

REJOICING IN SPIRITUAL BATTLE

Philippians 1:27-30

Intro: People are searching for joy in life; but all too often they implement wrong solutions. They are like the man who complained, "When my wife and I went on vacation two years ago, burglars broke into our home and stole \$250 worth of our belongings. So last year I got smart; I decided to foil the burglars by leaving all the lights turned on, and all the radios and TVs playing. The burglars were afraid to show up and didn't get a cent...but the electric company got \$523.25!"

Sometimes our "answers" are not very good answers; and sometimes they are just wrong "answers". Philippians is the kind of book that gives us real answers to the question, "How can I find joy?". What we discover, however, is that joy comes in some surprising ways to us. The irony is that some of our most joyous moments may come when life is most difficult. I've always been challenged by the statement Luke makes about the apostles of Jesus who after taking a brutal caning from the Jerusalem authorities went out "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name" (Ac. 5:32).

Is it possible that we too might rejoice even in the face of painful opposition? For an answer, let's turn to Phil. 1:27-30. (Read)

Someone once said, "The Christian life is not a playground, it is a battle ground"! Each of us needs to come into the new life of a Christian with our eyes fully open. In the gospel, God calls us as his spiritual soldiers first to attention and then contention. We have a battle to fight. There may even be painful conflict. Yet, in spite of the pain, we can discover a great joy in fighting the good fight of faith—the joy of spiritual battle. Let's think about that battle and how we may find joy in it.

I. THREE THINGS WE MUST REMEMBER ABOUT THE CONFLICT

A. As disciples we are called to a life of conflict; and it is important that we have an accurate perception of the components of this warfare! We need to remember three things:

1. What are we fighting for!—the faith of the gospel.

The faith is not some written creed from some past historical meeting, nor is it some consensus understanding of today's preachers. The faith of the gospel refers to what has been revealed by the Holy Spirit through the apostles and prophets of Jesus Christ—the message found in our New Testaments. This faith has been once for all delivered to the saints by the Holy Spirit (Jude 3) and we must contend for it! Paul in Eph. 4:5 says there is "one faith!" We need to make sure that we do our own thinking, making our own independent investigation, and verifying

that it is the gospel that we are defending and promoting, and not some man-made doctrine.

C. Who are we fighting against.

1. “your opponents” (Satan and all his forces). Satan seeks to nullify the effect of the precious truth God has entrusted to us through deception and wickedness. And he has “ministers” who are committed to the propagation of his message (2 Cor. 10:3-5). Those ministers are not only so-called “men of God” in religious garb. They may be politicians competing for your vote, entertainers on stages, professors in classrooms, or actors on the big screen.
2. We need to make sure we have carefully identified the opposition.

The costs of the conflict.

Several years ago I stood on the burial ground of the battle of Gettysburg and witnessed over 7,000 small stone pillars marking the burial of soldiers from not only the civil war battle there, but also other conflicts in which American soldiers have died. I remember the words of Lincoln’s famous Gettysburg address as he spoke of the battle for freedom and equality that began our republic and then turned to think of the dead soldiers at Gettysburg who in the same tradition had given their lives and hallowed the ground upon which they stood. "But in a larger sense, we can not dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract". Later he spoke how they did that "by giving the full measure of devotion"--their very lives. A powerful testimony to the cost of the conflict that has purchased and preserved our freedom. Have we considered the costs of the conflict that produced the ground upon which we stand? The battleground upon which we fight was first hallowed by the blood of prophets who spoke of the Christ to come. Then hallowed with the blood of our Savior who died to make victory possible for us and “for whose sake” we are striving. Since then with the blood of countless martyrs who gave their lives for the testimony of the Lord. Only when we have fully comprehended the costs already paid will we find the motivation to:

Value truth enough to make our own prayerful investigation of what is right rather than take the easy road of creedal conformity to past conclusions or popular preachers.

Take a stand for what is right when everyone else is willing to speak another message of conformity with the world.

Listen patiently as a new generation is instructed in things we already know. To grow tired of hearing truth is a signal that the value of truth has diminished in our hearts. And I say to you that it never must!!!

And we must not fail to live lives that will result in spiritual victory not only for ourselves, but others! How can we win? Paul gives us the answers we need:

II. THREE THINGS WE NEED TO BE VICTORIOUS

A. We need a consistent lifestyle!

A manner of life worthy of the gospel! This word comes from the word from which we get the word "policy" or "police" or "politics". It originally meant the "conduct of a citizen". We are citizens of the kingdom of heaven, living as strangers in a foreign land.

To say that we live "worthy" of the gospel is to say that the life we live represents well the message of the gospel. How do we say to the world that we serve a Lord who modeled truth, sought the salvation of all men, and gave his life to do it? There needs to be consistency between our profession and our deeds. We must "stand firm". As we do, it will have its effect.

One of the most powerful weapons against error is not on the debate platform or in the pulpit; but in the lives of the those who love the Lord and who demonstrate day by day the complete superiority of God's truth over the lies of Satan!

B. We need a cooperative spirit

Striving together--is an interesting word. We could follow the Greek word here into our language in the word "athletic". The picture created by this word is that of a group of competitors who are running together. They are on the same team, working for a common victory. In one spirit, with one mind. God's people must fight the enemy in unity. There must be a single-minded commitment that all us will get to heaven together! Cf. Special Olympics

C. We need a courageous assurance.

1. v. 28 In no way alarmed! Paul urges the Philippians not to be intimidated by those who stand for error and who live it. He mentions how that the Philippians were undergoing a lot of criticism and perhaps even physical persecution for serving Christ. And offers then some words of encouragement:

a. Persecution for the sake of the gospel is a "sign" from God that we are going to be saved and that our enemies are going to be destroyed. Let us take consolation in that.

b. Persecution for Christ's sake is a privilege! "God has granted..."think of what that is saying!

c. Persecution for the gospel is the lot of all the faithful. Paul reminded the Philippians that "the same conflicts" were experienced by Him. Peter enlarges upon this: 1 Pet. 5:9

2. We live in a world where most people live by different values. It is easy to be intimidated by their numbers, or their criticism. Keep your courage and find assurance and consolation in what Paul says.

Conclusion: As we then fight the good fight of faith, we must work hard. We may shed tears over those who are defeated by sin. We may suffer from the hurt of those who wrong us. But however painful, in all of it we can rejoice that we are fighting for the only thing that really matters; that we are citizens of another kingdom to which we hope at last to arrive. Let us rejoice in even in the battle for truth.