

Day of the
Christian
Martyr

2026

SERMON BUILDER

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

WHAT IS DAY OF THE CHRISTIAN MARTYR?

According to church tradition, June 29 marks the martyrdom of the Apostle Paul. This year, Christians around the world will take time on June 29 and throughout that weekend to honor the Lord through the legacy of those who have sacrificed their lives for the advancement of the gospel.

The Voice of the Martyrs invites you and your congregation into fellowship with our Christian brothers and sisters who are persecuted for their bold and faithful witness at any cost.

SERMON BUILDER — WHAT IS IT?

The Voice of the Martyrs serves the local church. We strive to furnish resources for the local church to the glory of God and the purposes of Christ for the advance of his eternal kingdom. This resource is a tool to help you as you engage your congregation with other Day of the Christian Martyr resources. In response to feedback from pastors, we are providing this sermon builder resource to help you have a starting place as you lead your congregation's Day of the Christian Martyr focus. It is one option as you preach. Feel free to pull illustrations, content or thoughts as you build your sermon for that day. Be blessed and know that we are praying for you as you lead your church into fellowship with our persecuted Christian brothers and sisters and a greater obedience to the Great Commission.

Day of the Christian Martyr 2026

SERMON PLANNING — BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

WHAT DO I WANT MY CONGREGATION TO KNOW AS A RESULT OF THIS SERMON?

As Christians walk worthy of the call to follow Christ, we should expect opposition.

WHAT SHOULD I CHALLENGE MY CONGREGATION TO PURSUE AS BIBLICAL DISCIPLES?

No matter the opposition we face, we can stand firm as we strive for the advance of the gospel.

WHY IS VOM TELLING THE STORY OF MARTYRS?

As we learn about persecuted Christians, our brothers and sisters in Christ for all eternity, we can be inspired by their faithfulness to serve Christ at any cost. As we learn about Christians throughout history who gave their lives for the sake of Christ, we remember and are inspired by Christians who do the same today.

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SERMON TITLE

WHEN OPPOSITION COMES
(PHILIPPIANS 1:27-30)

BACKGROUND

Paul likely wrote his letter to Christians in the church at Philippi during his first imprisonment in Rome. During his second missionary journey, he had led people to Christ and started a church (Acts 16). Now, Paul writes to those he knew and loved to encourage them in the faith. The tone of his letter was seemingly impacted by his current situation, as he wrote thoughts about his own death — “to live is Christ, to die is gain” — and encouraged his friends to maintain joy (Phil. 4:4), embrace the peace of Christ (Phil. 4:7) and learn contentment no matter what state they found themselves in (Phil. 4:11-12).

All of Paul’s encouragement is especially inspiring to Christians facing opposition and persecution. His message is clear: No matter what happens, be faithful to Christ!

INTRODUCTION

Show the short video on Perpetua available at vom.org/martyr or share the summary of her story, which can be downloaded at the website above or read from the bulletin insert.

SERMON PASSAGE AND OUTLINE

“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.”

—Philippians 1:27–30

1. **The Focused Walk (Philippians 1:27)**

- a. “Only” (v. 27): Paul’s placement of the Greek word *monon* (Strong’s G3440) gives evidence that his intent here is to say “above all” or “at all costs.” This flows out of his previous declaration in Philippians 1:21 that “to live is Christ and to die is gain” and foreshadows his resolute statement in verse 29 that belief and suffering are intertwined.
- b. “Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ” (v. 27): The phrase “worthy of the gospel” is one Paul writes on multiple occasions (e.g., Rom. 16:2; Eph. 4:1; Col. 1:10), calling Christians to the highest standard as a pattern of behavior. Paul is saying that citizenship has its obligations, and citizens of the kingdom of Christ have the highest obligation to live worthy of his name.
- c. “Come and see you or am absent” (v. 27): This important phrase reminds the Philippian readers that their fellowship with Paul (the person God used to bring the gospel to them) is not diminished by distance. In the same way, our fellowship with Christians is not dependent on face-to-face interactions, for we are one body. Paul reminds them that “I may hear of you,” which brings accountability to the worthiness of their walk.

ILLUSTRATION: Christians in Eritrea pay a great price for living lives worthy of the gospel of Christ. According to Brother Joseph, a Christian formerly imprisoned in Eritrea, “Prisons in Eritrea are torture chambers.” Front-line workers believe between 350 and 400 Eritrean Christians remain in prison, often held without formal charges in shipping containers in the desert. The actual figure is unknown because officials will not release information on prisoners or allow outside contact. Despite the pressure in his country, Brother Joseph joyfully declared, “We praise God because the number of believers is growing every day.”

2. The Firm Walk

- a. “Standing firm” or resolute (v. 27): The reader might be tempted to pull the phrase “standing firm” out of context and apply it to any number of situations. But note that Paul uses it to describe the type of unity he is exhorting the Philippian Christians to embrace. Perhaps Paul has heard of specific issues within their fellowship. Perhaps he simply knows that being a Christian in Philippi is difficult as opponents of the gospel may have been attempting to bring divisive accusations against the believers. Standing firm is not used as a cliché or platitude here; it is directed at two specific behaviors:
 - i. Being united in spirit (v. 27): Some discussion arises among commentators if Paul is referring to matters of gifting or in controversy surrounding the Philippians’ view of the Holy Spirit. Either may be true. But in the face of opposition, a literal reading suffices: The believers in Philippi should stand firm, united in spirit with lion-hearted courage against all opposition.
 - ii. Being united in mind (v. 27): Further, the believers should also be united in mind, not allowing their opponents to drive wedges between any minor disagreements to drive them apart. They do have an enemy, but their enemy is not one another.

3. The Fearless Walk

- a. “Striving side by side” (v. 27): The unity to which they are committing is not passive. Often, our image of unity in the context of opposition is “circling the wagons” — that is, drawing inward and putting up a defense against a common enemy. However, the unity that Paul writes about is an active unity that is striving together (*synathleō*, Strong’s G4866).
- b. “For the faith of the gospel” (v. 27): The striving is not merely an activity in itself but a means to accomplish something wondrous. Effort demands outcome. The Philippian Christians have been given insight into the mystery of faith through Christ, and they are to strive together to proclaim it to the world.
- c. “Not frightened ... by your opponents” (v. 28): “Paul expresses the negative very strongly. Frightened, *ptyromenoi*, is a vivid term, unique in the Greek Bible and denoting the uncontrollable stampede of startled horses” (Martin, Ralph. *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary*. London: The Tyndale Press, 1959, reprinted 1969, p. 86). What would cause such wild fear for the Philippian Christians? Roman soldiers? False teachers? A community opposed to their faith? Insecurity about their own ability to defend their faith? The main fear of our Philippian brothers and sisters is likely the same as our own: ungodly opponents in any age who shake the faith of those claiming Christ. Paul’s direct words, coming from one who was their father in the faith, are those of command and likely carried great influence.

ILLUSTRATION: When VOM founders Richard and Sabina Wurmbrand faced the invasion of Communist Russia in their homeland of Romania, they were confronted with the temptation to give in to fear by fleeing the country or submitting to Communist ideology. Many Christians in Romania, including pastors and denominational leaders, were urged to comply with the Communist regime. At one meeting, influential pastors and denominational leaders were urged to embrace communism in Romania. Joseph Stalin himself had been elected as the honorary president of this group, even as he

had murdered countless Christians in the name of communism. Bishops and pastors in the assembly succumbed to fear, stating that communism and Christianity were fundamentally the same and could easily coexist. Knowing that such statements were false, the Wurmbrands were face-to-face with those opposed to the Lord Jesus Christ — and disgusted by the actions of fellow church leaders. Sabina told Richard, “Stand up and wash away this shame from the face of Christ.” Richard replied, “If I do, you’ll lose your husband.” But Sabina said what Richard knew in his heart: “I don’t wish to have a coward as a husband.” Richard stood up in front of the 4,000 delegates, but instead of praising communism, he bravely declared that the church’s duty is to glorify God and Christ alone. He was met with thunderous applause.

4. **The Faithful Walk**

- a. “That for the sake of Christ” (v. 29): Paul begins this verse with a statement: “For it has been granted to you.” All our worthy walking and striving in unity of spirit and mind is for the sake of Christ. All our suffering is for the sake of Christ. Nothing we experience in our Christian life is separated from his sovereign hand.
- b. Belief and suffering (v. 29): The word “granted” could also be translated “graced” or “favored”: The Philippian Christians were graced with the immense responsibility to not only believe but also suffer for the sake of Christ. There is no accident in their suffering. Throughout his writings, Paul declares that suffering on behalf of the name of Christ is a privilege, not something to be feared or avoided.
- c. Paul’s example of faithfulness (v. 30): Lest the Philippian Christians feel alone as they face opposition and suffering, Paul reminds them of his own journey of suffering. He is not a leader who asks others to pay a price he is unwilling or unable to pay, and his own example is fixed in their memory.

ILLUSTRATION: Perpetua was resolute in her walk with Christ. No level of pressure or persuasion could lessen her commitment to hold fast to Christ. Facing certain death in the arena, she refused to be frightened by her opponents, placing her faith in Christ alone for her salvation and viewing her execution as a joyous privilege.