

Philippians 1:28-30

Lessons from White Water Rafting:

- Every Christian might not want to stay in the rough waters of tribulation and suffering, but it is in the white water that their character is tested
- Whitewater (i.e. life's challenges) is not only God's design for believers but, a sign of God's protection and a place for the believer's character development.
- The rough water is where perseverance is strengthened; which is why the believer is to resist the temptation to seek only safe, calm, stagnate waters (i.e. escaping from difficult situations)

"All those who desire to live godly in Jesus Christ will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). James wrote, *"Count it all joy when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith (the whitewater of life) will produce endurance – which produces maturity."* (James 1:2-3). It isn't a matter of "if" but "when" a Christian finds himself in turmoil, conflict, and trials of the white waters of life. But here is a biblical truth: God never promised the believer smooth sailing, but He did promise us a safe landing.

That means to be good citizens of heaven they are to be good citizens in the local church, where the believer is to be committed to three critical actions. Verse 28 identifies the actions ...

- Don't be terrified when adversaries attack
- Put your trust in Christ during these times
- Suffer for Christ's sake

Verse 27 communicates to be committed to repairing any dis-unifying spirit, *"with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel."* Christianity isn't a solo performance . . . it's a team effort. In verse 28 we are advised on what *not* to do – *"not in any way terrified by your adversaries."* So, not only are we to be committed to repairing any dis-unifying spirit (Vs. 27) we are to reject any disengaging attitude (Vs. 28).

The Greek word used here for "terrified" or "frightened" does not occur anywhere else in the New Testament. It's a word that refers to horses that are startled and frightened on the battlefield. So Paul tells the church to resist and to refuse any kind of perspective that would dishearten them, distract them, or discourage them. He's effectively telling the church to be fearless. Jesus said in **John 16:33**, *"In this world you will have tribulation."*

John MacArthur wrote, *"... a growing number of churches today are intentionally playing down the biblical elements of sin and repentance . . . and in so doing, the gospel is trivialized or reduced to an impotent level and then repackaged into various forms of entertaining amusement."*

Paul is effectively saying opposition is a "*sign*." The Greek word Paul uses for a *sign* is a word that refers to giving evidence that something is true. In other words, the sign proves what it true (verification).

I. Opposition is evidence of a coming judgment – Perdition (Hell, damnation, punishment)

Paul writes here, *"it is a sign of destruction for them (that is, the opponents of the church)."*

2 Thessalonians 1:6-9, *"it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation ... when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power."*

Let's keep that in mind when we are facing opposition that the opponent is doing nothing more than giving self-condemning evidence that they are enemies of God and that horrifying judgment is in their future. This will help us to respond to our world correctly; not with hatred or anger or retaliation, but with compassion, kindness, understanding, agape love, and above all sympathy.

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II. Opposition is evidence of a genuine disciple (Vs. 28)

The very fact that we are being opposed on behalf of Christ provides the evidence that we belong to Christ.

What Paul will do in the next verse is to effectively expand his case for fearlessness, for the church to stay in the white water by giving 3 encouraging reminders.

1. Paul will remind them that salvation is a gift (Vs. 29)

Notice, “*For to you it has been granted ...*” The word Paul uses for “granted” which is “*charismia*” is from “charizo” which means to give graciously and generously. It’s the same root word from which we get our word “*charis*” – grace.

God not only gave believers the marvelous gift of faith to believe in Him, but also the privilege to suffer for His sake.

2. Suffering is a privilege to embrace (Vs. 29)

Verse 29 says, “*For to you it has been granted.*” Paul says it is: God in His grace, not His disfavor, has granted us the privilege to suffer for His sake. This means suffering isn’t a sign that God has abandoned us, it is a sign that God is honoring us. It isn’t a sign that God is displeased with us . . . it may very well be a sign that He is pleased with us.

What good does this gift do for us?

- It takes our eyes off earthly things (objects that are nothing more than merely trinkets)
- It weeds out superficial believers and shallow traditions
- It strengthens the testimony of those who endure
- It causes us to release anything and everything in our life that does not glorify God
- It adds to the future reward for those who faithfully suffer
- It weans us from self-sufficiency and self-promotion
- It crushes our pride
- It causes us to worship with purified motives and emotion

The plan of God is not to pamper us but to perfect us, to mature us in Christ, not to deliver us from peril, but to develop us in the midst of it.

Part 1 of verse 29-- salvation is a gift of grace. Part 2 of verse 29--suffering is a privilege to embrace.

3. Trials are to be expected as common-place (Vs. 30)

Paul is saying you are experiencing what I’m experiencing, and by implication – what every believer experiences. All of our situations might be different, different trials and persecution, but the same suffering. Trials should be viewed then, not as occasional events, but as regular experiences.

The word translated “*conflict*” is from the Greek word “*agon*” which gives us the English word agony.

It is the same word used for Christ’s struggle in the garden of Gethsemane, “*and being in agony, he was praying fervently*” (Luke 22:44). First and foremost, Jesus Christ tasted the agony of suffering. He most definitely understands ours.

Christianity is anything but predictable and it demands recurring trust and commitment to whatever God’s hand of grace has chosen to grant to us. It is ultimately for the sake of the gospel and the glory of Christ.