

**Philippians 1:27-30 (NASB)**  
***Impactful Gospel Living***

27 Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, 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;  
 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.  
 29 For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,  
 30 experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.

**Introduction**

On the morning of 11 September 2001, a plane hit the World Trade Centre in New York.

A week later, Al Braca's body was found in the rubble. Al worked as a corporate bond trader on the 105<sup>th</sup> floor of Tower One.

Then the reports began to trickle in from friends and acquaintances. Some people on the 105th floor had made a last call or sent a final e-mail to loved ones saying that a man was leading people in prayer. That man was Al—he had been ministering to people during the attack!

For years, Al had been praying for the salvation of these men and women. According to Jeannie (his wife), Al was convinced that God wanted him to work among them in order to be a light in the darkness. He was not ashamed to share his faith with his colleagues ... many of whom sarcastically nicknamed him "The Rev".

And on that fateful day of September 11, in the midst of the chaos, Al realized that they were all trapped in the building and would not be able to escape. He then shared the gospel with a group of 50 colleagues and led them in prayer.

Al also asked an operator to contact his family. "Tell them that I love them," he said. It took the operator more than a month to reach his family, but the message brought them much-needed comfort. His son Christopher said, "The last thing my dad did had involved the two things most important to him—God and his family."

Indeed, the last things we do or say here on earth are often the most important things to us.

([http://paskewich.typepad.com/paskewichcom/2006/09/september\\_11th\\_\\_2.html](http://paskewich.typepad.com/paskewichcom/2006/09/september_11th__2.html))

Our passage today begins with an enormous challenge in v. 27—“Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.” Three key words unlock the meaning of this phrase. The first is the word “only”, which doesn’t even appear in the NIV text. But the Greek text begins with the word “monos” which means “only”. Paul meant to say that whether he would be set free or die in jail, there’s “only one thing” he wanted the Philippians to know.

The second word is “conduct” and it refers to living as a citizen of heaven. If you were charged for being a citizen of heaven, would there be enough evidence to convict you? True Christians live in such a way that no one can deny their identity as citizens of heaven.

The third word is “worthy” and it refers to balancing the scales so that both sides are even. To live “worthy” of the gospel means to live such that your life gives proper weight to all that God has done for you. Eugene Peterson translates it this way (*The Message*)—“Live in such a way that you are a credit to the message of Christ.”

When Paul wrote these words, he had no idea if he would ever get out of jail in Rome. That’s why Paul spoke of the “only one thing”—it is the “only one thing” he wanted to make clear in case he never saw the Philippian Christians in person again. This might be the only opportunity he had to say this one thing ... and it would be the most important thing he wanted to say while he still had time.

From this text we discover four ways we can impact our world for Jesus Christ.

## **I. Stand with One Another.**

V. 27a says, “... standing firm in one spirit ...”

The phrase “standing firm” describes a Roman military formation in which the soldiers stood shoulder to shoulder with their shields up and their spears outward. It was the strongest possible defensive position.

Impacting the world begins as Christians stand “in one spirit”. Perhaps, there are already too many barriers in the bigger body of Christ—e.g. barriers of worship style, mode of baptism, and denominational separation. We are not to divide ... but yet we do, sometimes over secondary issues. We end up mistaking preferred practice as sacred spirituality. This will hinder the people of God in the bigger Body from working together to advance the Gospel based on the many areas in which they stand on common ground.

Jesus said that all men would know that we are His disciples by our love for one another (John 13:34-35). Let me also add this, “All men would know that the Gospel is beautiful when they see our oneness in Christ.”

Here is an observation made on those people who were with Jesus:

“Look at those who surrounded Jesus—a tax collector, a physician, fishermen, a woman who was a prostitute and once possessed with seven demons. Some were poor. Some were wealthy. Some were very energetic, while others were passive. Some were explosive like Peter. Others, like James, were logical.”

(*The Leadership Secrets of Jesus* by Mike Murdock, p. 101)

Jesus knew that people contribute their uniqueness to the church, and consequently, they make it stronger. Each person in the body possesses knowledge, insights and experiences to edify people and build up the church. That’s the oneness in unity and the uniqueness in diversity that Jesus has wanted His people to know and show as He works in and through them.

Unity doesn’t mean there are no differences in views, roles, and responsibilities. However, if there is a multiplicity of views, the one common purpose for that must be seeking God’s interest, not lobbying the interest of any one person or group.

That’s why the Bible exhorts us to esteem one another, and not let our human pride get in the way of working with one another in Philippians 2:3 says, “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves ...”

Rick Warren once listed five commitments to help unite the church:

- One, build one another up. Life is tough and there are enough discouraging people in the world today. What we need to be then is to be an army of encouragers.
- Two, recognize the value of every person. Every church is made up of a broad range of personalities. But the value of a loving church is that while you may disagree with others, you never forget that Christ died for them. That shows how valuable they are. That shows how important they are. What right do I have to hurt people for whom Christ died? So let’s model the belief that everybody is important to Christ.
- Three, keep our focus on what’s really important. We need to let what is eternal and sacred to unite us, not let what is external and secondary to divide us. The church must focus on emphasizing what is eternal (e.g. worship of God), not external (e.g. physical building in which we worship God). Focus on what’s really important.

- Four, restrain our liberty out of love for one another. I believe Christian leaders have a heavier responsibility and accountability here. This is because there are some things other people in the church could probably get away with, but you can't because you're a leader and they're watching you. Leaders need to be aware of that. That's the price of leadership.
- Five, live with a peacemaking spirit. On non-essential matters, keep them to yourself. There is no need to impose them on everyone. Romans 12:18 says, "As far as it depends on you, if it is possible, live at peace with all men." However, the fact of life is that there will be some people who can't get along with you no matter how right you are. Even Jesus had done things that the Pharisees disapproved of. They were hard core legalists who were simply impossible to please.

These five commitments help to unite the church in its diversity.

(<http://pastors.com/6-commitments-for-growing-a-church-with-unity>)

Unity is not something we pray passively to God, and then expect it to drop from heaven to us. Unity is something we pray fervently to God, and experience Him so blessing us because we work proactively for it. Paul exhorts the church to stand firm without division. If the church is divided, then our message of "God loves you" to the world would be heard by them in this way—"God loves you, but among ourselves, we find it hard to love one another." If this is how the world understands our message and witness to them, we will have little or even negative impact on them.

There is a second way we can impact our world ...

## **II. Strive with Steadfastness.**

V. 27b says, "... striving together for the faith of the gospel ..."

Note two key words in this phrase—"striving together". It pictures some sportsmen competing as a team with optimum effort to hit the finishing line, if not to finish first, then at least to finish well.

God's people strive together not to bring glory to themselves individually or even as a body, but to the Lord and for the Gospel's sake. Whenever our biblical beliefs and values are being challenged or threatened, we must strive steadfastly to remain true in and for Christ.

God's word to the church is always this—"Go forward together!" Jesus calls the church to "GO and preach the gospel" (Mark 16:15). He calls the church to "GO and make disciples" (Mathew 28:19). Yes, we are to unite and GO use all our God-given opportunities, gifts, and resources to advance the Gospel.

We need Christians to get out of the church and into the public domains—like education, business, and entertainment—to collectively commit themselves to shine for Christ and make a difference for Him.

Recently, I watched the movie “Sully” starring Tom Hanks as the main character—an Airbus pilot by the name of Chesley Sullenberger. It is the true story of how this pilot of US Airways saved the lives of all 155 people on board (5 crew and 150 passengers) by water-crashing his aircraft into the Hudson River on 15 Jan. 2009. The two engines failed when a flock of birds flew into them and damaged both of them.

Though he was hailed as a hero, Sullenberger was investigated for possible error of judgment—i.e. instead of doing an emergency landing at a nearby airport, he committed an error and crashed the plane into the Hudson River.

To cut the story short, the investigation finally concluded that it would be humanly impossible for Sullenberger to land safely at any nearby airport. The crash landing in the waters of the Hudson River was indeed the best possible option for survival, given the circumstances and the time available.

One investigator commented to Sullenberger that it was his one heroic act that had saved the lives of all on board. Sullenberger disagreed and said that it was the act of many heroes working together that brought about this rescue miracle—his co-pilot, the cabin crew, the passengers themselves, and the rescue personnel who came to them by air, sea, and land.

In the same way, to save a lost world for Jesus Christ is not a one-man heroic act. It must be the act of many committed Christians working together for the Gospel’s sake. Striving together means striving interdependently as a team and in the same direction, not striving independently as individuals and in separate directions.

To impact our world for the Lord, we need Christians who are going forward and not retreating. We need Christians who are GOING FORWARD TOGETHER. Paul says we need Christians who are “striving together for the faith of the Gospel”.

There is a third way we can impact our world for Christ ...

### **III. Speak with Conviction.**

V. 28 says, “... 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.”

Opposition to the Gospel reveals spiritual reality. That's the "sign" mentioned in v. 28. When people oppose you for your Christian testimony, you can be sure of one reality—i.e. you are on track to to heaven!

That's precisely the meaning of v. 28. Genuine believers are proved genuine because they are opposed by those who are disturbed by the believers' witness.

Believers committed to living out the Gospel would disturb the world because they often stand counter-cultural to worldly beliefs and values. E.g. if you dare to say the Bible teaches that adultery and active homosexual practice are against God's will no matter how consensual the parties are, some people are bound to call you a narrow-minded, judgmental bigot. We disturb the world precisely because we are citizens of heaven and live by different standards. I want to stress that I am here talking about damning the act, NOT demonizing the person because this is someone we must try to help and not to harm; someone whom God wants to redeem and not to reject.

Paul's advice is simple—"Don't be alarmed." Don't be surprised when someone criticizes your Christian faith. If you are indeed true to your faith in your witness, this will happen to you sooner or later. And when it comes, you need conviction to speak and live boldly in and for Christ.

On the morning of 5 October 2006, some 25 Amish children in Pennsylvania were studying in the local schoolhouse.<sup>1</sup> At 9:51 a.m., Charles Roberts, a 32-year-old milkman, burst into the schoolhouse and heavily armed to kill.

He ordered the young girls to line up quickly in front of the chalkboard. Then he demanded that the teacher take her 15 male students, a pregnant woman, and three mothers with infants outside.

Once they were gone, Roberts bound the hands and legs of the young girls, who ranged in age from 6 to 13. When the Amish girls asked him why he meant to hurt them, he said he was angry at God.

The teacher ran to a neighbouring farmhouse and called the police. Nine minutes later, the police were on the scene. They engaged Roberts in conversation via a loudspeaker. He said if the ground wasn't cleared in two seconds he'd kill everyone.

Demonstrating incredible courage and love, Marian Fisher, the oldest of the Amish girls, pleaded—"Shoot me and let the others go."

But Roberts began firing, spraying bullets into all ten girls as quickly as he could. The police rushed into the building, but didn't get in before

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<sup>1</sup> Amish are generally viewed as sectarian Christians.

Roberts turned his gun on himself. Five of the young girls were killed, including Marian Fisher.

But that's where the story takes an unexpected turn. The entire Amish community followed young Marian Fisher's example of sacrifice and love. While Roberts chose to unleash his anger on the innocent, the Amish chose to bestow forgiveness on the guilty. Many in the Amish community attended Roberts' funeral. They insisted it was not their place to judge him.

The Amish also reached out to Marie Roberts and her children (the killer's family). They obeyed the biblical teaching to mourn with those who mourn ... for the Roberts family was also mourning their own loss. In addition, the Amish community leaders set up a fund to take care of the killer's widow and three children.

Marian Fisher and the entire Amish community dared to be different from the prevailing culture.

The prevailing culture says, "You must love yourself above anyone and everyone else." Following Christ's example, Marian Fisher said—"Greater love has no one than this ... that he'd lay his life down for his friends."

The prevailing culture says, "Exact revenge and somebody's got to pay." But following Christ's example, the Amish community said—"Love your enemy. Mourn with those who mourn. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ forgave you."

(<http://storage.cloversites.com/firstbaptistchurchhotspringsarkansas/documents/Dare%20to%20Be%20Different.pdf>)

In Matthew 5:10-12, Jesus pronounces a blessing upon those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness. That kind of persecution is a sign that you are a genuine believer ... because your conviction emboldens you to speak and live counter-culturally for Jesus Christ.

Finally, there is a fourth way we can impact our world for Christ ...

#### **IV. Suffer with Honour.**

VV. 29-30: "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me."

Notice the two gifts in these verses. There is first the gift of faith ("not only to believe in him"). This is the gift that enables us to believe in Christ. Without this gift from the Lord, we would never be saved in the first place. Then there

is the gift of suffering (“also to suffer for him”). This is also a gift—but it is the gift no one wants.

I personally don’t know of any Christian in Singapore who has ever suffered for his/her faith in terms of being imprisoned, beaten up, or killed. But as Christians, we do suffer in terms of being ridiculed either subtly or openly for our faith and stand in Jesus Christ.

A teacher wanted to teach her students about self-esteem. So she asked anyone who thought he was stupid to stand up.

One kid stood up and the teacher was surprised. She didn’t think anyone would stand up.

So she asked him, “Why did you stand up?”

He answered, “I didn’t want to leave you standing up by yourself.”

Isn’t it true that when we stand up for our faith and witness in Christ, we may look stupid and alone ... because others want to ridicule us as such?

How then should we respond to those who ridicule our faith or stand in Jesus Christ?

- One, don’t be surprised. Jesus was mocked when He was crucified, and He told us that people would hate us because we follow Him. This is the cost of being a disciple. It is unrealistic to always expect people who have not had a personal encounter with Christ to respect my faith or applaud my morality. Unbelievers sometimes mock God, take His name in vain, attack the Bible, make fun of the church, and ridicule anyone who follows Jesus. Don’t be surprised when it happens. Paul wrote—“All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12).
- Two, don’t react in anger. In this world of social media outrage, we Christians may also want to jump into the ring and scream like everyone else to prove our point. But that wasn’t how Jesus responded when He was arrested, stripped naked, scourged and interrogated. When Jesus was being reviled, 1 Peter 2:23 says, “He did not revile back; when He suffered, He did not threaten.” Jesus either answered plainly or kept silent. He trusted the Father to vindicate Him. If you are mocked for your faith, keep your cool and hold your tongue. God will give you wise words to say if you let His love control your tongue. Don’t go round bad-mouthing just to vent your anger.
- Three, pray for those who oppose us. Jesus said it best in Matthew 5:43-44—“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray



for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.” Our obedience to the Great Commission must go hand-in-hand with our obedience to the Great Commandment. The Lord who calls us to “go and save people” also calls us to “go and love people”, even those who oppose us for our faith.

The gift of suffering is one that no one would gladly and willingly receive. Yet, it is one that the Lord calls on us to expect and accept as part and parcel of living out a Gospel-worthy life here on earth.

## **Conclusion**

Would you like to change your world for Jesus? Would you like to be a credit to the Gospel? Here’s the “only one thing” on Paul’s heart that you need to remember.

- You’re citizens of heaven.
- So live like it.
- You can impact your world if you will ...
  - Stand with one another.
  - Strive with steadfastness.
  - Speak with conviction.
  - Suffer with honour.

This is impactful Gospel living for the Lord here on earth.

Let’s make a difference for Christ by the way we live beginning this day.  
Amen!