

A New Citizenship (Phil 1:27-30)

Introduction: *Philippi as a colony of Rome, and now heaven*

“I’d like to buy about \$3 worth of the gospel please? Not too much. I’d like just enough to make me happy, but not uncomfortable. I want joy but not repentance, transcendence but not transformation. I’d like enough to be nice, forgiving, and broad-minded, enough to keep my family secure and my children well-behaved. But I don’t want my goals redirected or my giving enlarged or my life otherwise affected. Just give me about three dollars of the gospel, please.” Surely nobody would be so bold as to say such things. But all of us have felt the temptation to live the life of about \$3 worth of a tame and domesticated gospel [paraphrased from D. A. Carson, *Basics for Believers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996) p. 12-13].

This was a particular temptation for the Christians in Philippi because, as Paul has learned and mentions here, they’ve been suffering some opposition for the sake of Christ. Nobody likes to feel different, that you don’t fit in. Probably you younger people and students feel that the most here. It’s hard to stand out from everyone around you: a different life, different ways, different loyalties, different goals. But Paul brilliantly encourages these Philippian Christians to shine forth and devote themselves to a life worthy of the true gospel of Christ. I have much to say about this over the next few weeks, but let me give you just a little background to explain what the Apostle is saying both to them and to us.

Philippi was a special city. It was a colony of Rome. It was populated by Roman citizens and governed directly by the Emperor, just like the American Colonies used to be governed directly by the King. The people of that city were proud of their Roman ways, Roman speech, Roman privileges, and a Roman king. But by the time Paul and his companions had left that city, some of those people now had a new citizenship. They had a new way of life. They had new privileges. And most of all, they had a new king. And what was formed in the city of Philippi was nothing less than a colony of heaven, an outpost on earth under the authority of the king of kings and populated by *his* citizens. They would henceforth live, 1:1, as “the saints [who are] in Christ Jesus, [but] who are [living] in Philippi.” What did this mean? How are these citizens of the kingdom of God to live in Philippi? And how should *we* live as citizens of a colony of heaven?

And can you see the sheer brilliance of Paul’s approach already? The citizens of Philippi were already different. They were proud to be different. They knew what it meant to stand fast as Romans at the frontier of the Roman world. They knew that they were there to advance Caesar’s rule in the face, what they called, barbarians. They knew what it meant to live a different life in the world for the sake of their king. And this is what Paul urges them to do for King Jesus in our passage today.

Here’s how he puts it in 1:27, “Only let your *conduct* be worthy of the gospel of Christ.” And if I say the word for “conduct,” I think you’ll get the idea immediately, *politeuomai*. It’s the language of citizenship. *Polis* is a city. *Politis* is a citizen. *Politeuomai*, the word here: I’ve put some definitions in your notes. Friberg, “lit. live as a citizen, have one’s citizenship or home; fig. in the NT, of how one lives as belonging to God’s kingdom; live, behave, conduct oneself.” Louw-Nida, “to conduct oneself with proper reference to obligations in relationship to others, as part of some community.” Look for a moment with me at Phil 3:20, “our *citizenship* is in

heaven,” *politeuma*. Same word in the noun form. And Paul is saying, “conduct yourselves as community citizens worthy of the gospel of Christ.” Conduct yourself with proper reference to obligations in relationship to others, as part of the gospel community.

Please don’t lose patience with this technical language. The ancient philosophers, starting with Aristotle, coined this word, teaching that the essence of the citizen, of the *polis*, was to be civic-minded. They also had a word that they used for someone who wasn’t interested in anything beyond his own house and his own family. I’ll teach you that word too. I think you’ll like it. The word was *idiotes*. It just means literally someone who cares about his own things, his own concerns. But it became an insult, and as you’ve guessed, it comes right down to us today as the English word *idiot*. Such a self-centered man was looked down on with contempt. He had no care for other people, for the welfare of the community. The man wasn’t a *polis*. He was the opposite, an *idiotes*. The *polis*, the citizen, lived for the welfare of others.

And Paul is using this political language of living as a citizen of a community to describe what it means to live lives worthy of the gospel. God has made you citizens of his kingdom. And that means that we must live for the good of others. This will become very important for the next few weeks as he goes on to explain what this means, starting next week. Look at 2:2, “[be] like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:2-5). This is the theme of the letter. We have a new citizenship, and we’re to live lives worthy of the gospel as a colony of heaven. Nothing else must distract you from that great purpose. It’s your all-embracing calling. This is the theme of the letter. One set of instructions was enough, verse 27: *only this*, he says, that your living should be worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Paul weaves together three cords of the gospel in this chapter. He wrote earlier about the *defense* of the Gospel in verse 7, for which the Philippians were well known. He writes about *proclaiming* the Gospel in verses 13 through 18, in which they were fruitful. And here he writes about living a *life worthy of the gospel*. And all three responsibilities rest equally on those who love the Lord. Maybe we’re eager to defend the Gospel; but too often however marred our defense by unloving controversy or pride. Sometimes the church has been eager to proclaim the gospel but they haven’t made it very attractive by their lives. Why should people believe our gospel of Christ if they can’t see that Christ has made any difference to us? What’s a \$3 gospel worth to the world?

The rest of this book describes what it means to live lives worthy of the gospel of Christ. Paul has much to say in the following chapters about sacrificial love for one another, godliness and gospel humility. But before he does, he has a few words here for the church about the trials that they’re experiencing. And that’s what we’re going to consider today. How do we live as citizens of the gospel community in the face of suffering? We’ll consider it briefly in four parts.

1. United in Spirit: “*stand fast in one spirit*” (Phil 1:27)

The church in Philippi had some minor divisions and disagreements. For example, 4:2, these poor ladies. Their disagreement in church will never be forgotten. “Stand fast in the Lord,

beloved. I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel” (Phil 4:1-3). Poor ladies, memorialized forever because of a disagreement. Throughout the letter, Paul urges the church to be united in the Lord Jesus Christ: 2:2, to be “like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Phil 2:2)

Lesson: This is very practical matter for them and for us. The church that’s united in the Lord in love can stand against the fiercest opposition. But when the church argues and squabbles within itself, it weakens and discourages the whole body.

The church isn’t the place for drama, people. The church isn’t the place for you to play out your quarrels. It’s a not gospel living, and betrays a lack of purpose and urgency. It weakens the whole body. In ancient terms, it’s *idiotes*, caring about yourself and your own things. What about the gospel community? This is to be a colony of heaven, as much as it depends upon us. Therefore, rather than take offense, Paul urges the church toward love and humility. Here’s 2:3, “in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil 2:3-4).

Maybe you’ve read the history of the Scottish Covenanters, and when the movement began to fail. There was a time on Rullion Green, when the King’s army of 3,000 men was closing in on them. While the army is closing in they’re sitting there arguing about what they should do and who should lead them and “You can do that if you want to but I’m going to do this.” The people fled. Many abandoned the movement. And that day, those leaders who couldn’t do anything but argue with each other, were captured by the army hanged, drawn, and quartered. It’s a picture of the church too often, arguing to the last, until the church itself is overcome. In order to live a life worthy of the gospel, we must join together in love and “stand fast in one spirit.”

2:14, “Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life” (Phil 2:14-16).
Point 1, United in Spirit.

2. United in Purpose: *“with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (1:27)*

We’ve already seen that the gospel was the central focus of Paul’s life. In Philippians 1, he uses the word “gospel” six times: verses 5, 7, 12, 16, 27 (twice). He alludes to it in other words several more times: “to speak the word [of God]” (1:14); “preach Christ” (1:15); “Christ is preached” (1:18); “Christ shall ... be exalted” (1:20). Paul’s focus should be the Philippians’ focus, and ours: He charges them to stand firm and strive together “for the faith of the gospel.” Paul is calling them to oneness of purpose and joyful ambition: to advance the gospel of Christ.

Lesson: Unity without a common purpose is as cold as a marriage of convenience. “We’ll be married, but you can go your way and I’ll go mine.” We must have not only a common spirit but a common purpose and passion to strive together for the faith of the gospel.

The church isn’t a place for passengers. Our attitude must not be, “I agree with our purpose and calling, but I won’t do anything to fulfill it.” Consent is not cooperation. Agreement is not

partnership. As one writer puts it, Christianity is not a “fugitive and cloistered virtue.” Just as a Roman colony existed to advance the purposes of Rome, so the Christian church as a colony of heaven is called to strive to advance the cause of Christ.

“With one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Phil 1:27). By the way, the word translated *mind* here is usually translated *soul*, and speaks about our inner life, our thoughts, affections, passions, and energies. Paul is calling them to be united, with one heart, one mind, one passion, one common inner life, to strive together for the gospel. That is a life worthy of the gospel. United in spirit, and united in purpose.

Now, third, where there’s a godly community and gospel advance, there’s going to be trouble. Paul had suffered in Philippi. You remember what they said about Paul’s group, “they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe” (Acts 16:21). In general the apostolic Church was a church under fire. What is a life worthy of the gospel? Is it a life of cowering in fear? Paul writes elsewhere, “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace ... [in] “Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim 1:7-10). The gospel has taught us boldness in grace as children of God. We are of a kingdom and eternal life. What can man do to me, says the Psalm? This is what the gospel teaches. And therefore to live worthy of the gospel, they must thirdly be...

3. United in Courage (1:28): *“not in any way terrified by your adversaries...” (1:28)*

Verse 28, “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). What’s this about courage being the proof of perdition or salvation? Well, your godly way of life, your unity in the gospel, your courage in suffering—these things speak volumes both to those outside and to those inside the church. It’s a sign of judgment against the raging world, and a sign of assurance that we are truly the people of Christ.

Rather than explain it, let me just give you a picture of it. Allow me to read an account of the arrest and martyrdom of Polycarp: “The sound of hooves at midnight—horsemen galloping into the courtyard—and the clatter of armor as soldiers surrounded the house woke the old man. Two officers dismount and pound on the wooden door with the butt ends of their spears. Maids in disheveled nightclothes rush upstairs and urge the white-haired fugitive to hide under the bed, in a closet ... anywhere. Instead, he hushes them, drapes a cloak over his frail shoulders, descends the stairs, opens the door and invites the men who have come to arrest him inside.

He instructs the maids, “Quickly, prepare hot food and something to drink. Can’t you see these men have ridden hard tonight? They need refreshment; give them the best in the house.” Confused by this unexpected reception, the arresting officers crowd into the room and cluster around a bronze charcoal brazier on the floor. As they warm their numb hands against the cold night of February 22, 166, Polycarp, elderly bishop of Smyrna makes every effort to see that his guests are comfortable. He personally serves the officers and soldiers alike from the warm

dishes his maids have prepared. His gentle manner puzzles the soldiers; they expected to find a vile, raging demon instead of a venerable man of peace and prayer. One of the men asked, “Why was so much effort made to capture such a respectable old man?”

Polycarp is brought before the Roman governor. After many questions, Polycarp says, “Since you keep [pretending] not to know who and what I am, listen to me announce with boldness: “I am a Christian.” But if you want to learn what the doctrines of Christianity are, appoint me a day, and you shall hear them.” The enraged proconsul replied, “I have wild beasts at hand. I will throw you to them if you don’t repent.” “Call them, then,” replied Polycarp. “We’re not used to repenting of what is good in order to adopt what is evil.” “If you won’t repent, I’ll have you burned with fire, since you have no regard for the wild beasts!” The old man replied, “You threaten me with fire that burns for an hour, then goes out after a little while. You’re ignorant, however, of the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. What are you waiting for? Bring out whatever you want.”

And the writer who witnessed it all adds this: “When he spoke these things, and many others like them, he was filled with confidence and joy. His face was so full of grace that not only did it seem like he wasn’t troubled by anything said to him, but the proconsul was astonished.” Polycarp was sent immediately to burn at the stake before the crowd at the Roman stadium. And they reported that the flames did not touch him, so a soldier went and ran him through with a sword. But many of the people who heard his words and saw his death believed, and many Christians who faced that same persecution were strengthened.

That, friends, is not the \$3 gospel. That is being “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). And that is a life in accordance with our gospel that brings us courage, joy, and life eternal. The Romans could not understand why their persecution was only making more and more courageous, joyful, gracious Christians. Tertullian writes, “[Your persecution] is bait that wins men for [our] school. The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow: the blood of Christians is seed [of the church].” This is the power of the united, unmoved, courageous church, striving together for the gospel.

Lesson: People in the world today too often fear death, but not the judgment that follows. It was the very first lie of the tempter there in the garden that God would not bring judgment. The world needs to see the reality of heaven in the people of God. That’s what a colony is all about.

Christians are too often characterized by fear. I know I am at least. What about official opposition or lawsuits? And the impression I get from reading many articles today is that Christians are *in every way terrified* by their enemies, the very opposite of what’s commanded here. People need to see a church together for Christ, enduring threats and worldly loss, full of greater joy, looking to those things that are eternal.

4. United in Christ’s Sufferings (1:28): “*but also to suffer for His sake...*” (1:29-30)

For, verse 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, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me” (Phil 1:29-30).

To have such faith in Christ as we've been speaking about today is only possible by God's grace. Faith itself is the gift of God. There's a whole sermon in that phrase, but Paul here assumes that you know that. Faith is a gift, since he writes elsewhere, "The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor 2:14). We are dead and blind to the things of God, and must be saved by grace, through faith—and that not of ourselves, he writes, it is the gift of God. Even as Christians, we must often pray like that man, "Help my unbelief." Faith is God's gift. That's assumed here as the basis of what he's about to write. He extends it now. Not only have you been given the gift of faith in Christ. You've also been given the gift of suffering for Christ.

What does he mean that we're given the gift of suffering for Christ? That's not the normal way we think about suffering. We'll have to wait until next week to have a full answer, as Paul opens it up and illustrates it in Christ, in Timothy, in Epaphroditus, and in Paul himself. The short answer is this. And here's the lesson for us.

Lesson: Christ took the form of a servant and suffered for us, and therefore he was highly exalted. So those who follow Christ in serving and suffering for others find that this is the way to true greatness in God's kingdom. Jesus put it his way, "Whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matt 20:26-28). As the church suffers, we must join together in that suffering, serving and helping one another, untied in the sufferings of Christ. Self-centeredness is unity's deadliest enemy. It actually gives aid to the enemy. And that will continue in the church until believers start giving themselves for others and so share in Christ's sufferings. There's much more in chapter 2 about this, come back next week.

Conclusion

In conclusion, what does it mean to live lives *worthy of the gospel*? Clearly it doesn't mean that we should try harder to be saved. Dear friends, we're saved freely and completely and graciously by Christ, not of works. The gospel says that Christ has died for our sins and in him we are reconciled to God. It's given freely to the undeserving, and it says everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Maybe you need to call upon him today.

But don't misunderstand. A life worthy of the gospel doesn't mean trying harder to be saved. Instead, it means learning to live the saved life, a life suitable to or in accordance with the gospel. He puts it this way in 2:12-13, "work *out* your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Phil 2:12-13). We're not working *for* our salvation, but *from* it. And we're not working now in our power but according to the power of God. Conduct worthy of the gospel is therefore a unity that advances the gospel and courageously endures all opposition and suffering for the sake of Christ and his body.

We therefore put aside all self-interest and self-serving differences, and unite together in spirit, in purpose, in courage, and in the sufferings of Christ.

How much we need to recover this. In many places, Christianity has settled for the \$3 variety, or retreated into spiritual secret societies that give each other the secret handshake. Christians seem content to have it this way as long as they're safe and their children are behind the barricades. This is a different attitude. As one writer put it, "The early Christians did not say in dismay, "Look what the world has come to," but in delight, "Look what has come to the world." They saw not merely the ruin, but the resources for the reconstruction of that ruin. They saw not merely that sin did abound, but that grace did [now] much more abound. On that assurance the pivot of history swung from blank despair, loss of moral nerve, and fatalism, to faith and confidence that at last sin had met its match, that something new had come into the world, that not only here and there, but on a wide scale, men could attain to that hitherto impossible thing—goodness" [E. Stanly Jones, *Abundant Living* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1942), p. 183; cited in James M. Boice, *Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), p. 90).

Our citizenship is in heaven, and this is our Christian colony on earth. Let us therefore take Paul's statement from chapter 3 to heart. And with this I'll close. "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind. Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern."