

The Faith of the Gospel

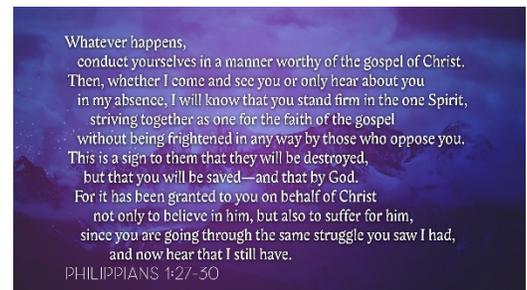
We are pressing on with our series from the New Testament book of Philippians that we are calling **Joyride**... because **joy** is prominent theme that runs throughout Pastor Paul's letter to the church that he planted in Philippi.



We started with *The Fellowship of the Gospel*, last week was *The Furtherance of the Gospel*, and today is the **Faith of the Gospel** as we wrap up chapter 1.

It is a short passage today, so let's get started by reading it all together:

²⁷ 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, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel 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. ²⁹ For 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. ¹



“Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel...” That is a powerful, potentially complicated, statement... one that can reveal our grasp on the Gospel.

This is an exciting season at our house since we have a teacher in the midst. Laurie's classes wrap up at the end of the week, so she is in the midst of collecting and grading final projects and such. There will be a few more days of buttoning things up and then Laurie will enjoy what I hear are the three best things about being a teacher: June, July, and August.

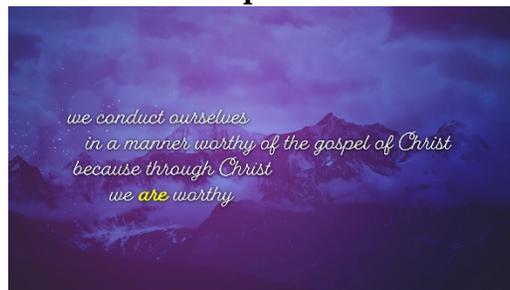
While we are not all teachers (at least not in the formal sense like many here), we have all been students. We know that while we might prefer *multiple-choice* questions on a test (teachers like them too, since they are easier to grade), a better way to test our knowledge of a topic is often with essay questions, or at least short-answer questions.

If I wanted to test someone's understanding of the Gospel, I might put this verse on the test, asking a question along the lines of: “In Galatians 1:27, Paul said to *conduct yourselves in a manner worth of the gospel of Christ*. Explain why such conduct is important.”

¹ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Php 1:27–30). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

I am confident that some would answer such a question along the lines of how people generally think about religion... that we have to *behave* before we *belong*... that we have to conduct ourselves in certain ways so as to be worthy... that our *rule following* is tested in hopes that we get the passing grade. That is a reasonable answer... but *that would be a failing answer to the question.*

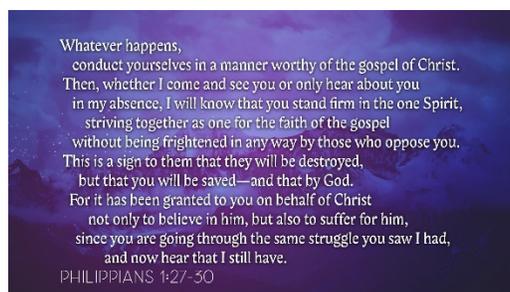
It is true, that most every other religion says that we have to follow the rules ***in order to*** be accepted by God, but the Gospel turns that notion upside down; the Gospel says that we follow the rules ***because*** we are accepted by God. In the words of our text: we conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ because through Christ we ***are*** worthy. It is not a matter of us conducting ourselves in such a way as to elicit a response ***from*** God (approval)... but rather our conduct is our response ***to*** God's acceptance.



We learn more about the *purpose* of our conduct from the words that follow in our text.

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 Spirit²

Here again, if we approach this verse with our typical preconceptions about religion, we might view this an opportunity for the Philippians to *pass inspection*. In this case it is not God's inspection that they would need to pass, but one of God's generals, Paul, who was *inspecting the troops*.



Is that the picture that we should have in mind? That Paul intended to judge the Philippians, either in person or at a distance... checking on their unity, their striving for the faith, their fierce readiness, not fearing any opponent?



If we believe the Gospel, that we are saved because of what Christ has done, that we cannot earn our standing before God by our behavior, but rather through faith in Jesus... then why would we think that we would need to *pass inspection* from any other?

Here again, this is how common perceptions of Christians are wrong. It seems that many in our culture believe that Christians are occupied with judging others.

² The New International Version. (2011). (Php 1:27). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Haven't you heard the objection that Christians are *too judgmental*? Our culture thinks that we are roaming the ranks, looking for those to call out, ones who do not pass inspection.

But I don't think that is what is going on here in our text. I do not believe that Paul has it in mind to *inspect the troops* in Philippi in order to pass judgement.

Nevertheless... when confronted with the behavior of others, I do believe it **is** an

opportunity for judgement. That is right, observing the behavior of others **is** an opportunity for judgement... not judgement of them, but rather judgement of ourselves. Paul wasn't longing to see and hear about the Philippians for an *inspection*; he was looking for *encouragement*. He wanted to see them standing firm in the Holy Spirit so that he could rejoice. He wanted to see them in unity, striving together as one, so that he could be encouraged. He wanted to see them without fear in order to strengthen his own resolve.

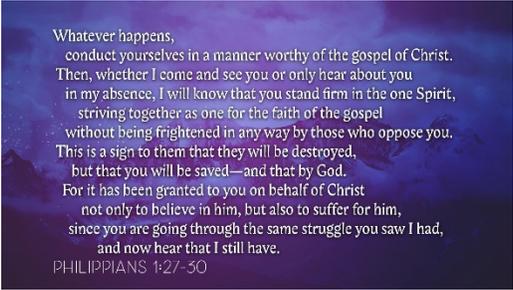
One of the best ways for us to be reminded that the Gospel is real and powerful is to see it in action through the lives of those around us. We carry that call to encourage others by the way we conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel.

The *flipside* of the impact of our conduct is evident in our text as well:

This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God.³

Our conduct can encourage... and it can convict. It can bring cheer... and it can bring distress. There are these *two sides of the coin* of conduct.

It is fun to be a Mariners fan these days. They are tied for first in the AL West. Right now, in all of Major League Baseball, the Mariners are one of only six teams with a winning percentage over 60; it is looking good for our guys.



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,
striving together as one for the faith of the gospel
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.
For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ
not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him,
since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had,
and now hear that I still have.

PHILIPPIANS 1:27-30

³ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Php 1:28). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

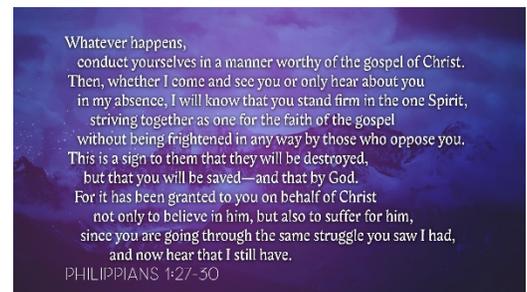
I went to a game a recently and had a great time; it was one of those one-run wins. Good times and good food... but there was one *sour* moment as I was confronted with street preachers who were telling everyone they were going to hell. It made me cringe... even a bit sick to my stomach.

Now hear me... I am not necessarily opposed to street preaching. Go ahead and spread the Good News as best you can... but I don't think it helps to lead with a message about "the lake of fire for all sinners." People need to hear that *God so loves the world...* that Jesus is the Way. They don't need to be told they are going to hell; they likely know it, or feel like they are already there. I don't get Christians who think that their main job in life is to tell others they are going to hell... to judge others.



I can't imagine that those *knuckleheads* I encountered outside of Safeco convinced anyone of anything positive. I would imagine that if they did anything at all they did *damage*. I'm also confident that they would have done far more for the Gospel if they would have *ditched* their signs and loudspeakers and picked up some trash in Jesus name, or did some other acts of service or kindness.

Look at our text. Behavior and judgement **are** tied together... but it isn't the way that may be commonly perceived. It is not that Christians are charged to judge the behavior of others. It is that Christians are supposed to behave, and that is a sign by which others will know; they'll judge themselves.



We don't save ourselves, and we certainly don't condemn others. Both, as our text says, are "by God."

So... we observe others, both to find encouragement in faith, and to judge ourselves with the hopeful result of turning to faith.

And then there is this...

²⁹ For 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. ⁴

Suffering? *Come on man... why suffering?*

Isn't it obvious?

⁴ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Php 1:29–30). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

This passage is teaching us that our behavior matters. Behavior matters, not so much as a matter of gaining God's acceptance... but it matters to demonstrate that we are accepted. Behavior matters because it proclaims the Gospel. Behavior matters because believers are encouraged by our behavior, and those who do not yet believe see their own destructive path and some might turn from it.

Behavior matters... and it seems that the behavior that matters most is the way we persevere while suffering. It seems that the best way to see what is inside us is to squeeze us.

It is what is **inside** that matters, right? Or is it? Is that the message of our culture, that it is what is inside? Or are we mostly concerned with the outsides of things, our appearances? Our popular culture may be mostly concerned with appearances and our outside image; what about church culture?

There is no doubt that God is mostly concerned with our hearts, our insides, matters of spirit, soul, and mind. He sees and knows it all. That is where the Gospel works... replacing our cold hearts of stone with warm hearts of flesh.

So how do we get that which is inside out? How do we get the insides that God is changing with the Gospel to the outside where all can see?

Let's think about matching the outsides with the insides.

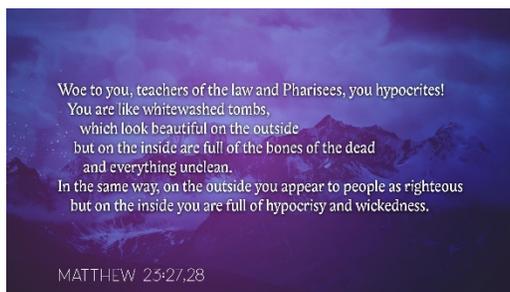
Suppose I had three apples.

And suppose I told you that one of these apples looks great on the outside, but inside it is rotten and wormy. Would you like that one?



Jesus talked about such a condition from time to time. In one case he described it as *whitewashed tombs*. He wasn't street preaching to the masses, but rather speaking directly to the religious leaders, saying:

²⁷ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. ²⁸ In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness."⁵



The outside looked great, perfectly pious and such... but *squeeze it* and out would come the rotten stuff inside.

⁵ The New International Version. (2011). (Mt 23:27–28). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Suppose I told you that the one that looked pretty crummy on the outside, was actually pretty good on the inside. Would you rather have that one?

Jesus told a story along these lines, again talking to the religious leaders of the day, and saying:

²⁸ “What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’

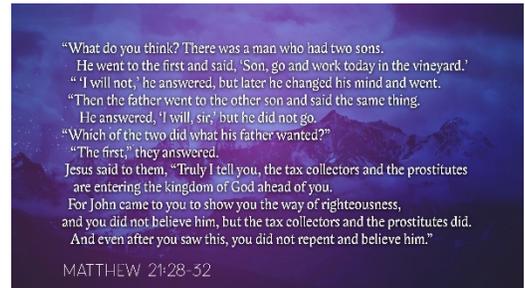
²⁹ “ ‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

³⁰ “Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.

³¹ “Which of the two did what his father wanted?”

“The first,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³² For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him. ⁶



In these cases, the outward appearance was more about *what was said* than *how they looked*, but the same concept applies. The outward appearance did not match the inward reality. The son who said he would obey didn't, and the son who first said he wouldn't obey eventually did.

I've actually been compared to that first son... the one that the outward appearance did not match the inward reality, the one who first appeared to be disobedient but proved to be good.

There is one among us *expert* in the behavior of Dan Neary. Laurie, after 30 years of marriage, knows me pretty well. From time to time she points out this flaw of mine... she calls it being *prickly*. She reminds me that my resting face is too serious (sometimes even angry). She reminds me that sometimes I am perceived as being a bit obstinate or even belligerent... but knows that I reliably come through for people. I suppose I'm a bit like that ugly apple... not as shiny and awesome on the outside, but when squeezed some good stuff is revealed.



⁶ The New International Version. (2011). (Mt 21:28–32). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

That is a *good* apple... but I suspect we would all prefer the **best** apple. Suppose I told you that the third apple was both beautiful on the outside and delicious on the inside. Wouldn't we all choose that apple?

The beautiful outsides matching the insides... that is what is meant in our text:

²⁷ Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.⁷

Our behavior matching what Christ has accomplished for us and what Christ is accomplishing in us... conducting ourselves worthy because He has made us worthy.

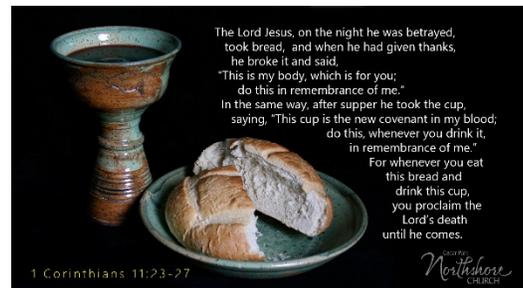
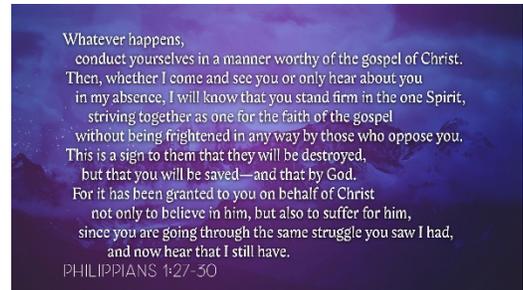
Proclaiming the Gospel not merely in words, but in action... our conduct revealing lives revolutionized and resurrected by the Gospel.

It is the first Sunday of the month, that time when we are sure to come to the Lord's Table... remembering Jesus with the bread and the cup. These symbols represent so much to us who believe... it represents God's love for us, and the extent to which God would go to have us know his love.

In all that Communion *can* mean, it certainly includes **suffering**. We don't merely have Paul's example of suffering, or the countless others who have followed through the ages; we chiefly have Jesus as an example of suffering. And we know what was displayed by Jesus when He was *squeezed*... when crushed, bruised, pierced, and crucified... we see that He is who He said He is... we see God's love.

With the bread we are reminded that He gave His body; and with the cup we are reminded that He gave His blood. He gave His life so that we could truly have life... now and forever.

Today is a day to believe... taking these precious symbols and believing again. Putting aside anything that would hold us back, and leaning in. Today is a day to trust God to work in us and through us... even in suffering, let people see the real life of the Gospel in us and through us (perhaps *especially* through suffering).



⁷ The New International Version. (2011). (Php 1:27). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.