

Word for the Year of 2021: Realign

Thesis: Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Text: Philippians 1:27-30

Let's read Philippians 1:27-30.

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 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 on 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 (Philippians 1:27-30 NIV).

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 (Philippians 1:27-30 NT Wright).

When I was growing up, I remember some of the things that my dad used to tell me.

- “When you leave this house, act like a McGee. You are a representative out there of our family. So, bring honor to our name.”
- When my dad sent me to the hardware store or somewhere for company business, he would say, “Tell them you are Joe McGee’s son. You are my son, and the owner will take care of you.”

- My dad has been around horses throughout his life. He has raised them since I was in middle school. He poured his life into working and showing Quarter Horses. Along the way, he began transporting horses across the country. Just like in everything else, my dad has given it his all and he has been successful at showing and transporting horses.

As a seventh grader, I remember going to the stable where the horses were kept outside our small town. My dad would say, “Don’t show fear to that horse. Show that horse who is the boss. If you are afraid, they will know it and will run all over you.” My dad knew that horses, dogs, and other animals could sense fear and take advantage of it.

Those statements from my dad were a lot like what Paul told the Philippians whom he loved. The Lord wanted to remind the Philippians through Paul of how they were to live, act, and be in this world.

Our King wants us to align with what he says, with what he does, and how he feels.

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

- Living in a manner worthy of the gospel stands throughout this book as Paul’s ultimate goal for the Philippians.
- **Where we are out of alignment, we are called to realign:** *whatever happens [with whatever you face, with whatever you go through, with whatever comes your way], conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.*

This imperative-- *whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ--* **calls for steadfastness, unity, and courage, even in the face of suffering.**

1. **Steadfastness:** *stand firm in one spirit (Philippians 1:27).*
 - a. Don’t give up; don’t give in. If you don’t quit, you win.
 - b. Steadfastness is about having done all, stand (Ephesians 6:10-18).
 - c. And whatever happens and whatever you go through, stand in one spirit with others, not grumbling about others, blaming others, or dividing from others. In other words, *stand firm in one spirit.*
2. **Unity:** *contending as one for the faith of the gospel (Philippians 1:27).*
 - a. Paul stresses partnership and unity in a variety of ways:
 - i. “partnership in the gospel” (1:5);
 - ii. “partakers with me of grace” (1:7);

- iii. “striving side by side for the faith” (1:27);
 - iv. “served with me in the gospel” (2:22);
 - v. “my brother, and fellow worker, and fellow soldier” (2:25);
 - vi. “join in imitating me” (3:17);
 - vii. “labored side by side with me” (4:3);
 - viii. “partnership with me in giving and receiving” (4:15).
 - b. Paul also makes frequent calls for unity. He wants to see the believers “standing firm in one spirit” and striving side by side “with one mind” (e.g., 1:27; 4:1). He asks them to have “the same mind,” “the same love,” and to be in “full accord” and of “one mind” (2:2). Paul calls the Philippians to “think” the same way as Paul and to imitate his example (3:15). Euodia and Syntyche must have the same mind or “agree in the Lord” (4:2).
 - c. The need for a unified mindset is a dominant focus of Philippians, as Paul uses the word “think” (φρονέω, *phroneō*) 10 times throughout the letter (1:7; 2:2 [twice], 2:5; 3:15 [twice], 3:19; 4:2, 4:10 [twice]). In all the rest of Paul’s letters, φρονέω (*phroneō*) occurs just 13 times; in the New Testament outside of Paul’s letters, it occurs only three times (Matt 16:23; Mark 8:33; Acts 28:22). (*Lexham Bible Commentary*.)
3. **Courage: without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you (Philippians 1:28).**
 - a. **Fear is a natural emotion.**
 - i. In the face of clear and present danger (acute anxiety), it is helpful to respond instinctively, like racing to stop a child from going into the street in front of a passing vehicle.
 - ii. However, we are not to be ruled by fearfulness or chronic anxiety, nor are we to let fearfulness or chronic anxiety control us.
 - iii. Rather, we choose to figure out thoughtfully **why we feel threatened** and how the Lord wants us to respond in the face any perceived threat.
 - b. **We were created in the image of God to be courageous.**
 - i. The Lord wants to help us to respond in his strength and courage instead of our fear and discouragement.
 - ii. “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go” (*Joshua 1:9 NIV*).
4. **Action: Reflect on whether or not you are conducting yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, whatever happens.**
 - a. Where we are out of alignment, we are called to realign: *whatever happens [with whatever you face, with whatever you go through, with*

whatever comes your way], conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

- b. What is the Lord putting his finger on in your life? Take time to lift up this question to the Lord, to listen, to pay attention, and to respond to the Lord (realign).
 - c. Good news: Where you are out of alignment, the Lord invites you to realign.
5. **Action: Reflect on whether or not your life aligns with steadfastness, unity, and courage.**
- a. Examen:
 - i. Where do you respond to whatever happens with giving up, giving in, or quitting, instead of remaining steadfast?
 - ii. Where do you try to live out the gospel of Christ out of independence, self-reliance, inauthenticity, divisiveness, or disunity, instead of pursuing partnership and unity with the Lord and others on mission with Jesus?
 - iii. Where are you being frightened or discouraged by opposition or voices from within or without, instead of accessing the strength and courage of the Lord?
 - b. What is the Lord putting his finger on in your life? Take time to lift up this question to the Lord, to listen, to pay attention, and to respond to the Lord (realign).
 - c. Good news: Where you are out of alignment, the Lord invites you to realign.

When the Philippians stand together in the faith and are not intimidated by their opposition, they show that their salvation and the destruction of their opponents are “from God.”

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 on 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 (Philippians 1:28-30 NIV).

One scholar says it like this.

‘Don’t let your opponents intimidate you,’ Paul tells the Philippians (verse 28). [Note: remember my story above about not fearing a horse.] From the first-century Mediterranean world to the twenty-first century in China, in the Sudan, and in many other places, there have been plenty of people determined to stamp out this Christian ‘nonsense’ and to use every trick in the book to do so.

And in the post-Christian West, today, the forces of scepticism and cynicism within our culture are extremely powerful, not least in newspapers and on television. It's easy for Christians to feel intimidated; but Paul insists that we mustn't.

Why not? Don't they have the power to harm us? Well, yes and no. As Jesus said, they can kill the body but not the soul; and the living God is looking after you. More particularly, from Paul's point of view, the whole business of being a Christian is about living by the belief that Jesus is *already* the true Lord of the world. Most of the world doesn't know this yet, so the loyal Christian is inevitably out of step with people all around, and this will result in misunderstanding, hostility and even persecution.

That is why it's all the more important that Christian behaviour in the public sphere should be beyond reproach. The Philippians' public behaviour, as he says, must match up to the gospel. They must not acquire a reputation for being uncivil, boorish or rude. They must be known as honest, reliable, good neighbours, even if people are accusing or attacking them. They mustn't be intimidated into retreating into a private ghetto where they can ignore the rest of the world and nurture their own faith away from it.

At the same time, they must maintain their solid unity of spirit and intention, working together like members of the same sports team all equally intent on winning the game. That's what 'struggling side by side' really means. Appropriate public behaviour and united work for the gospel will together send a signal to opponents: we're not afraid. And that signal is itself part of the gospel message. It functions as a sign to the Christians that they already belong to the coming king, and to their opponents that a new world is beginning in which the threats of the old one don't work any more. (NT Wright. *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.*)

This is such an important point that it's worth spelling it out a bit. Paul's world was familiar with the situation where a great army might be taken over by a new general, who would demand different standards of behaviour and different practices in warfare. News of this would take time to work through the ranks, and many of the old soldiers would prefer to remain loyal to their former general. But those who knew that the new general had indeed taken over and would get his way in the end would be in the position of strength. The fact that they would hold their nerve, believing that the new regime was firmly in place, would itself be a sign to their doubting fellow soldiers that it was actually true.

This is more or less exactly what Paul believes about Jesus. He is the new king; most people don't yet realize it; but those who do must hold their nerve and remain loyal to him, because one day the whole world will acknowledge him as Lord. And that very loyalty itself, that holding of their nerve, will themselves be the sign that the message they are proclaiming is true.

So, too, will their suffering be—and suffering is bound to come, sooner or later, if they really are loyal to Jesus. The world, the opponents of the gospel, will turn on loyal Christians for being out of line, out of step. Try telling people with heavy investments in the Third World that one of the major gospel issues today is global debt, and watch the angry or scornful reaction you get. Try telling people who believe they have the right to inflict their military solutions on the rest of the world—or who make a lot of money from making and selling weapons—that the lordship of Jesus stands for a radically different way of resolving conflict. Try telling people whose lives revolve around sexual immorality that the Lord Jesus summons them to use their bodies in a way that honours the world's creator. Or, in Paul's case, try saying 'Jesus is Lord' under the very noses of people who are living by the 'gospel' that 'Caesar is lord' ...

Which gospel issues does your community face right now? Where is it important for you and your church to hold your nerve and remain unafraid in the face of opposition? (NT Wright. *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.*)

This imperative-- whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ-- calls for steadfastness, unity, and courage, and joy, even in the face of opposition and suffering.

Our King wants us to align with his joy (John 15:9-17). *I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete (John 15:11 NIV).* **So, joy is another important way to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.**

- Paul expresses thankfulness and joy through prayer for the Philippians' partnership (Philippians 1:3-11).
- Paul expresses joy in suffering for the gospel and in preaching the gospel (Philippians 1:12-26).
- Paul exhorts the Philippians to rejoice in Christ even in the face of opposition, humbling circumstances, the challenges of spiritual formation, and disagreements (Philippians 3:1 - 4:9)

Choosing joy in the midst of suffering:

- Joy and suffering are intertwined throughout Philippians. Paul writes from prison and in the midst of suffering. Despite his hardships, Paul shows the Philippians that his own joy provides a pattern for theirs: “Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me” (Philippians 2:17). This joy is present in the midst of suffering and conflict. Paul rejoices despite rival preachers, unjust imprisonment, and life endangerment (Philippians 1:12-26, 2:17). He asks the Philippians to rejoice in spite of his dire circumstances and the false teachers who seek to undermine their faith (Philippians 2:18, 3:1–2).
- Moreover, Paul’s joy is tied to the Philippians’ endurance as they confront their own trying circumstances (Philippians 2:2). The command in Philippians 1:27–30 (ESV), “let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ,” is given in the context of suffering. Paul exhorts the believers to stand firm, “not frightened in anything by your opponents.” He states in Philippians 1:29 that it has been granted to the Philippians to “suffer for [Christ’s] sake.” The church’s partnership with him is not only financial; it also involves suffering for the sake of the gospel. Nevertheless, in his final exhortation to the church, he commands them to rejoice in the peace of God (Philippians 4:4, 7) (*Lexham Bible Commentary*).

Who else **chose to respond in joy** to whatever happened and to whatever opposition came his way? That’s right: Jesus.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart (Hebrews 12:2-3 NIV).

Whatever happens, we choose to respond in the joy of the Lord. Where we are out of alignment, the Lord invites us to realign.

*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near [**discipline of awareness empowers us to be gentle and to respond to whatever happens in joy**]. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you (Philippians 4:4-9 NIV).*

This message today is an invitation from the Lord. If you feel condemned or shamed, then you are not hearing the voice of the Lord. If you feel challenged and stirred up, that is good.

We need to practice intentionally in order to live into this word for the year-- **Realign:** *whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.*

If we are to embody and express outwardly the good news of King Jesus, it will take awareness (intimacy with God), authenticity (openness and honesty with God and others), and alignment (radical obedience; full partnership with Jesus and others on his mission).

Where we find that we are out of alignment, we cast vision. We identify our current reality and declare our preferred future in Christ. We get in action to learn skills and to develop new capacities so that we come into realignment.

Closing illustration:

Is it possible to **realign**? Is it possible that *whatever happens, we can conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ?*

Let's look again at Philippians 1:12-26. Here we can see Paul living into and out of the Lord's vision for his life. Paul's life and testimony are a practical example and model of conducting oneself in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, whatever happens.

Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. 13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14 Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. 15 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16 The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 18 But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, 19 for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. 20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me (Philippians 1:12–26 NIV).

Paul is saying all this, obviously, to encourage the church in Philippi. But it ought also to be a great encouragement to us. How often are we tempted to feel discouraged because the plans we had were badly thwarted, or because malicious people were trying to make life difficult. **We need to learn from Paul (and, long before, from Joseph) the art of seeing God's purposes working out through problems and difficulties.** 'God meant it for good.' 'The king is being announced, and I'm going to celebrate!' (NT Wright. *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.*)

Summary:

The word for the year for us in 2021 is this: **Realign.** *Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.*

There will be many opportunities and challenges in this year to see where we are in or out of alignment morally or missionally. The Lord wants to help us to realign, we might respond in ways that line up with the good news of our King.