

Realign Part 4: Contending as One for the Faith of the Gospel Unity

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

Text: Philippians 1:27-30

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).* (Feb. 7)
2. **Unity:** *contending as one for the faith of the gospel (Philippians 1:27).* (Feb. 14 and Feb. 21)
3. **Courage:** *without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you (Philippians 1:28).* (Feb. 28)
4. **Joy:** *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! (Philippians 4:4).* (Mar. 7)

Today, let's consider what it means to *contend as one for the faith of the gospel (Philippians 1:27).*

1. **Unity:** *contending as one for the faith of the gospel (Philippians 1:27).*
 - a. **Our unity or oneness with each other comes as we contend together for the advance of the gospel [of Christ].**
 - b. Paul envisions the Philippian Christians struggling side by side with one united intent—for the faith of the gospel. They are partnering together on mission with Jesus. The Christian life is like a team sport, with each one doing its part to help the team win the game or to advance the mission.
 - c. Paul does not want them advocating for, nor are they advancing, their Roman citizenship, which was highly praised and sought after in their day. Since Philippi was a colony of Rome, its citizens had elevated status

as subjects of Rome, which afforded them legal rights, economic rights, and other rights and advantages which were not afforded non-citizens of the Roman Empire.

- d. **As Christians, our unity comes from partnering together with the Lord and with one another to testify and demonstrate so that others can experience what it is like when Jesus rules and reigns in the lives and circumstances of people.**
- e. **Let me be very practical. Calvary Community Church wants each of us to be involved as good citizens and in politics as God gives us grace.**
 - i. We want our members praying for our leaders (1 Timothy 2:1-4).
 - ii. We want our members voting values informed by Scripture and directed by Jesus.
 - iii. We want to raise up godly men and women to serve as salt and light in the political sphere and to run for political office at the local, state, and federal levels.
 - iv. We want to see our government pass laws that promote the common good and which ensure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.
 - v. We want to stand up for laws that are a blessing and not a curse; laws that are just, righteous, and true.
 - vi. And, we do not believe that we are to spend our emotional and relational capital to get people to vote Republican or Democrat.
 1. Yes, vote. Yes, share what you think, feel, and believe. Yes, align with the party platform and with the character of the politicians that best fits your values.
 2. But, we do not choose who is our friend or not based on their political party affiliation.
 3. We are here to work together to advance the gospel of Christ through both parties.
 - vii. And, we want both political parties to be influenced by men and women who are salt and light.
 - viii. And, we want to celebrate when both or either political party does well.
 - ix. And, we want to speak correction when both or either political party needs to be held accountable.
 - x. We want to encourage each member of Calvary to treat others with gentleness and respect when that member shares their views or when other people share their views with us (1 Peter 3:15).
 - xi. We want to encourage each member of Calvary to treat others with respect and dignity, whether they agree with you or not.

- xii. We want to encourage each member of Calvary to seek first to listen and to understand, before seeking to be heard and to be understood.
 - xiii. We want each member of Calvary to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ when talking about politics, government, business, sports, entertainment, medicine, etc.
2. **Unity is expressed in the face of opposition and suffering.**
- a. When we face opposition and suffering with steadfastness, unity, courage, and joy, it is a sign to others.
 - i. The church's steadfastness, unity, courage, and joy were a sign to unbelievers that hopefully would awaken unbelievers to their own lostness without Jesus.
 - ii. And, it would awaken unbelievers to the life changing and lifesaving activity of Jesus in the lives of believers. The fact that the Philippians could stand firm in the face of adversity proved their relationship to the Lord.
 - 1. Others could see **the hidden strength in these believers.**
 - 2. **This strength was the inner strength to live and die for the One in whom they believed.**
 - 3. **Such strength had to come from God himself, not from mere human resources.**
 - b. Paul's life provided the model of the suffering which he identified in this passage. In Philippians 1:30, Paul used athletic imagery again ("struggle," *agōna*) to remind the believers that they would go through what he did.
 - i. In a parallel passage in 1 Thessalonians 2:14–16, Paul explained that his suffering related to calling the Gentiles to Christ so that they could be saved.
 - ii. **The nature of the gospel of Christ presented a problem to Gentiles, who had their own religions, and to Jews, who wanted the Gentiles to accept Judaism.**
 - iii. **The result was that Paul suffered at the hands of both groups, and the church at Philippi would suffer as well.**
 - iv. Under the leadership of the Lord, Paul had to develop a theology of suffering.
 - 1. **He did so without becoming calloused to human need and without accepting suffering as good.**
 - 2. The danger for Christians at Philippi and elsewhere was that, as they endured suffering, they would have one of those reactions (becoming calloused to human need or accepting suffering as good).

- v. The Christian view of suffering is that suffering is evil because it comes from sin in the world.
 1. Paul stopped far short of mixing good and evil, which would make evil (suffering) a good thing.
 2. He did realize that there would be benefits and privileges of being involved in a battle for truth and life. And, he realized that battle scars were inevitable.
 3. Christ was the supreme model for suffering because of the battle between light and darkness.
 4. Similarly, Christians today should remember that:
 - a. general suffering sometimes comes because they live in a world which suffers **as a result of sin or brokenness,**
 - b. **that Christians are called to a unique Christian suffering because of their identification with righteousness in an evil world,**
 - c. that Christians have a **divinely given privilege** to be involved in this battle,
 - d. and that **the struggle becomes redemptive** in attesting to the gift of grace in our own experience.
 5. **The Philippians were, therefore, to take heart if they were called to suffer.**
 - a. Their steadfastness, unity, courage, and joy would demonstrate the reality of their relationship to God to unbelievers and to spiritual forces of darkness, **just like in the suffering of Jesus.**
 - b. *And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39).*
3. **Unity comes through humility** (Philippians 2:1-4).
 - a. Paul calls the Philippians to live in a manner worthy of the gospel regardless of circumstances. Living in unity as believers will enable them to face outside opposition. **True humility is essential for unity (2:1-4).** Paul's call for humility and unity is illustrated by a look at Christ's own example of selfless sacrifice (2:5-11), an example that should motivate the Philippians to continue working out their salvation and holding fast to the word of life (2:12-18).
 - b. **Let's read Philippians 2:1-11.**

- c. Paul's thoughts turned from the need to withstand pressure from the outside to the attitudes that were to characterize Christians. In Philippians 1:27, he exhorted them to unity. In Philippians 2, Paul continued that thought. The passage unfolds in three parts: the basis of Paul's appeal to unity (2:1); the essence of unity (2:2); and the expression of unity (2:3–4).
 - d. *If [assuming that] you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion... (Philippians 2:1).*
 - e. First, there is encouragement that comes from experiencing oneness with Jesus.
 - f. Second, Christians experience "comfort from his love," which is Christ affirming his love for you and me.
 - g. Third, there is our blessing that results from our "fellowship with the Spirit."
 - h. Finally, there is "tenderness and compassion" which we experience in Christ; the Lord touches us with his mercies.
 - i. These statements make a strong emotional appeal to believers. Christians have a common experience of grace, and Paul builds upon that in his exhortation.
4. **Here are some expressions of unity** (Philippians 2:2-4).
- a. *Being like-minded (Philippians 2:2).*
 - b. *Having the same love (Philippians 2:2).*
 - c. *Being one in spirit and purpose (Philippians 2:2).*
 - d. **Three characteristics express the unity of the church.** They are goals for which to strive, and they provide the measurement of success. (Melick, R. R. (1991). *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* (Vol. 32, pp. 89–90). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.)
 - i. **The first characteristic is the same outlook.**
 - 1. Unity is not found in an identical lifestyle or personality. Unity goes beyond just thinking the same or just having the same outlook. It occurs when Christian people have the same core values (like differentiation of self, walking in the light) and loves (loving God, loving others loving our enemies).
 - 2. Three ideas combine to emphasize its different aspects: having the same love as Christ did; having a harmonious affection; and valuing the same thing. The NIV translates this text as "having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose" (2:2b).
 - 3. Together these characteristics speak to the unity found among those who are going the same direction. There is

nothing superficial about it. This unity comes from the core of one's being.

ii. **The second characteristic is humility.** Paul expressed this both negatively and positively.

1. Negatively, the Philippians were to avoid "selfish ambition" and "vain conceit." Selfish ambition motivated the preachers Paul described in Philippians 1:17. Perhaps that was fresh in his mind. It led him to think about conceit, a seeking of glory which is empty because it focuses on the individual rather than on the Lord.
2. The positive side corrects improper attitudes. They were to act in humility. Before the New Testament era, the word "humility" had a negative connotation. The adjective related to it "was frequently employed, and especially so, to describe the mentality of a slave. It conveyed the ideas of being base, unfit, shabby, mean, of no account. Hence 'humility' could not have been regarded by Gentiles as a virtue to be sought after."
3. "Humility" introduces a key theme of the passage. Paul further described it in Philippians 2:3 and 2:5–11. He urged the Philippians literally to "count others as excelling over themselves." This also relates to the mind and values. The word "excelling" ("better," NIV) occurs in Philippians 3:8, where the pursuit of Christ excels anything Paul had before he engaged in it. The word "consider" occurs in the hymn to Christ (2:6), as does the word for "humbled" (2:8). Since the model of Christ loomed in Paul's mind, Christ's actions provided the necessary motivation. Christ's humility is the standard for evaluating the worth of others and actions toward them. This does not mean that personal concerns should be overlooked. Elsewhere Paul clearly stated that Christians must take care of their own affairs as an act of love for the congregation (1 Thessalonians 4:9–12). The next verse implies the same truth. Humility begins with a realistic appraisal of oneself and others as being in the image of God.

iii. **The third measurement is consideration.** The Philippians were to "look out" for others' interests as well as their own.

1. Consideration for others means that Christians are not to be self-centered.

2. Any concerns of others were to become the concerns of all. For example, when one weeps, all weep. When one rejoices, all rejoice.
5. **Jesus is the supreme example of humility** (Philippians 2:5-11).
 - a. Humility is modeled and exemplified in Christ by his self-giving love (2:6-8) and the exaltation that results from this self-giving (2:9-11).
 - b. Christ's life serves as the ultimate example of God's love and the ultimate model for the outlook and life to which Paul calls the Philippians verse 2:5. Only in receiving Christ's life as their own will it truly be possible for the Philippians to live the life of unity and humility with each other.

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 unity.**
 - a. Examen:
 - i. Where are you seeking to promote unity with other believers even in the face of opposition and suffering?
 1. *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:1-3).*
 - ii. Where do you respond to whatever is happening with divisiveness, attacking, trying to convince others they are wrong, trying to debate others into your way of understanding the truth, biting and devouring one another, judging others, etc.?

- iii. In what relationships or responsibilities do you need to express a new dose of humility (teachability; curiosity; be a learner)?
 1. Remember: God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble (1 Peter 5:5).
 2. ... *All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5).*
- 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.