

Philippians 1:27-2:4

Summary: Paul emphasizes the need to live a life worthy of the gospel. He then encourages the Philippians to strengthen their desire for unity as a safeguard against the suffering that they are bound to face for the sake of Jesus.

²⁷ The one thing I would stress is this: your public behaviour must match up to the gospel of the king. That way, whether I do come and see you or whether I remain elsewhere, the news that I get about you will indicate that you are standing firm with a single spirit, struggling side by side with one united intent for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸ and not letting your opponents intimidate you in any way. This is a sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation—a sign that comes from God. ²⁹ Yes: God has granted you that, on behalf of the king, you should not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake. ³⁰ You are engaged in the same struggle which you once watched me go through; and, as you now hear, I'm still going through it.

^{2:1} So if our shared life in the king brings you any comfort; if love still has the power to make you cheerful; if we really do have a partnership in the spirit; if your hearts are at all moved with affection and sympathy—² then make my joy complete! Bring your thinking into line with one another.

Here's how to do it. Hold on to the same love; bring your innermost lives into harmony; fix your minds on the same object. ³ Never act out of selfish ambition or vanity; instead, regard everybody else as your superior. ⁴ Look after each other's best interests, not your own.

How does Paul's description of a united Christian community compare with your experiences?

Denominationalism inherently sends a message of a deeply divided church. We have all probably experienced Christians who relish more in what separates us rather than that which unites us. However, when the church can unite around a message, it can be very powerful.

What do you think about Paul encouraging the Philippians to "suffer for his sake"?

Some suffering for the sake of the gospel should be expected of us because it is part of the bargain we make to live a godly lifestyle (see Romans 8:17b "we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him."; Paul will also make a similar statement later in this letter). This also echoes Jesus in Luke 9:23-24, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it." By taking up a godly life, we place our worldly desires on a lower pedestal than Jesus, and this will naturally conflict with the motivations of those around us. So while it is true that we probably won't ever be incarcerated for our beliefs, we nevertheless have to expect that spreading the good news about Jesus will sometimes be a challenging burden in our earthly lives.

How does Paul think we should bear the burden of this suffering?

He tells the Philippians to share their trials with each other. While we will have our challenges, we do not need to face them alone, and we can be strengthened by our fellow Christians. Paul appeals to the power of love to uplift and strengthen us. Paul sees this as a critical aspect of having "partnership in the [Holy] spirit." In other words, God will also help to share

these burdens when we are willing to help others with "affection and sympathy"

How do verses 3 and 4 relate to the teaching of Jesus?

It is evocative of Jesus' teaching on humility, Mark 10:43-44 "whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all". One could use power and authority to force opinions on people, but Jesus and Paul believe that the only true greatness is to be a servant; recall how Paul described himself and Timothy in the opening of this letter.

Has there been a situation in your life where you have had to suffer for the sake of Jesus? If you shared these concerns with your fellow Christian, how did that make you feel?

We know that there are disputes within Christendom as a whole which are causing deep divisions between denominations. What do you think Paul would say about how to overcome these differences? How can you be a part of that solution locally?