

LIVE UP TO THE GOSPEL

Philippians 1:27-2:11

Before we had so much access to mass media of hundreds of TV channels, the internet and facebook, people throughout our country were less homogeneous than they are today. Not only were there distinctive speech patterns that would identify a person as being from Boston, the Midwest, West Coast, the deep south, or even Texas, but there were some characteristics of behavior that we tended to associate with people from various areas of the country. I can recall working with people who had transferred from New York to the Tennessee area and the problems that resulted from the way they interacted with other people. They were very direct and abrupt and those who were used to a more oblique and more gentle way of communication, thought they were being rude. You may have experienced people from Texas who always had the best and biggest and most expensive “whatever” the subject. We might think that, in a lot of cases, the people sort of lived up to the stereotype of whatever region they were from.

Speaking of stereotypes, how would you describe the stereotypical Christian? The list might include a number of negative and positive characteristics such as prayerful, pushy, obedient, intolerant, trustworthy, hypocritical, truthful, deceitful, wise, foolish, caring, and insensitive. Which of these behaviors do you think would or should be included in actions that are representative of what is involved when we “live up to the gospel?” We want to look at four aspects that should influence the way we live up to the gospel: what we do, what we have as the top priority in our life, the way we think about ourselves, and what we say.

Our Conduct - 1:27-30

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 will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; ²⁸ 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. ²⁹ For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, ³⁰ experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear *to be* in me. Philippians 1:27-30 (NASB95)

Paul was not at all sure what was going to happen to him. He was ready for whatever the outcome might be. One possibility that would impact the Christians at Philippi was that he might be released from prison and he could make a visit to their area. Whether that would happen or not was not his main concern. The most important concern he had was that their behavior or “conduct” was what it should be considering that they had responded to the gospel message and were now members of the family of God. When we see the word “worthy” we usually think in terms of “being deserving.” If we say that God is worthy of our praise, then “deserving” would be the correct idea. The Greek term that is translated worthy can also mean “to be aligned with” something else. This is the idea that Paul is using here.

We hear a lot today about political correctness in what we say or the way we behave. The word translated “conduct” is a form of the word from which we get the word “politics.” If Paul were writing this advice in today’s vernacular, he might advise us to be “politically correct” from the point of view of our alignment with the gospel in all our behavior. If the message of the gospel is what is guiding believers individually, then the result will be that the entire body will be in agreement on issues that really matter. This is important for the success of the church in its impact on the culture or society in which we live. If the church would stand firm and be in agreement on important issues, then the influence of the gospel message would have more effect on those who are not part of the family of God. D. A. Carson has noted that the greatest hindrance to the advancement of the gospel is the inconsistency of Christians. It is almost like

we not all on the same team. When Paul used the term “striving together” he was not emphasizing the idea of “striving” as much as being together as an athletic team would or should be. Each individual may have a different assignment, but everyone on the team has the same objective.

The need to take a firm, united stance is all the more important when there is opposition to the principles of the word of God from those outside of the church. The world, the flesh and the devil resist the Kingdom of God and oppose the citizens of the Kingdom. They ridicule and intimidate Christians in an attempt to cancel out our effectiveness. We have no reason to be intimidated or frightened because Christ has overcome the world, has defeated Satan and has put to death the fleshly nature on the cross.

Why would Christians who do not fear the authority of man but "fear God only" be a sign to the world that it is doomed to be destroyed? The argument might go something like this. A person who would risk death and suffering would be relying on a power that is beyond their own strength. Therefore, one would conclude that their beliefs are based on truth and that they have assurance of this truth. Truth will not retreat and it will not go away, but it will prevail. (This may not be a valid argument as to what this verse means, since we could point to suicide bombers and argue that their lack of fear is proof of the validity of their beliefs.)

Verse 29 tells us that it is by God’s grace that we have been privileged to believe in Christ and have been privileged to suffer for Christ. The first part of this is fairly straightforward and we can readily accept the idea that it is a privilege to be able to believe since God provides the faith that allows us to believe. Sometime we have some difficulty in seeing the “privilege” related to suffering.

It is likely that we may indeed suffer for standing for the truth, but our victory is in being faithful to the truth even as Jesus was. If we live as He lived, then we will encounter opposition as He did and suffer for the cause of Christ. We will never know complete victory over self until we realize that it is a privilege to not only believe on (trust in) Jesus but also to suffer for His sake. We can never be worthy to be saved because salvation cannot be earned, but we can live a life that gives evidence of our salvation once the presence and power of the Holy Spirit invades and pervades our lives.

Matthew Henry makes the argument that suffering is a privilege when such suffering brings glory to God which should be our ultimate purpose in life. He also contends that when we suffer for Christ sake that we will have a great reward in heaven (Matt 5:11-12).

Barnes New Testament Notes points out that suffering for Christ is a privilege because we resemble the Lord Jesus, and are united with him in trials; because we have evidence that we are his, if trials come upon us in his cause; because we are engaged in a good cause, and the privilege of maintaining such a cause is worth much of suffering; and because it will be connected with a brighter crown and more exalted honor in heaven.

Our Priority - 2:1-4

¹ Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, ² make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. ³ Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; ⁴ do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Philippians 2:1-4 (NASB95)

Paul continued in his appeal for unity among the believers at Philippi. The reasons we can have unity are fourfold. The encouragement in Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. In John 14, Jesus told the disciples that He would send the “Comforter” or “Encourager” (meaning the Holy Spirit) to be with them and in them. Since we have the same Spirit

indwelling us, then there is a strong basis for unity. Regarding “love,” Paul wrote to the church at Rome that the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. As this love overflows from us to others, then we have assurance (evidence) that God abides in us and His love is being perfected in us (1 John 4:12). Unity that is based on truth and love is based on a sure foundation.

The fellowship of the Spirit could mean our fellowship with the Holy Spirit or it could simply mean the “spirit-to-spirit” connection that we should have with others who have been born again of the Spirit of God. The affection and compassion (or tenderhearted mercy) that God showed to us in Christ should be reproduced in us toward others. All these will result in unity in the church.

We find in verse two the expression of unity in that we will have some distinct similarity or “sameness” that would characterize or “stereotype” us as Christians. We certainly should be in agreement with regard to the things we love and hold dear. The phrase of “being of one accord” used in the KJV is rendered “united in spirit” in the NAS and “joined in soul” in Darby’s translation. This unity or “sameness” on a soul level appears to be what Paul was trying to communicate to them. When we have a “sameness” on a soul level and agreement with regard to what we love and hold dear, then we will not have any real problems in working toward the same purpose or objective.

If each of us is letting Christ live His life in us, and since Christ is going to be in agreement with Himself, then we will find agreement with each other as we find His will in any situation. What Paul is saying is "if we have found a place of rest (from our own labors) in Christ and are comfortable and have peace with that position, then we will not be acting out of the old fleshly nature toward each other." We will supernaturally consider the feelings of others and will have empathy with them. You have likely heard the statement that the key to communication is to "seek first to understand and then be understood." We are to listen empathically and to respond with empathy. Most of us don't listen at all and wind up responding emphatically with our own agendas and opinions. That is not Jesus working in you, that is the world, the flesh and the devil.

Our Attitude - 2:5-8

⁵ Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Philippians 2:5-8 (NASB95)

The mind is our thought process, our frame of reference, our attitude, our approach to and view of life. If Christ is in us, then we can choose to let Him be in control or we can choose to do it our way. Christians have a choice. Jesus had a choice. He did not let the fact that He is God prevent Him from coming to us in human form so that we could know Him. He did not take the attitude that "being God" was something that He had to hold on to. The fact that he took on the role of a servant and was limited in time and space in the human body did not diminish His worth. He was still God. The fact that He suffered death for us and became sin for us did not make Him any less God than He was. In the same way, if we do what the world considers to be a menial task by helping someone who is poor, if we befriend a person who is outcast by society, or if we get down on the floor and take care of little children in the nursery it does not diminish our value or take away from our dignity.

If Jesus had been only human, then He would not have been able to do what He did since pride would have prevented Him from doing so. It was the fact that He is God that made it

possible. It is only because Christ is in us that we can do the humble and lowly things that really minister to other people. Jesus was exalted to His place at the right hand of the Father and because He is in us and we are in Him, we too are with Him in the heavenlies. The ultimate outcome of all things is that Jesus will be recognized as Head of all things in heaven and in earth. Now He is Head of all things to the church, but eventually He will be all and in all.

Our Confession - 2:9-11

⁹For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:9-11 (NASB95)

Let's look at Matthew 23:12, James 4:10, and 1Peter 5:6. What is the common theme in these verses? God will exalt the humble. How humble or humiliated can one be? Starting with the birth of Jesus and continuing with His life and His ministry and especially looking at His arrest, trial, and crucifixion, we would conclude that in all the circumstances He encountered that humility was ever present. His humility was climaxed (or reached its depth) with His death on the cross. Because of this obedience in humility, He was "highly exalted" by God.

How high can one be exalted? We see in verse nine that He was given the name which is above every name. What does that mean? The idea of a person's name is more than what someone calls you when they address you. When we talk about slandering a person, we might say that his or her name was dragged through the mud. In that use of the term "name" we mean the person's reputation or the character of the person. For example, if I were to mention the name Benedict Arnold, what is the reputation or character associated with that name? What about Albert Einstein or Thomas Edison or Mother Teresa?

Think of all the good and beneficial qualities that we could list about a person. I would say that the highest of these would be associated with the Lord Jesus as exemplified by His life, death, resurrection and ascension to heaven. His reputation (name) is higher than the reputation (name) of any other being you can think of.

If Jesus is recognized as being of greater character, ability, power, and reputation than anyone else, then what will be the reasonable reaction to this realization? We see in verse ten that "every knee shall bow" **at** the name of Jesus. If we take this literally to mean that everyone should have a physical reaction of bending their knees at the mention of His name, then we miss the intent. The literal name of Jesus was fairly common among the Jewish people (being equivalent to Joshua) and we even see that name being used by people in Hispanic communities. John Gill's assessment is that this is a ridiculous conclusion. He points out (and rightly so) that a better translation is "**in** the name of Jesus" which gives us a different emphasis of what our response should be upon realization of the truth of Who Jesus is.

The essence of this passage is that the evidence presented to us by the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus will cause all to acknowledge that He is Lord of all. Most translations following this with the phrase "to the glory of God, the Father." While we can legitimately make the argument that confessing the Lordship of Jesus glorifies the Father, the interpretation could also mean that our confession is that the Lord Jesus Christ has the same glory as God the Father. In other words, His exaltation above all in heaven and earth or under the earth is proof that He is One with the Father.

Maybe the question we should be asking of ourselves is simply this: What sort of name (reputation) do we have as a person? Is it a name that is in alignment with the gospel of Christ or would it be contrary to who we are in Him?