

Realign Part 3: Stand Firm in One Spirit Steadfastness

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

Text: Philippians 1:27-30

Point: We need to put on and to develop new capacities for what is coming in our culture. This sermon series is about developing new capacities.

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).

Our King wants us to align with what he says, with what he does, and with 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 good news of your Messiah, of the King.*

To conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ-- no matter what happens, not matter what we face, not matter what we go through, not matter what comes our way-- **calls for steadfastness, unity, courage, and joy, even in the face of opposition and suffering.**

Over the next several weeks, we are going to explore what it means to live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. We are going to consider what it means to align with the ways of Jesus in this hour of history. We want to grow in four capacities of alignment:

1. **Steadfastness:** *stand firm in one spirit (Philippians 1:27).*
2. **Unity:** *contending as one for the faith of the gospel (Philippians 1:27).*
3. **Courage:** *without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you (Philippians 1:28).*
4. **Joy:** *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! (Philippians 4:4).*

Today, let's consider what it means to stand firm in one spirit (Philippians 1:27).

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. (I love that song.)
 - b. Whatever happens, and whatever you go through, *stand firm in one spirit with others* (not as isolated individuals), not grumbling about others, blaming others, nor dividing from others. In other words, *stand firm in one spirit with one another.*
 - c. *Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends! (Philippians 4:1).*
 - i. The Philippians are encouraged to stand firm in union with the Lord, in spite of the fears and attacks which assail them from without and the encroachment of false doctrine into their church life (Martin, R. P. (1987). *Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary* (Vol. 11, p. 172). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.)
2. **Steadfastness is about having done all, to stand** (Ephesians 6:10-18).

- a. *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle [wrestle; close quarters] is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints (Ephesians 6:10-18).*

3. **Steadfastness is about the extreme center.**

- a. During a time of dialogue and sharing among our staff, Joshua Rushing talked about the “**extreme center**.”
- i. The Lord really spoke to me through our dialogue.
 - ii. It is easy to go to extremes on the left or on the right in dealing with cultural, theological, or political issues.
 - iii. The challenging place is to stay in the extreme center.
 - iv. You have to keep your head on a swivel, Joshua said, because bullets are flying at you from both directions. You are attacked from the left and from the right.
- b. **What is the extreme center?**
- i. Is it a place of compromise, of lack of commitment, of taking the easy way out?
 - ii. Think about the balance beam. Think of Olympian gold medalist Simone Biles.
 1. No one would accuse her of taking the easy way, of seeing balance as weakness.
 2. It takes skill, courage (fearlessness), and focus to compete on the balance beam.
- c. Some people would say, “**Get off the fence. Choose a side.**”
- i. In response, I say, “No.” Jesus called me to the **middle ground**, to get on the **fence to be a bridge builder**, to be a **minister of reconciliation**, and to share **the message of reconciliation** (how to be reconciled with God and others) (2 Corinthians 5:14-21).
 - ii. *For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15 And he died for all, that*

those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. 16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:14-21).

d. **Think of how Jesus chose members for his team and how he chose to relate to people of vastly different backgrounds, different beliefs, and different political alliances.**

- i. Simon the Zealot and Matthew the Tax Collector.
- ii. Jews and Gentiles.
- iii. Pharisees and the sinners. Jesus related to them both with love and with pursuit (breaking bread, fellowshiping, and spending time in their homes).

4. **Steadfastness is about perseverance.**

- a. We are called to persevere, to endure to the end.
- b. *Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. 10 At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, 11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. 12 Because of the increase of wickedness [lawlessness], the love of most will grow cold, 13 but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come (Matthew 24:9-14).*

5. **Steadfastness is about resolve, determination, and self-discipline.**

- a. **Ask the Lord to give you resolve.**
 - i. We need resolve and grace to pray, to stand in the gap, to lay down our lives for the Lord first and for others second.
 - ii. We need resolve, determination, and grace to love God, to love others, and to love our enemies.
- b. We need resolve, determination, and grace to seek to advance the kingdom of God in the earth and in our spheres of influence.
- c. We pray that God may help us and strengthen us, so with God helping us, we may seek God without giving up, without stopping short, without

settling for less than what God has planned, purposed, promised, and prophesied.

- d. We pray that God may give us burning hearts and lives to be the salt and light he has called us to be.
- e. We pray that the Lord may give us resolve, courage, and grace to stand, to fight the good fight of our faith, to remain steadfast for the rest of our days. We pray that we will not be just a flash in the pan.
- f. We pray that we may have the resolve to pursue deep intimacy and full partnership with Jesus and others. May we not give up on that dream of our hearts.
- g. This is the dream of our heart; this is what we long for. With the Lord helping us, may we keep burning passionately for the Lord for the rest of our days.

Call to Action:

1. **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 and he gives you the grace you need to change and practice a new way of being.
2. **Action: Reflect on whether or not your life aligns with steadfastness.**
 - a. Examen:
 - i. Where do you respond to whatever is happening with giving up, giving in, or quitting, instead of remaining steadfast?
 - ii. Where are you resisting being called to the extreme center, if that is where God is calling you to live?
 - iii. Where are you being tempted to stop short and to say, "What's the use?"
 - iv. In what relationships or responsibilities do you need a new dose of resolve and determination?
 - b. What is the Lord putting his finger on in your life?
 - i. 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:
 - i. Where you are out of alignment, the Lord invites you to realign.
 - ii. God wants to give you his help and his grace to realign.

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 walk in the light. We cast vision with clarity, authenticity, and passion. 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.

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.

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).

Expounding on Philippians 1:12-26 (NT Wright. *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*)

One of the most dramatic stories anywhere in ancient literature is that of Joseph, the second youngest son of the patriarch Jacob. His father spoiled him rotten, and his older brothers were jealous. They wanted to kill him, then they decided to sell him into slavery. Joseph was taken to Egypt, where he became a trusted servant of his new master, until his wife falsely accused him of trying to molest her, and he was thrown into prison. After a long while, he was suddenly brought out to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh, king of Egypt—with such success that Pharaoh put him in charge of his major project to alleviate the coming famine. In that capacity, he found himself selling corn to his own brothers without their knowledge. Eventually, having tricked them to test their state of heart, he told them who he was. The story ends happily, with the whole family surviving the famine and settled in Egypt.

After their father Jacob dies, Joseph's brothers worry that he will now take revenge on them for what they'd done to him many years earlier. So they come and tell him that Jacob had told them to seek his forgiveness. Joseph's reply is

one of the most memorable statements of faith anywhere in the Bible. 'Don't be afraid,' he says. 'Don't suppose that I am in God's place. After all, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good' (Genesis 50:20). And he forgives them and continues to look after them.

Paul seems to have something of the same robust confidence in God's overruling power, even when everything seems to be going wrong. Joseph said what he did with hindsight, though he had probably clung to God in hope all through the story. Paul is saying all this while his story is still going on. But he, of course, knows of a much more recent story in which another Jew, falsely accused by his own people, suffered the extreme penalty at the hands of wicked people, and still demonstrated, through the resurrection, that 'God meant it for good'. With this story of Jesus echoing and bringing into focus the mainline Jewish belief, that Israel's God yhwh would somehow, strangely, produce good out of evil, we perhaps shouldn't be surprised at the robust statement of this belief which Paul now produces.

He is faced with two problems, one on top of the other, and in both cases he declares that what looks like a major difficulty is being turned by God into an opportunity for the gospel. It isn't, of course, an opportunity for his own advancement; as we shall see, he doesn't much care what happens to him, if only the gospel itself can go forward.

The first problem is, of course, that he's in prison. For a travelling apostle to be put in prison must have seemed like a concert pianist having his hands tied behind his back. How can he possibly continue the work he's been called to do? But Paul, with his strong belief in the way God works through unlikely circumstances, is ready with the answer. The Imperial Guard (every major centre of Roman influence had an Imperial Guard, and Ephesus was on its way to becoming an important centre of the actual worship of the emperor) were all now aware that there was a man in their custody who was going around proclaiming a new and very subversive message.

The soldiers were used, of course, to the 'gospel' of Caesar—the supposed 'good news' that a new emperor had taken the throne, bringing (so he claimed) peace and justice to the world. Now here was someone out of the blue announcing that there was a different 'gospel': that Jesus of Nazareth had taken the throne of the world, and was summoning every man, woman and child to bow the knee to him. Having Paul in custody meant they couldn't ignore this new message. They were having their noses rubbed into it. And Paul can see that already the other Christians in Ephesus (the 'family', his brothers and sisters in the Messiah) are taking courage from his example. They can see the

impact he's having even on hardened soldiers. Why shouldn't they seize the moment and speak about King Jesus to their friends and neighbours as well?

This brings him to the second problem. There are some people going around talking about King Jesus who, Paul knows, don't really mean it. They don't believe the message; they merely want to make more trouble for him in his imprisonment. Some people have thought that these people were a rival Christian group, opposed to Paul's specific view of the gospel. But I think it's more likely that they are ordinary pagans who have heard what all the fuss is about and are talking about it on the street.

'Have you heard?' they'll be saying to each other. 'They've caught that strange fellow who's been going around saying there's a new king—a new emperor! And you won't believe it—this new king turns out to be a Jew whom they crucified a few years ago, and this jailbird is saying he's alive again and he's the real Lord of the world!'

Talk like that would be guaranteed to make people feel that Paul was a dangerous lunatic who should be kept locked up. But Paul's reaction is to celebrate. That's fine by me, he says. As long as people are going around saying that Jesus is the world's true Lord, I shall be happy.

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!'