



The Harvester

*Preparing Souls
To Serve The Lord!*

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Dead People Don't Fear

Brian R. Kenyon

Vincent Okamoto was a Japanese American who was born in an interim camp during World War II. He served the US Army in Vietnam. According to an interview he gave for a PBS special on Vietnam, Okamoto was in a battle where his unit was out-numbered six to one. Their only advantage was two armored personnel carriers with mounted .50 caliber machine guns. Their mission was to keep a North Vietnamese unit from taking refuge in Cambodia, where they could reload to inflict further damage. Well into the fire-fight, his unit suffered many casualties. Okamoto recalled, "I just knew for sure I was going to die." He said to himself, "Okamoto, you're not going to make it out of here. Mom's going to take it hard, but you're not going to make it out of here." Then, he excitedly told the interviewer, "That's liberating! When you know you're going to die ... the fear leaves. At least in my case, I was no longer afraid."

Okamoto got off the ground, climbed into one of the disabled armored vehicles to find that all its occupants were dead. He cleared away the bodies, and fired the gun at the enemy until it ran out of ammunition. Then, he jumped out of that vehicle, ran through the crossfire, climbed into the other vehicle and did the same until it ran out of ammunition. Then, the enemy threw two grenades at him, which he was able to throw back before they exploded, until finally a third grenade was thrown slightly out of his reach. He was riddled with shrapnel in his legs and back, but he survived the explosion.

When I heard Okamoto's statement, "When you know you're going to die ... the fear leaves. ... I was no longer afraid," I immediately thought of the Christian experience. As it concerns spiritual courage, I would change his statement to "When you know you are already dead, the fear leaves, and I should no longer be afraid."

Christians are, in a sense, dead people. Paul stated such when he declared:

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. (Gal. 2:20 cf. 1 Cor. 4:9)

Because they are already dead, Christians should be among the most courageous people alive! From prison, Paul wrote a motivating call to courage in Philippians 1:27-30, in which he gives three particular areas where Christians need to be fearless.

Congratulations, Stephen Atnip!



He was awarded a PhD in Bible New Testament from Amridge University, August 2021. Stephen has been an instructor with FSOP for twenty years and is a regular speaker on our lectureship. He has also served on the board of directors since 2003. I have known Stephen since 1989, and since then have always appreciated his love for the truth and ability to teach it! —Brian

Be Courageous In Living the Gospel

Paul wrote:

Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel. (Phil. 1:27)

Whether Paul remained physically with the Philippians, they must be faithful! "Let your conduct [manner of life, ESV]" (from *politeuomai*, πολιτεύομαι) literally means to "behave as a citizen," which would have special significance to the Philippians because of their status as a Roman colony. The citizenship Paul had in mind was of heaven, not of Rome (Phil. 3:20).

Being courageous in living the Gospel requires Christians to be united in spirit. "One spirit" and "one mind" refers to complete oneness (cf. Phil. 2:2; Rom. 12:16; 15:6; 2 Cor. 13:11; 1 Pet. 3:8). Although some may take "spirit" to be the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:4), the context in Philippians 1:27 indicates that Paul was speaking of the human spirit, or attitude. This is further confirmed by its parallel in context, "mind." The "mind" here (from *psyche*, ψυχή) refers to the self, inner life, one's inmost being (cf. Phil. 2:3; 1 Thes. 5:23). Paul wanted Christians to be of one mind (Phil. 1:7; 2:2, 5; 3:15; 4:2; 1 Cor. 1:10).

Being courageous in living the Gospel also requires Christians to be united in battle. The term "striving together [striving side by side, ESV]" (from *sunathleo*, συναθλέω) means to fight together with, or to work together with. This word occurs again only in Philippians 4:3, where it is translated "labored with." However, the word without the "with" prefix occurs in Second Timothy 2:5, where it is translated "competes [strive, KJV]," and "carries the association of a contest in war and in the arena where the gladiatorial struggle was one of life and death" (Martin 88). That for which Christians are to fight together is "the faith," which refers to the objective system of belief contained in the Gospel (Gal. 1:23; 1 Tim. 4:1; 5:8; Jude 3).

Christians are the Lord's spiritual army! Since we are already "crucified with Christ" and thus released from the fear of death (Heb. 2:14-15), let us be courageous in living the Gospel!

Be Courageous In Facing Adversaries

Paul continued exhorting that they be "not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God" (Phil. 1:28 cf. 2 Cor. 1:9-11). "Adversaries [opponents, NAS]" refers to those who stand against, or are opposed. The word is used again for opponents

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of Paul's preaching (1 Cor. 16:9); to the "man of sin" (2 Thes. 2:4); and even to Satan (1 Tim. 5:14). In this context, it probably refers either to government officials influencing Philippi or to some religious antagonists such as the Judaizers (cf. Phil. 3:2, 18).

Enemies of Christ think that suffering Christians was a sign that Christianity was weak and ready to fall, but reality showed their persecution of God's people was actually the sign that His enemies were doomed for destruction (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18-31). "Evident proof [token, KJV; sign, NAS; clear sign, ESV]" refers to evidence, or an indication (Rom. 3:25-26; 2 Cor. 8:24). "Perdition [destruction, NAS]" refers to utter ruin (Phil. 3:19; Mt. 7:13; 1 Tim. 6:9; Heb. 10:39; 2 Pet. 2:1, 3; 3:7; Rev. 17:8, 11), or to one bound to be lost or one destined for hell (Jn. 17:12; 2 Thes. 2:3).

Informed Christians know that suffering for Christ by His adversaries is a gracious privilege granted them by God (cf. Acts 5:41). This kind of suffering is not a sign of Christians' ruin, but rather a sign of their salvation from God (cf. Mt. 5:10-12; Rom. 8:17-18; 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Pet. 4:12-16). We must not cower in the face of opposition but stand courageous with "the whole armor of God ... praying always ... being watchful" (Eph. 6:11-18)!

Be Courageous In Suffering Persecution

Paul concluded, "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me" (Phil. 1:29-30). The suffering the Philippians were enduring was the same kind of suffering Paul endured and was presently enduring when he wrote (Phil. 1:30 cf. 2 Cor. 1:8-10). The word "conflict" refers to a struggle, fight; opposition (Col. 2:1; 1 Thes. 2:2; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7; Heb. 21:1). Paul said elsewhere, "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Rom. 8:36-37).

The persecution Paul endured for teaching the Gospel not only imitated Christ (1 Pet. 2:21), but it also helped the church, as he declared:

We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed — ¹⁰always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested

in our body. ¹¹For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹²So then death is working in us, but life in you. (2 Cor. 8-12)

These verses reveal, as one commentator succinctly stated, "There is clearly in Paul's mind a great 'fellowship of suffering' (Phil. 3:10 KJV) which reaches vertically to share in Christ's agony ... and horizontally to include all believers" (Harrell 82). Paul viewed his suffering as falling short of the suffering Christ endured. Thus, he could say, "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church" (Col. 1:24). The only way Christians can receive glory in eternity is to be willing to suffer with Christ in this life (cf. Rom. 8:16-17).

Since Christians are dead people, there is no reason to "fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul" (Mt. 10:28). We must be courageous to face persecution. When Paul spoke about his suffering in Asia Minor, he acknowledged that it was so "we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered ... does deliver ... in whom we trust ... will still deliver" (2 Cor. 1:8-10)!

Conclusion

The soldier's words can (and should) ring true for every spiritual soldier as well: "When I know I am already dead, the fear leaves, and I should no longer be afraid." Christians have been "crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20), and thus are already dead. It takes maturity and growth to become sufficiently detached from the world so as not to fear its opposition. Every Christian must progress toward that goal. Although fears may still arise among the spiritually mature (cf. 1 Cor. 2:3), we cannot allow those fears to keep us from faithfulness (cf. Mt. 8:26; Rev. 21:8). We must live the Gospel fearlessly, willing to speak boldly (Phil. 1:14) and face whatever adversaries oppose us (Heb. 13:6; Rev. 2:10), for "you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father'" (Rom. 8:15).

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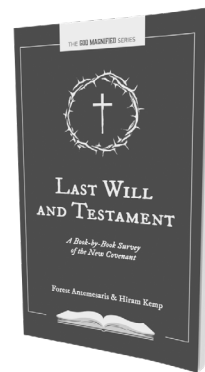
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Keep Pressing Forward

There is no doubt the covid-19 pandemic has slowed down the work of the Lord in some regions of the world! However, especially during times like these, people need to hear the good news and be taught about the peace that results from obedience to it. There is no doubt covid-19 is serious and people are dying from its complications. Regardless of people's view of masking or the safety of the vaccine, only the Gospel can give people the fearlessness to face even the devil himself (Heb. 2:14-15) and the "peace of God, which surpasses all understanding" (Phil. 4:7). We are continuing to do what we can to get the life changing message to a spiritually lost and dying world! Currently, we have a total of fifty registered students, forty-four of whom are part-time. Of these, twenty-three are taking classes for credit. We thank our supporters for making this possible. Your financial support of our full-time students helps them better concentrate on their studies, knowing their living expenses are covered. The value of the school in reaching the lost proves itself with each student who enrolls. Thanks for your financial support!



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