

Rediscovering Our Joy
Sermon # 4

"Living A Worthy Life!"

Philippians 1:27-30

I consider myself to be a patriotic American. My citizenship is so important to me that it in part defines who I am and how I live. For example when I travel out of the country I remind myself that I represent the United States of America. That I may in fact be the only American these people have seen, and therefore my country is judged by my conduct. If we keep this thought in mind it will help us to understand what Paul is saying in today's text.

The church at Philippi found themselves surrounded by an unsympathetic and at times hostile dominant culture. When people find themselves in such a situation several possible reactions are possible. Some when so confronted get aggressive and lash out like a cornered animal. Others tend to pull back and cringe in fear. And still others try to act like chameleons and just blend in to their surroundings. But the Apostle Paul writing from his chains of imprisonment calls on the Philippians to react to hostility in a way that does not come naturally. Paul begins by reminding the Philip-

pians that they must maintain a consistent witness regardless of their circumstances.

In verse twenty-seven we read, “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, (28) and 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. (29) For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, (30) having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.”

Perhaps there has never been a period in the history of America when true Christians have lived so much like the standards of the world and demonstrated so little of the higher standards of God’s word than now. Polls show that there is no difference between the evangelical population and the rest of the country in the TV shows we watch or in the amount of time we spend watching them. There’s not much difference between the church and the world in the rate of adultery or divorce. It’s a sad thing when the church blends in with the world in matters where we should be distinct, and is distinct in matters where we should blend in.

So what does it mean to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel?

First, Living A Gospel Worthy Life Depends On A Proper View Of Our Citizenship. (1:27)

“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.”

The words *“let your conduct”* are derived from (*polituesthe*) meaning **“behave as citizens.”** These words have special meaning for the Philippians. Although they are about 800 miles from Rome, Philippi was a colony of Roman and they were very proud of their status as citizens of Rome (Acts 16:20-21). While the people of Philippi enjoyed the privileges and fulfilled the responsibilities of their Roman citizenship, Paul reminded these Philippian believers that they in fact had a dual citizenship, for as Christians they were considered citizens of Heaven. Paul later in this same letter says, *“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, (21) who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”* (Phil. 3:20-21)

Paul is reminding these believers that they should also live as citizens of Heaven, with all the responsibilities that status entailed. Specifically in the later part of verse twenty-seven Paul points out two areas when he says, *“stand fast in one spirit.”*

- *Stand fast (stekete)*– A call to Consistency.

The first fact that we have to face as Christians is that we are engaged in a spiritual battle. In his letter to the church at Ephesus Paul wrote, *“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. (12) For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”* (Eph. 6:11-12).

Paul wants believers to understand that we are in a supernatural spiritual battle with evil in which there is no truce and no compromise. John White has written a book entitled *“The Fight”* which describes what it means to be a Christian. *“To acknowledge Jesus as Savior and Lord is to join an army. Whether you know it or not, you have enlisted. The only other option to you is to become a deserter, to hide your uniform and pretend you are someone whom you are not. Now to be a deserter is not to leave the army, celestial regulations make no provision for the discharge personnel but to evade your responsibility to your Commanding Officer.”*

[John White. *"The Fight: A Practical Handbook to Christian Living."* (InterVarsity Press, 1976)

I remember reading some stories during the first Gulf War (Operation Desert Shield -August 2, 1990 – January 17, 1991), of military reservists who were shocked that they were being called up in active service. It seems that some had signed up for the benefits never expecting that they would actually be called upon to serve. (Now I am not condemning all reservists most served with great distinction, but merely using it as an illustration.) I am afraid that may also be a description of a lot of Christians in America they signed up for the benefits but are not too excited about the active duty aspect. But whether we like to acknowledge it or not the Christian life is a call to the battlefield not the playground.

- *Contending Together – “In One Spirit” (synathlountes)– A Call to Unity.*

*Specifically Paul admonishes the Philippian believers to behave as citizens of Heaven by getting along well with one another. Paul warned that disputes and grudges would drive a wedge into the church. We are called to work hard at healing and working to mend offenses within the body. As Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians, we are called **“to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace”** (Ephesians 4:3). Getting along with each other specifically meant **“standing fast”** - literally fighting side by side as in a military battle or a gladiatorial contest.*

The word “*contending*” used in verse twenty-seven is the word (*sunathleo* -, the prefix *sun* means “with” or “together,” and *athleo* from which we get our word “athletics”), but it literally means to “fight side by side.” Just as a team must work together to win an athletic victory, so Paul feels that the Church needs to work together to be successful in the World.

Alexander the Great and later the Romans were able to conquer the world because they devised an ingenious strategy. Prior to Alexander the Great, armies lined up along the mountain ridges and descended into the valleys for hand-to-hand combat, every man for himself. But Alexander the Great came up with a battle strategy called the phalanx (*fee-lanx*). Rather than assemble in a straight line, a phalanx formed a box with about 25 soldiers across and several rows deep. They advanced into battle in this formation. The soldiers in front and on the sides held their spears straight out. The soldiers on the inside laid their spears on the shoulders of the soldiers in front of them. It was said that when opposing armies first saw this phalanx advancing, many of them turned and ran, because they'd never seen that before. Rather than doing battle one-on-one, these soldiers were marching side-by-side.

Christians fighting and squabbling with one another only causes the World to turn away. But when Christians work together, the world takes notice. In the

days when the early Church was just getting a foothold, many people in the world did not understand what the Gospel was all about but they did notice and understand that these people loved one another (John 13:34-35). As Christians we are challenged to not be divided and yet we are, sometimes over very trivial issues.

- “For the faith of the Gospel” - (v. 27c)

“... striving together for the faith of the gospel.”

In other words, *“the faith of the Gospel”* involves certain core truths that cannot be compromised. About one-half of the uses of **“the faith”** refer to the **ACT** of believing but rather refer to **WHAT** is believed, as it is in this verse. The gospel is the foundational truth, upon which they are called to striving together (in peace) not striving against each other. Believers are tragically have often been known to be at war with each other over such small things (color of the church carpet, whether the pews should have padding, etc!) Brothers this should not be!

To be sure, we cannot compromise on the truth of the gospel for peace is never purchased by the sacrifice of truth. Paul is calling for unity but not at the expense of the gospel.

Notice that Paul began verse twenty-seven with the word *“only.”* *“His opening ‘only’ underscores Paul’s unwavering expectation for his Philippian friends, that whatever the outcome of his own case. Whether he*

*returns to see their faith in action, remains at a distance and hears reports, or even dies by Caesar's sword, **their** focus must be on serving as citizen-soldiers in courageous unity, so as to bring credit to the distant and majestic capital that defines their privileged status – not Rome to the west, but heaven on high.”* [Dennis E Johnson. *“Philippians.” Reformed Expository Commentary.* (Philipsburg, NJ: P& R Pub., 2013) p. 88]

Living A Gospel Worthy Life Depends On A Proper View Of Our Citizenship And...

Second, Living A Gospel Worthy Life Depends On A Proper View Of Opposition. (1:28)

“and 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.”

When believers really start to work together to accomplish something for Christ, **there will be** opposition.

- Live without Fear. (v. 28a)

“and not in any way terrified by your adversaries...”

Paul uses a word in verse twenty eight translated *“in any way terrified”* (*ptoromemoi*) which describes a horse that was startled. What does a startled horse do? It takes off running. Paul calls the Philippian believers to not to give way to the intimidation posed by the opposition they faced by either scattering in panic or

being silenced in fear. Paul says that rather than being terrified by opposition we should be reassured by -

- Recognizing that Opposition is a **Sign**.

(v. 28b) “...which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God.”

According to verse twenty-eight opposition to the Gospel is “**proof**.” This word (*endeixis*) is translated “**token**” in the King James Version and rendered “**omen**” in the Revised Standard Version and “**sign**” in the New International Version. But in every case it carries the idea of an undeniable a demonstrable truth. The presence of opposition should always be a sign to us we are not of this world.

Opposition is the “sign” that the Gospel is true. While it is true that we do not want to create enemies by being harsh and abrasive neither do we want to be complicit by our silence with those who stand against what the word of God says.

When we say that “**Jesus is the only way to Heaven**” we are declared to be intolerant. If we declare that “**you must be born again**” someone will call you a fanatic. If you say that “**the Bible is true and the only word of God**” you will be declared uneducated. If you declare that you are sure that you are going to Heaven you will be accused of being arrogant and thinking you are better than everybody else. If you dare to call adultery wrong or homosexuality a sin then you are

narrow minded and judgmental. Paul's advice is don't be surprised when someone criticizes you for standing up for what you believe.

Living A Gospel Worthy Life Depends On A Proper View Of Opposition and...

Third, Living A Gospel Worthy Life Depends On A Proper View Of Hardships. (1:29-30)

“For to you it has been granted on behalf of the Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, (30) having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.”

Two Gifts of Grace

- *The Privilege of Belief. (v. 29a)*

“For to you it has been granted on behalf of the Christ, to believe in Him...”

The Apostle John says this way, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name. (13) who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” (John 1:12, 13)

Everything about our salvation is gift of God's grace. Believers are saved because of what Christ has done for them and not because of what they have done for Christ. As Paul tells the believers at Ephesus, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, (9)not of works, lest

anyone should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9). Everyone is saved the same way -by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone

- The Call to Suffer. (vv. 29b-30)

“...not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.”

Paul’s description of suffering as a gift is startling, it is difficult enough to accept the inevitability of suffering as a part of our Christian life, much less understand that it is a gift. It is possible in the middle of trying to serve Christ, doing our best to live for His glory that we will occasionally find ourselves suffering for Him rather than being recognized and rewarded for our faithfulness.

*It is hard for us to wrap our minds around this truth, but the suffering that comes to a Christian is not a sign of God’s neglect but rather it is proof that the grace of God is at work in his or her life. Paul warns his son in the faith Timothy, *“Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life will be persecuted.”* (2 Timothy 3:12)*

Unfortunately Paul’s claim that suffering is a gift can also lead to some misunderstandings of the meaning of suffering.

- Paul **DOES NOT** mean that suffering itself is Good!

Some have deduced the suffering itself is good and led individual to seek suffering or to inflict suffer-

ing on themselves under the mistaken impression that suffering somehow purifies one of sin or is some way pleasing to God. This of course is not true.

➤ Paul **DOES NOT** mean that God is the author of suffering. He is not!

But God because of His sovereignty can use suffering for His own purposes. As related in a previous message, we find that truth related by Joseph to his brothers, *“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”* (Genesis 50:20)

The willingness to endure suffering does provide clarity about who really is a Christian. It is very unlikely that anyone who is not truly committed to the Gospel will willingly endure the discomfort of persecution.

In his closing statement of this section, Paul referred to his experience as a *“conflict”* or struggle and he reminded the Philippians that they were experiencing the same kind of struggle. In verse thirty Paul says the church is *“having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me”* - that they are experiencing the same conflict they *“saw”* Paul endure in Philippi (beating and imprisonment) and *“now hear”* he is presently experiencing in Rome.

Conclusion

Paul summons the church at Philippi to conduct themselves befitting citizens, to display values and behavior that reflect the city that defines their identity and gives them significance. As Christians we are citizens of Heaven. It was said of Abraham, “for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrew 11:10) - so do we!

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- *Contending Together* - “In One Spirit” – A Call to Unity. (*Ephesians 4:3*)
- “For the faith of the Gospel” - (27c)

Second, Living A Gospel Worthy Life Depends On A Proper View Of Opposition. (1:28)

- *Live without Fear*. (v. 28)
- *Recognize that Opposition is a Sign*. (v. 28b)

Third, Living A Gospel Worthy Life Depends On A Proper View Of Hardships. (1:29-30)

- *The Privilege to Believe*
- *The Call to Suffer*. (2 Timothy 3:12)
Misunderstandings of the meaning of suffering
 - *Paul DOES NOT mean that suffering itself is good*.
 - *Paul DOES NOT mean that God is the author of suffering.* (*Genesis 50:20*)

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