



First Baptist Church At The Villages

Series: REJOICE! In The Lord • Study Title: Christian Unity • Philippians 1:27-30 •

For use by groups 9/15 through 9/21/2019

Main Point

We must be unified in the mission to spread the gospel, regardless of the suffering and hardships we might have to endure.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What character trait are you most known for and why?

What character traits, attitudes, and behaviors do you think are important for a follower of Christ to exhibit? Why these specific traits?

What does Jesus' life reveal about how we are to conduct ourselves if we are living for Him?

Paul emphasized that the Philippian Christians must be unified in their mission to spread the gospel, regardless of the suffering and hardships they might have to endure. God has called us to tell the world about the good news of salvation available through Jesus, and He has called us to fulfill this mission together, as His church. Effectively communicating the gospel is only possible when we are loving and serving each other well.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Ask a volunteer to read Philippians 1:27-28.

Paul challenged the Philippian believers to conduct themselves properly whether he was

present with them or absent from them. Whether Paul would be able to return to Philippi was not to be the determining factor in the Philippians' behavior.

What good report did Paul want to hear about his friends in Philippi (v. 27)?

Why might the Philippian Christians have been in danger of disunity and poor conduct if Paul wasn't with them?

What is the purpose of the church? How does disunity hurt that purpose?

Christians who live by the gospel encourage other believers in their efforts to serve God. We should be aware constantly of our conduct as Christians, for it is a gauge by which others judge us. If we engage in proper conduct, we will be the kind of encouragers we should be. Paul encouraged his Philippian friends to keep standing firm for the gospel like good soldiers committed to the battle. Paul also used athletic imagery as he encouraged the Philippians. He urged his readers to strive together or work side by side like devoted athletes for the faith of the gospel. Working for the advancement of the gospel is a cooperative venture. It requires team effort. If individuals on a team contend individually, rather than cooperatively, their efforts fail.

| Ask another volunteer to read Philippians 1:29-30.

What did Paul identify in verse 29 as two privileges believers have? Why are both integral parts of Christian living?

Paul and the Philippian church struggled to spread the gospel in the face of adversity and rejection (v. 30). What daily struggles do you face in your relationship with God and your service to Him? What struggles does the church in our country face?

How can adversity encourage believers?

In the Christian life, our struggle is not only against flesh and blood but against spiritual powers as well. Nevertheless, there is a positive aspect to the Christian's struggles. Paul reminded the believers in Philippi that their struggles meant neither that God was punishing them nor that He was abandoning them. Rather using the analogy of the athletic contests, our struggling or striving for the gospel gives us assurance that we are in the game. Furthermore, through our struggles we have opportunities to encourage one another as believers.

| Ask a final volunteer to read Luke 9:23-26.

In your own words, what did Jesus mean by "take up his cross"? Why is doing

so a necessary part of following Christ?

How does carrying a cross through life affect the decisions we make and priorities we have?

If we all live obediently to Jesus' command in Luke 9, what would be the impact on our unity as a church? On our efforts to strive together to advance the gospel?

Jesus defined what it means to follow Him: a rejection of self-centered living and total commitment to Him. We are to place God and His kingdom's priorities first in our lives. The idea that one is to take up one's cross emphasizes dying to self, and the words "follow Me" emphasize living according to the Lord's will and direction.

For the people in your inner circle, what does following Jesus cost?

What has following Jesus cost you in terms of your employment, your family life, and your social obligations?

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges Christians face as they try to maintain unity in serving God?

Would you say the community of Christian churches in our city is unified in their efforts to spread the gospel? Why or why not?

What would have to change in you, personally, to make such unity possible?

How can we help each other take up our crosses and follow Jesus wholeheartedly?

Pray

Ask God to help your group experience unity as you strive side by side for the gospel. Pray that love and service would become central to your group and to everything we do as a church. Pray also that through your dependence on God and your personal sacrifice you would point others to Christ.

Commentary

Paul wanted his friends to demonstrate exemplary Christian conduct (v. 27). For Paul, the matter of believers' deportment as Christ's followers was of utmost importance. The phrase "let your manner of life" carries the idea of behaving as a good citizen, of living according to a government's laws. In a broader sense, it refers to conduct in general. As citizens of God's kingdom, the Philippian Christians' daily conduct was evidence to the gospel; they were to incarnate the good news of Christ. If Paul were able to visit his friends soon or if he were delayed, he wanted them to remain steadfast and unified as Christ's followers. The Greek term rendered, standing firm, has the sense of persevering or enduring. The phrase in one spirit could refer to a shared attitude or disposition or to the Holy Spirit. If Paul intended the latter, the Spirit would be the sphere in which believers maintained their faithfulness.

The Philippian Christians were to persevere with one mind (literally, "soul"). That is, they were to be unified in their loyalty to Christ, their grasp of what was involved in living for Him, and their purpose as a church. The Greek word translated striving side by side was an athletic term that conveyed the sense of strenuous teamwork toward a common goal. Paul's use of the term may have been a subtle reminder that believers were not to contend with one another but were to be unified in presenting the gospel. The words for the faith of the gospel could refer to the gospel's content the believers were to teach or the act of proclaiming the gospel.

Paul knew that the small pocket of Christians in Philippi faced ongoing opposition. He exhorted them not to be frightened by their opponents (v. 28). The word frightened literally described a horse being startled and bolting in terror. It carried overtones of panic or dismay. Paul did not want believers to recoil in fear as they faced harassment. With the word this, Paul likely referred to believers' courageous refusal to allow their opponents to intimidate them. Christians' perseverance would give a sign (proof) of the opponents' ultimate destruction (eternal ruin) and of Christians' ultimate deliverance—their salvation's completion or fulfillment. The phrase and that from God most likely is a reference to God's sovereignty in pronouncing ultimate judgment on the gospel's opponents and bringing believers' salvation to completion. Paul viewed suffering on Christ's behalf to be a grace gift (v. 29). The opportunity and capacity to believe in Christ issued from God's grace. Accepting God's grace gift carried with it the privilege of enduring hardship and opposition because of their faithfulness to Christ. Note carefully that suffering per se is not a privilege; the key words are for Him (Christ).

Opposition should not have surprised the Philippian believers. When Paul planted the gospel

in Philippi, he experienced persecution (see Acts 16:16-24). As believers there continued to advance the gospel, they could expect no less. They were engaged in the same struggle Paul waged. The Greek word translated conflict is the basis of our English word agony. It described intense exertion in athletics and gladiatorial combat. The Philippian Christians had seen the conflict Paul endured. He and they shared the common experience of suffering for Christ. Such suffering was not payment for salvation but arose in the course of their loyal service in the gospel (v. 30).