

**27 – Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Messiah, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;**

The emphasis of the opening word of this verse, *μόνος* (*monos*), most likely hearkens back to the previous context and Paul's yet unknown status as to whether the future will bring his death or his exoneration and thus his release from prison. Thus his primary exhortation to the Philippian community is that they remain confident in their faith and remain fervent in their commitment to honor Yeshua in all aspects of their lives.

*...conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Messiah* – In the Greek, the phrase “worthy of the gospel of Messiah” follows the opening “Only,” and “conduct yourselves” follows. Thus the word-order of the Greek puts the emphasis upon Paul's desire that they depend upon the Lord and not allow his own situation to discourage them or cause them to doubt the goodness of God and the salvation He has secured for all who are His.

This is an excellent reminder for all who are in a leadership and teaching position within a local community of believers, that it must be the goal of our teaching and leading to put Yeshua as the focus and not ourselves. And it is likewise an important exhortation to all believers that even though teachers are to be appreciated for their work and service, we must always have our primary allegiance and focus upon Yeshua with the goal of walking in His footsteps and becoming more and more like Him.

The Greek word translated here by “conduct yourselves” offers interesting insights to Paul's admonition. It is the Greek word *πολιτεύομαι* (*paliteuomai*) which carries a basic sense of “to be a citizen, have one's citizenship/home.”<sup>1</sup> The point that Paul is making here, and will emphasize again in chapter three, is that as believers in Yeshua who have been “born again,” while we may be citizens of any given country in this world, our ultimate and primary citizenship is in heaven. For we are in Yeshua Who is our King and Who reigns at the right hand of God. Thus, regardless of where we may live in this world, we are to live in such a way that every aspect of our lives marks us as citizens of the “country” whose reigning King is Yeshua.

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1 BDAG, “*πολιτεύομαι*,” p. 846.

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Yeshua Messiah; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. (Phil 3:20–21)

... *in a manner worthy of the gospel of Messiah* – The idea of “citizenship” is coupled both with privilege and responsibility. For this reason “citizenship” is expressed by living in accordance with the laws of the land in which one is a citizen. In our text, the “laws of the land” in which believers are citizens are nicely enveloped within the very essence of the gospel. And the essence of the “good news” is that Yeshua, the very Son of God, has paid the penalty of sin for all whom the Father has given to Him. This means that they are thereby secured as those who have both full access to His grace and salvation as well the power of a renewed life, energized by the Ruach HaKodesh. For being citizens of heaven, they are enabled to obey and honor the King of Kings, Yeshua, and to live all aspects of their life in accordance with His rule, giving all glory to Him.

Note that Paul uses “the gospel” as the quintessential expression of the life of the redeemed. This is because the gospel is the good news that Yeshua has died to pay the penalty of sin for all who are His, and that in bringing them to be citizens of His kingdom, He likewise gives them the power to live in a way that honors and glorifies Him. Thus “the gospel,” when understood as that which the Scriptures themselves define, contains the truth which, when received by faith, transforms the life of one who was without hope, to a life lived in obedience to God’s righteous commands. As Paul teaches in his Epistle the Romans:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “*BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.*” (Rom1:16–17)

How, then, are we to “walk worthy of the gospel in Messiah?” By this Paul means that as those who have been redeemed by the work of Yeshua on our behalf, we have been “made new” in that we have been given the ability through the abiding presence of the Ruach HaKodesh, as redeemed children of God, to say “no” to the sinful passions of the flesh and to obey God by living in accordance with His will and His directions as given to us in the Scriptures themselves. Surely the preservation of the Scriptures through the millennia is yet another

proof that God in His sovereignty has maintained them, for they teach the very truths of God in accordance to which His children are to live.

The “gospel of Messiah” (τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ) is the “good news” that God has reconciled sinners to Himself through the substitutionary work of Messiah for all who were given to Him, in His death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession. As a result, the infinite debt they owed as sinners has been fully paid. Being “born again” through the work of the Ruach and being given faith in Yeshua, they are redeemed from being objects of God’s righteous wrath and have become children in the very “family of God,” thus enabled to address Him as “Abba, Father.”

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” (Rom 8:15)

He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. (Eph 1:5–6)

The “gospel” (εὐαγγέλιον, *euangelion*) is literally “a good announcement” or “message,” the word being made up of the Greek εὖ (*eu*), “good, beneficial” and ἀγγελία (*angelia*), “message.” Its background is found in the Hebrew word בָּשַׂר, *basar*, used often in the piel form in the Tanach with the meaning “to announce good news.” Here are examples.

I have proclaimed glad tidings of righteousness in the great congregation; Behold, I will not restrain my lips, O LORD, You know. (Ps 40:9)

How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation, and says to Zion, “Your God reigns!” (Is 52:7)

The Spirit of the Lord GOD (אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה) is upon me, because the LORD (יְהוָה) has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners; (Is 61:1)

The gospel, centered in Yeshua’s work for sinners, is surely “good news” for in our sin we were “without hope” in this world.

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. (1Thess 4:13)

And Paul reminds the believers in Ephesus of their lives before coming to faith in Messiah Yeshua.

*remember that you were at that time separate from Messiah, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (Eph 2:12)*

Thus, when Paul admonishes the Philippian believers to live “in a manner worthy of the gospel of Messiah,” he is reminding them of what they were without the saving work of Messiah and to compare their former lives with the bounty of blessing which is now theirs as being “in Messiah.”

*...I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.* – Here we see clearly that Paul considers unity within the local community of believers to be the quintessential core of believers living out their true identity as beloved and redeemed children of God.

Such unity is first based upon “standing firm in one spirit.” To “stand firm” seems to have a military expression in mind, that is, to describe “not giving up ground to the enemy,” as the following context would indicate. For there is an ongoing battle with those who reject the truth of the gospel and who stand against those who confess Yeshua to be their Lord and Savior and serve Him by living out the gospel in this fallen world and in doing so, to make unity a high priority. A military regiment that is not united in the heat of battle is doomed to defeat. As Calvin notes regarding the priority of unity and what occurs when it is absent.

*Stand in one spirit.* This, certainly, is one of the main excellences of the Church, and hence this is one means of preserving it in a sound state, inasmuch as it is torn to pieces by dissensions.<sup>1</sup>

But what does Paul mean by his words “in one spirit” (*ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι, en heni pneumati*)? The question is whether we should understand “one spirit” to mean “having a unified agreement between each other” or whether the word “spirit” refers to the Holy Spirit and should therefore be capitalized in our English bibles, meaning, “being together submitted to the Spirit of God.” While the majority of modern English

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<sup>1</sup> Calvin, *Philippians*, p. 46.

translations, including the NASB,<sup>1</sup> have “spirit” (lowercase) and thus understand Paul’s words to be referencing the human spirit, it has been shown that such a usage of the Greek *pneuma*, i.e., “to be of one spirit” meaning “to agree together,” is not an established metaphor in ancient Greek usage. As Fee notes:

...“in one spirit,” which seems to make perfectly good sense to us, in fact has no analogy in Greek literature, especially not in Paul and the NT. Whereas the term “one *psuchē*” [ψυχῆ μία, “one soul,” cf. Acts 4:32] occurs frequently to describe oneness or unity between two or more people, the word *pneuma* is never so used.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, we should understand the phrase “in one Spirit” to indicate the sphere in which true unity exists, that is, by all submitting to the work and leading of the Ruach as He impresses upon all the teaching of God’s word. We see Paul using a similar expression, “in one Spirit,” in his Epistle to the Ephesians.

...for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. (Eph 2:18)

Given this understanding, what then is the primary basis for the unity within a community of believers for which Paul exhorts us to strive? It is the genuine work of the Ruach and the maturing resolve of all who comprise the community to submit to the Spirit’s leading as He enables them to live out their faith in full harmony with the Scriptures. This requires humility of our own spirit, submitting to the Ruach HaKodesh by Whose leading we are enabled to follow the truth of God’s word and to gain true unity with one another. Such true humility is also described in Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians.

... and be subject to one another in the fear of Messiah. (Eph 5:21)

... *with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel*; – Here, unity is described as being “with one mind” (μιά ψυχῆ, *mia psuchē*). This does not in any way mean agreeing in every instance with each other, but it does mean finding true unity in the established truths of the Scriptures as

1 The NASB is the English bible I use throughout this commentary.

2 See Gordan Fee, *Philippians* in *NICNT*, p. 165.

all submit to each other for the cause of Messiah Yeshua proclaimed in the gospel. Indeed, it is the unity of believers within the local community that enables the community to be seen by outsiders as having something of great value, something worth investigating. Surely we must give the gospel by our words and communication, but when a community is known for caring for each other and showing their ability to maintain unity, the fruit of living out the gospel is seen. This is undoubtedly Paul's meaning by the phrase "the faith of the gospel," for it is the living out of one's faith that gives a living expression to the glory of the gospel message. Once again, Paul emphasizes this in Ephesians, another of the prison epistles.

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph 4:1-3)

**28 – in no way alarmed by your opponents — which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God.**

Even as turmoil within a community can weaken it from fulfilling the goal of being a light to the unbelieving society, so can a fear of being persecuted for their faith by those who despise Yeshua cause them to retreat from openly confessing Him as their Lord and Savior. This would be another method of the enemy to silence the glorious message of the gospel.

Rather, Paul exhorts them and us to rely all the more upon His sustaining power to defeat the enemy and not therefore to give way to fear and trepidation. When the enemy sees that their tactics have no power against God's people, they will recognize that they are being defeated. It is our faith in God and His working within us to strengthen us for whatever battles we face, that makes it clear to the enemies of the gospel that they are defeated.

... *which is a sign of destruction for them*, – Surely Paul understood first-hand what it meant to be an "enemy of the gospel," for in his own words, before coming to faith in Yeshua, he locked up believers in prisons, punished them in all the synagogues, tried to force them to blaspheme, and participated in having them executed (Acts 26:10-11). Yet not only was the miraculous event on the road to Damascus the turning point in Paul's life, but undoubtedly he understood personally

how the resolve and resilience of the believers he persecuted had the strength to even face death for what they believed. This must have likewise affected him as he wondered what made them so strong. As F. F. Bruce notes:

Paul himself had been a persecutor once and could recall the steadfastness of those whom he attacked. If at the time it had seemed to him to be obstinacy rather than steadfastness, yet after his conversion he could look back and appreciate it for what it really was—evidence of the power of Christ enabling them to maintain their faith unimpaired and evidence that he himself was, albeit in all good conscience, fighting a losing battle against God.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly, the gospel is used by the Ruach HaKodesh to bring conviction of sin to those who previously had no such conviction whatsoever. Even when transgressing established laws, they thought that as long as their transgression was not discovered, all was good. But the gospel, when used by the Ruach to pierce the heart, one's sin is seen for what it truly is, being a rebel against the holy God Who controls all things.

*...but of salvation for you*, – These inspired words of Paul are as true for us as they were for the Philippian believers. Thus we see that we need not fear even those who may persecute us for our faith. For in this inspired text we are given God's command not to fear those who may be our opponents, and the Lord's commands are always accompanied by His provision. Yes, the Lord will give us the strength to persevere, even when facing severe persecution for our faith. And we also can be sure that such strength will be used by God to open hearts to the gospel message. The enemy, regardless of the methods he may use, is destined to failure and defeat.

*... and that too, from God*. – God is the source of strength to all who are in Messiah Yeshua regardless of what they may face in this life. Therefore it is imperative that we grow in our faith and our commitment to honor Him in all aspects of our lives: "for in Him we live and move and exist..." (Acts 17:28)

Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. (James 1:17)

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1 F. F. Bruce, *Philippians* in *UBC* (Baker, 2000), p. 57