

Biblical Reflection 3: “Stand Firm, Together”

February 23, 2021



What does the New Testament have to say to Christians who are suffering unjustly and victims of oppression? Plenty. In Paul’s teaching to the Philippians, for example, we discover that Paul had been imprisoned for his faith in Jesus Christ. The Philippians were facing opposition from hostile forces in society and being torn by conflict within the church. They were confused, anxious, and afraid. They needed spiritual guidance and encouragement. So, Paul wrote:

“Only, exercise your citizenship in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. To them, [your faith and unity] are evidence of their destruction, on one hand, and of your salvation, on the other. And this is God’s doing” (Phil. 1:27-28, my translation).

In this world, we will be afraid at times. The forces of evil are real and menacing. Yet, in the face of intimidation and unjust suffering, we have to remember who we are as Christians (citizens of heaven), whom we serve (the Lord Jesus Christ), and where our true hope lies (in what God does in us, among us, for us, and through us). We also need to remember that we will be so much stronger if we stand and strive together, in unity of mind and action; and if we actively draw upon God's Spirit to fulfill God's will for our lives.

"Therefore, my beloved," Paul adds, "...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12-13, NRSV).

Our eternal salvation is dependent on God’s grace, which comes to us through faith; and yet, it is also something we must “work out” (develop and actively take hold of). We must learn to put our faith into action, especially when it is hardest to do so. Living by our faith is how we experience the power of God at work within and among us. And how do we recognize God’s power? It’s not our surges of rage or hatred, which only lead to violence and more evil. No, the fruit of the Spirit will be grace-based, love-motivated, and compassion-filled. When we learn how to draw on God’s power within us, we find courage, confidence, and strength to overcome evil in the right ways with the right spirit.

I am standing with you and the people of Myanmar, even though I cannot be with you in person. Let’s see what God will do as we draw upon the Spirit’s power to stand firm in our faith, and to stand firm, together.

"May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word" (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17).