

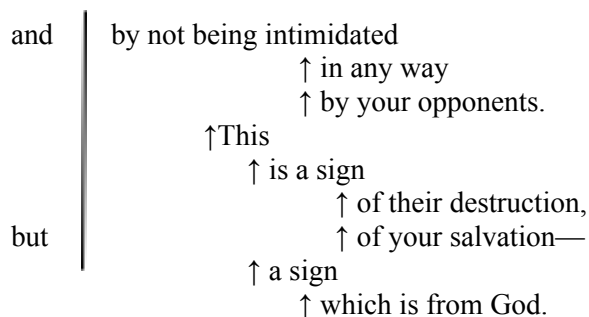
| **Philippians** |
Week 4 Scripture Guide | Philippians 1:27-30

Biblical Context

Before we start digging into the text a bit deeper, it's important to understand a few aspects of the culture found in Philippi so that we can understand some of the references that St Paul is making here, particularly in the Greek text.

v.27 Paul uses the phrase “πολιτεύεσθε” which is often translated as “conduct yourselves” or “live one’s life”. But the footnote on this word in the NET Bible reads: “‘live as citizens.’ The verb πολιτεύεσθε (*politeuesthe*) connotes the life of a freeman in a free Roman colony.”¹ In ancient Roman culture, there were varied classes of individuals living in various parts of the Empire, but Philippi had been appointed an official colony of the Empire with most of its residents being made Roman Citizens.² Roman citizens enjoyed privileges and benefits that most other residents of the Empire did not, and this status came with a level of pride.

v.28 In verse 28 Paul states, “this is a sign of their destruction, but of your salvation.” To better see what the author is emphasizing in a verse, sometimes it can be helpful to do what is called a “mechanical layout” or “sentence diagram.” If we were to diagram this verse out, it would look something like this:



Looking at this mechanical layout of the verse, we see that Paul is saying that the Philippian church’s standing firm and not being intimidated in any possible way by their opponents is the sign from God that indicates the destruction of the church’s opponents and the salvation of the Philippian church.³

vv.29-30 Finally, we see Paul saying that “it has been granted to you not only to *believe* in Christ but also to *suffer* for him” (emphasis mine). The footnote here in the NET Bible reads that based on the Greek grammar Paul is saying that the Philippians “present struggle is evidence that they have received the gift of suffering.”⁴ So, not only is the trait of believing in Christ a gift from God, but so also is suffering for Him in this way. Suffering as a *gift* is something that seems pretty foreign to us.

¹ *NET Bible*. Thomas Nelson, 2019.

² Wright, N. T., and Michael F. Bird. *The New Testament in Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and*

³ When St Paul is talking about “salvation” here in verse 28, he is specifically talking about their salvation in the sense of the Philippian Church’s continued existence while their opponents (most likely the individuals referenced in Phil 3:2, those who would add to the Gospel and teach a false teaching such as the Judaizers) are destroyed and fail in their efforts to destroy and divide the Philippian Church.

⁴ *Theology of the First Christians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2019. 436-437 ³ *NET Bible*. Thomas Nelson, 2019.

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Connection and Application

There are three points that we can make from this passage based on the linguistic, textual and cultural contexts we see here. First, we need to recognize that Paul is appealing to them to “conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” or in other words, “live as a citizen of the gospel of Christ.”⁵ Second, we see Paul exhorting the Philippian church to stand united and firm against their opponents without being intimidated, that this is a sign of their salvation and of their opponents’ destruction. Finally, we see St Paul explaining that the suffering and persecution they were enduring is a gift from God equal to that of the gift of their belief in Christ Jesus.

First, the Philippians understood the honor and privileges that came with being a citizen of the Roman Empire and of a favored colony like Philippi. That came with a level of pride that is hard for us to understand today. Paul is explaining to the Philippians that their citizenship in the Gospel is even more important, and that they should behave as though that is their first loyalty and recognize the great privileges they have as a result of being members of Christ’s kingdom.⁶

Second, because they are citizens of the Gospel and because they are to behave in a manner that reflects that, they should work together in unity in their standing against opposition. The language here “side by side” invokes the imagery of the phalanx, a military formation in which soldiers would stand close together with their shields overlapping, providing cover for each other while standing their ground against the enemy. The Philippians would understand this well, given that the colony was settled largely by Roman military veterans.⁷ By standing firm in this manner, they would be saved and their opponents would be destroyed.

Finally, we see Paul explaining that their suffering is a gift from God. Dr Tony Evans says in his commentary that, “Suffering may appear to be a strange gift, but it’s not. Suffering for the sake of Christ is *purposeful*, not purposeless. He allows it for our good and for his glory — and that makes all the difference.”⁸ The Christian Church has long taught that suffering carries with it a redemptive property that helps sanctify us and make us more like Christ, and passages such as this one support that perspective.

In sum, we as believers are called to behave much in the way that Paul is calling on the Philippians to behave. We are citizens of heaven, and because we are citizens of heaven we must work together with the other members of the Church to stand firm against anyone who would oppose the Gospel. By standing firm *together*, we are given a sign not only that God is with us, but that the Gospel is true. We also help keep our brothers and sisters to our left and right from falling to the Enemy by standing together and looking out for one another through prayer and discipleship. Lastly, we must recognize that the suffering we may endure as Christians is not without purpose, but is an opportunity for God to be given glory through our steadfast devotion to Christ.

⁵ Wintle, Brian C., ed. *South Asia Bible Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015. 1651.

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Wright, 436

⁸ Evans, Tony. *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary*. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2019. 1240; Emphasis his.