, desecrates the biblical truth so if we started to do that with one film, where would we end?" I said, "Frankly, which is worse, The Last Temptation of Christ which shows Jesus supposedly in a love relationship with Mary Magdalene or George Burns playing God in a film called O God which may be the ultimate blasphemy of blasphemies." And people I know of in a church go laugh at that and then get all upset about The Last Temptation of Christ. The whole system is set against God, set against Christ, the whole thing is corrupt, beginning to end. And where you going to start? I'll tell you, I said on the air across the nation, I said, "I don't feel that I need to defend God. God will take care of Himself and people who blaspheme His name and blaspheme His Son will not go without retribution." And we have every right to get into the imprecatory psalms and pray down the divine eternal damning judgment of God on people who blaspheme His name. But God will fight His wars. I'm going to fight along with Him happily. But I sure don't want to spend all my time fussing around about who gets what office in the church. That to me is absolutely inane. We have to do what we have to do, folks. As George Sweeting always says, "Somehow the church has got to remember it has to keep the main thing the main thing."

The church is selling out. We talk about evangelism, proclamation, we've got to do that. We've got to strive as a team to win the victory, take the message to this world. Churches selling out...the fastest growing church maybe in this country is totally built around entertainment, totally built around entertainment. I just saw their latest spring concert, Las Vegas show, profanity, kissing, wild dancing, rock music, "Get out of my dreams and into the backseat of my car" was one of the songs. And at the end the guy stood up and said, "In some way, shape or form Jesus Christ has touched all our lives." That was the end and you just desecrate the name of Christ.

Why do they do that? Entertainment. This day is mad with entertainment. It's going to be touch to reach this age. We're going to have to really go after it, folks. I read a book called "Amusing Ourselves to Death." I want to share a little of it with you, by Neil Postman, a 170 pages of great insight. He writes, "Today we must look at the city of Las Vegas, Nevada as a metaphor of our

national character and aspiration." Isn't that interesting? "Its symbol is a 30-foot high cardboard picture of a slot machine and a chorus girl. For Las Vegas is a city entirely devoted to the idea of entertainment and as such proclaims the spirit of a culture in which all public discourse increasingly takes the form of entertainment. Our religion, politics, news, athletics, education and commerce have been transformed into congenial adjuncts of show business, the result is that we are a people on the verge of amusing ourselves to death," end quote.

"Not long ago," he says, "I saw Billy Graham join Shecky Greene, Red Buttons, Dion Warwick, Milton Beryl and other theologians in a tribute to George Burns [a blasphemer of God] who was celebrating himself for surviving 80 years in show business. The Reverend Graham exchanged one liners with Burns about making preparations for eternity. Although the Bible makes no mention of it, the Reverend Graham amused the audience and assured them that God loves those who make people laugh."

It was an honest mistake. He merely mistook NBC for God. He further writes, "Indeed, in America God favors all those who possess both a talent and a format to amuse, whether they be preachers, athletes, entrepreneurs, politicians, teachers or journalists. The media of communication available to a culture are...the media of communication available to a culture are a dominant influence on the formation of the culture's intellectual and social preoccupations." What he is saying is we've been shaped by television. "Writing," he says, "freezes speech and in so doing gives birth to the grammarian, the legitian(?), the rhetorician, the historian the scientist." As soon as you put something in writing, it has to be logical, it has to be something you can study with depths, it has to have evidence and proof and substantiation. And content is the issue and it produces thinking, intellectualizing, cognition. He makes the point that a typographic society that deals with print creates cognitive intellectual culture where you, for example, have mass of people who go sit, stand for seven hours and listen to the Lincoln/Douglas Debates. Three hours by Lincoln, three hours by Douglas and a half an hour rebuttal by each. You show me a crowd in America that would stand and listen to a seven-hour debate between two men on political issues. Huh, how about Nehemiah 8, they stood up and read the Scriptures all day long and the people stood from dawn till sunset and listened to the Bible being read, try that...try that. Now they want 30 minute sermonettes for Christianettes with histrionics and jokes from beginning to end. Why? We've shifted to a telegraphic photographic society, it has shaped our culture with the result that the content of much of our public discourse has become dangerous nonsense. And you can listen to the typical TV preacher and maybe he says something profound once in 30 minutes and maybe he never says it in 30 weeks. There's no reasoned rhetoric, profound logic, exposition is turned off in favor of explosion, sex, murders, crashing cars...wild.

"Compare," he says, "modern preaching, Oral Roberts et al, Jimmy Swaggart," and he named Falwell, Graham, everybody that he sees on TV, "compare them with George Whitfield, Jonathan Edwards and Charles G. Finney if you want to know the difference between the mindset of people

today, absolutely unbelievable. Jonathan Edwards wrote a treatise concerning religious affections in 1746 is one of the most profound works in American history. And he would stand and read off of a page his message with no intonation and people would cry to God for mercy. Why? Because they had been trained to think. Now you stand up and give them a reasoned approach to Scripture, they're asleep in three minutes because nobody has been shot, nothing has blown up, nothing has exploded and nobody has said, "Now this..." and a cartoon character bounced through a McDonald store. They can't deal with it...they can't deal with it." (Applause)

Well, you're getting the message. Today's preaching is contentless. And TV trivializes everything. Absolutely everything is trivialized by television. Even religion is trivialized. You have some guy up there trying to preach and as soon as he's done, on comes a commercial cartoon. Even the news is trivialized. "Well, today an airliner was shot out of the sky over the Persian Gulf and 290 people perished. Now this...." And on comes a beer ad. The trivialization of everything.

He asks the question, does Postman in the book, "When is the last time you heard something on the news that changed anything in your life? The answer is never. What do we do with all that trivia that we can't use, we invent games like Trivial Pursuit so we can use it. We've got it, we might as well use it. It has no relation to life. Devastating to gospel presentation. Where is the Jonathan Edwards of our day? The problem in our day is his name is Amy Grant. The ultimate entertainment is the ultimate in Christianity. People are into emotional gratification. They're in to popularity. They want to feel, they don't want to think. Christian church platforms look like Las Vegas stages. Vaudeville has replaced the Scripture...no context, no content."

I don't think Christianity can work on television because the medium of TV trivializes it. I mean, how serious can you get when you're watching it and some guy starts to talk about Christ and if you want you can flip to something else and see somebody shot or kissed or thrown over a cliff or a stupid ad for deodorant? And then you flip back. It trivializes everything. You say, "Why you telling us?" Because this challenges us, folks. We have a tremendous task. We are committed totally to teaching God's Word. We've got a lot of empty seats. I'll tell you right now that if we had a Las Vegas show on this stage, it wouldn't be empty. This is the mindset of our day. It isn't like it was 20 years ago. People don't want to read books. They don't want to think. We're going to have a tough time in this culture. We better get about the business of doing what we ought to do and not be standing around looking at our own navels trying to figure out our own little internal problems. Struggling together to preserve the sacred serious truth of God may not be a battle against outsiders only, it may be a battle against insiders...struggle against the shallow churches that want to trivialize the truth and reduce it to amusement. The struggle to proclaim may not just be a contest for men's hearts, it may be a contest for men's minds. And we're going to have a mindless generation, we've already got one. They just want entertainment, nothing more. And each new one will be worse. And then you stand up like I do for 50 minutes and try to communicate the Word of God to these people and except for the Holy Spirit somehow allowing it to sink in, it just does not compute. What a

challenge. We better be aggressive.

Listen, we better be aggressive. We're in a dangerous time in our church history. I received in the mail an interesting letter laying out a course that is being taught. I want to explain it to you very briefly. It charted the history of churches, great churches. Their peak period of growth in a great ministry was 20 to 25 years, right where we are since I've come. That was the apex. From then on everything went down hill. When a church is born, they said, it takes one person to reach one, so the ratio is one to one. They're excited, they're enthused, they're thrilled, they're blessed. And we saw this church double every two years...the first almost 10 years. One to one to one to one...we were doubling. It took one to reach one. They said usually by the third year it takes three people to reach one and the process of outreach is slowing down as the church gets more internally complex. By ten years it takes eight persons to reach one. Fifteen to 20 years, somewhere between 8 and 15, perhaps. By the time a church is 50 years old it takes 89 people to reach one.

Why? The early years concentrate on evangelism. That evangelism takes the church to a peak. Then the church becomes preoccupied with pastoral care, preoccupied with shepherding, preoccupied with budget, preoccupied with internal systems and it eats itself up. It can't maintain its unity anymore because it doesn't have a common enemy that they're fighting. It's narcissistic. Evangelism isn't the reason to exist. Fellowship, teaching, caring, socializing, interacting, counseling...it stops confronting the world, it shrivels.

We have a great challenge. We've got a great struggle. Verse 28 he says, in the struggle don't be alarmed by your opponents. That's good news, isn't it? That's a word used, that word "alarmed" used never another place in the Bible, that's the only place it's every used but it's used in classical Greek to refer to startling horses. Don't be startled, don't be bolted or jolted by your adversaries, your enemies. Why? Because it's a sign of destruction for them but of salvation for you and that too from God.

What does he mean? Their hostility toward you is a sign that they're going to be destroyed. And it's a sign that you're going to be saved in the end. I mean, if they're attacking you, that proves whose side they're on and that proves whose side you're on, right? I'll never forget when those demons started screaming at me up in the top of the fireside room that night, "Get him out...get him out," and I realized they knew whose side I was on. That was a sign to me of my ultimate salvation and of their ultimate destruction. They were my enemies and they knew I was God's servant. So don't be worried about your opponents, just do it, be bold and courageous and their hostility is a sign of destruction on them and of ultimate salvation for you, you're going to win. And both of those things are the work of God, that's what he says at the end of verse 28, they're both the work of God.

The last word, and I'll just mention it, time's gone. Suffering...suffering. What does he say? Expect it, if it's easy, it's not right, if it's right it's not easy. If a church is what it ought to be it won't be easy,

you will suffer for you to it has been granted for Christ's sake not only to believe in Him but also to suffer for His sake, it is a gift of grace. He uses the word here related to charis grace, God has chosen you not only for salvation, He's chosen you for suffering and He's chosen you to experience, Paul says, the very same conflict which you saw in me. You saw it when I was at Philippi, Acts 16, and you now hear about it in me here in Rome. It goes with the territory...suffering, suffering.

I love that, verse 29, "He has granted you," ekchariste(?) from charis, grace, "He has graciously gifted you not only with faith but with suffering." Did you know suffering is a gift from God? You say, "He gave me a gift of suffering?" It's a gracious gift, all the health, wealth, prosperity teachers need to look at this again. Suffering is a gracious gift. When you suffer for hostility for the faith, persecution, animosity, rejection.

You say, "Why is it a gift? What's so good about it?" It assures you of your salvation, doesn't it? Doesn't it? When they attack you, it tells you whose side you're on. It produces hope of heaven. It perfects you for usefulness. It provides union with Christ, the fellowship of His sufferings. It brings joy due to the privilege, like the early church said, they counted it all joy to suffer for His sake. It leads to eternal reward. It strengthens the church. It wins the lost. Paul's suffering did, he said that in Philippians 1:12 to 14. Ultimately it glorifies the Lord. Expect it...expect it and don't feel alone, verse 30 says, you're not alone. All the faithful servants of the Lord have suffered.

Well, I had a lot on my heart this morning. I just want to say it in conclusion. It doesn't matter whether I'm here or gone, I want to hear that you are behaving yourself and that you're living in a manner that is worthy of the gospel that we know and believe and preach and proclaim. And that means you're standing firm. That means you have one spirit, one mind. That means you're struggling like a team to win the victory and that means you're suffering the hostility of the world. That's what I want to hear because that is what happens in a church that's behaving itself. Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for this straight forward word from Paul to our hearts. We praise You for it. Apply it in Christ's name. Amen.

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