Worthy of the Gospel

Scripture: Philippians 1:27–30

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Location: Midway Presbyterian Church

Date: November 22, 2026 · AM Service

Philippians 1:27–30 (ESV)

27 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, 28 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. 29 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, 30 engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Introduction

At verse 27, we're coming to a sort of transition now in the first chapter of Philippians. For the last few weeks, we have been considering what Paul had to say about his own situation, about his own life. And he gave out, you recall, if you were here last time, that clarion call: to live is Christ. And now he begins in verse 27, "Only let your life, Philippians", and he goes on. So, we see that he's gone from talking about his life and what his mission is, what his aim in life is, and now he shifts the focus to the Philippian church.

He says, if you also want to take as your great refrain, your great theme, your slogan in life, *to live is Christ*, then it's going to need to look like this. He gives some specifics for their particular context. And he really distills it down to one main mandate. It's mercifully short, but as we'll see, it's exhaustive and it is entire in its demand. But Paul also helps us. He helps the Philippians, and he helps us, by providing the method for fulfilling that mandate and also the motivation that is needed to fulfill that mandate. So those are the three headings under which we will consider the close of Philippians chapter 1. First, the mandate that Paul gives. Then the method for it, and the motivation needed as well.

1. The Mandate

First, the mandate. Look with me at verse 27. It's right there. He says, "Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ." This is the prevailing, controlling imperative of everything that follows. In Greek this is just one long, convoluted sentence, and everything falls out from this command, this charge, this mandate: live worthily, live worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And if you're like me, you hear that and you want to just throw up your hands immediately and say, "Well, who in the world could do that? How could we ever live in a manner that would properly repay Christ for all that he has done for us?" And of course, we can't. The gift is too great for us ever to be able to do anything that would be worth it, that would equal it in its value. But that's not exactly what Paul is

saying here. He's not calling the Philippians to try to live up to God's salvation in the gospel. He's not saying you need to prove that you are worth having been saved. He's not saying you need to prove that you were deserving recipients of grace. If we deserved it, it wouldn't be grace.

Part of the way we protect the gospel is by understanding what it means to live worthy of it. And it does not mean that we need to live up to it, but rather that we need to live out of it. This term *worthily* could really be translated *accordingly* or *appropriately*, and that gets at the idea better. Paul says, "Make sure your life is in accord with the gospel. Make sure your life comports with the gospel." If you have the King James Version, I think it's very helpful here with that old word *becometh*. Make sure your manner of life is one that is becoming of the gospel, *becometh* the gospel. So, it's about consistency here. That's really what Paul is after for the Philippians. Your life, the way you live, needs to be consistent with the faith that you profess.

And that means, among a number of other things, that there is actually a moral and ethical implication for the gospel message. For those who claim to believe it, there are moral and ethical implications. That is to say, in order to follow the command Paul is giving, that must mean there are objective ways to live rightly and objective ways to live wrongly. There is a sort of lifestyle that is inconsistent if you're going to say you believe the gospel.

Now, that's a message that has fallen on hard times. That is a message that even some so-called churches would deny. They would instead claim that the whole point of the gospel is to free you from expectations, to free you from restraints, to liberate you to live however you see fit. But that's not what the Bible teaches, and it's not what Paul says. Paul does not say only live in a manner that fits with your comfortability, with your sensibilities, with your preferences. No, he says live in a manner that makes sense, not necessarily to you, but makes sense as one who does not belong to themselves. One who's been bought with a price. You are not your own, dear Christian. And so, if you claim Christ, your life needs to keep in step with that profession.

What would that look like? What does it look like to live worthily of the gospel in that sense? What are some of those moral or ethical implications? We could just ask ourselves, what does the gospel teach? What is the message of the gospel? And then try to see if there's a reflection, even if it's just a modicum of reflection, in our own lives of that message. So, we could think of how the gospel at its very center is all about humility, isn't it? It's about the humility of the Son of God. And so, does your life reflect that humility? Are you a humble person? Or do you think that you're the center of the universe? Do you desire to decrease in order that Christ would increase? If so, that's a life that's comporting with the gospel, that's consistent with the gospel.

The gospel is a story of humility. It's also the story of great sacrifice. You can't talk about Jesus without talking about what he did for his people. Are you a sacrificial person? Do you live to serve, or do you think you are here for other people to serve you? And of course, the gospel is the story of grace. It's the story of grace. Are you a cold, demanding, exacting, unforgiving individual? A sign that the grace of the gospel has touched your heart is that it will leave its imprint, and you will be gracious in return, in response. It will make you long-suffering, forbearing.

Now, there's actually a metaphor hidden here in the way that Paul says all of this. He uses an idiom. I don't think any translation brings it out, but in the ESV it's in the footnote. This phrase in verse 27, "let your manner of life," is actually "be a worthy citizen." The word Paul uses, if you have your Bible open

there, you can drop down to chapter 3 and verse 20 and you'll see it again: "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." There Paul uses that same word. Here, "live as a worthy citizen."

The Philippians were citizens of Rome, just as most of us in this room are citizens of America, I would imagine. But as the Philippians' life wasn't ultimately to correspond to Roman life, neither is our life ultimately to correspond to American life. Our greater allegiance is to the citizenship that we have in heaven. And so, we are called to live as Americans in a way that's actually consistent with our Christianity. And he's telling the Philippians, you need to live as Romans in a way that's consistent not with Roman ideals, but with Christian ideals, with the gospel at its heart and center of everything that you do.

Now, people can debate and argue whether or not America is a Christian nation, or was it founded to be a Christian nation, or maybe it wasn't, but it doesn't really matter, because regeneration is not of the essence of American citizenship. You can be an American and not be a Christian, but you cannot be a citizen of heaven without having the new birth, without being born again. And so, ensure that your life is in step with the new birth, with the life-giving power of the gospel. That's what Paul's saying to the Philippians. He's saying, "I want to hear that you are living more like a Christian than a Roman. More like one who is born from heaven than one who's just been born in Philippi."

And notice that Paul recognizes that there are certain responsibilities we are more likely to carry out if we are supervised. Do you see that at the end of verse 27? "Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you again or if I'm detained," if I stay in prison, if I'm absent, "I want to hear that you are standing firm in one spirit," and so on. He's saying whether I'm there or not, I want to hear this about you. We could think maybe of how sometimes the mere presence of a parent is enough to motivate a child to do their chores, whereas if they were home alone, well, they might not get around to it as much. Paul's saying, "I shouldn't have to be there for you to do this, because the God of the gospel by his Holy Spirit is always present with his people, and we live with an eye to pleasing him, not any man."

And this life lived in gratitude for the gospel, one that lives out the gospel, one that is correspondingly appropriate to the gospel, it is the main mandate that Paul gives to the Philippians. And it's so important. He gives this little intro to it. You might even skip over it if you're not careful. It's the very beginning of verse 27. This tiny word: *only*. Here's what one scholar says. He says, "The force of this little word is tremendous. It is as if Paul had said, this one thing and this only. Nothing else must distract or excuse the Philippians from this great objective. It must be their all-embracing occupation." And friends, that same tremendous force needs to come to us this morning. It's as though this is the one thing, the one thing that matters. Live a life that makes sense for someone who claims the gospel of Jesus Christ.

2. The Method

That's Paul's main mandate. And he moves right on to share with the Philippians, and now us today, the threefold method for fulfilling that mandate in their context as citizens of Rome and heaven, those who are living as pilgrims and exiles. How will they best live lives that are consonant with the gospel message? What do they need to do to ensure that they can fulfill this charge? Paul gives them three things.

Stand Firm

First, he says, you need to stand firm. You see that there in verse 27. He says, "I want to hear that you are standing firm in one spirit." Now, what does it mean to stand firm in one spirit? If you peek ahead to the next clause, he also says he wants them to be of one mind. And so it might seem like Paul is simply saying, I want you, Philippians, to have shared convictions, as though what he's saying in the first clause, stand firm in one spirit, is the same thing as striving side by side with one mind. As though he's saying the same thing in two different ways, like be of one heart and soul together. Be all in this together.

Now, while that is ultimately what Paul is saying, the first clause that we're looking at here instructs how it is possible for the Philippians, or for anyone, to stand side by side. And it's not by sharing the same disposition or the same goals or the same aims. It is by sharing the Holy Spirit. I believe the word *spirit* there should be capitalized. Stand firm in the Spirit of Christ. And I think that interpretation is even bolstered if you look at chapter 4, verse 1. Look there with me, where Paul uses the exact same phrase, *stand firm*. And notice where they are to stand firm. "Therefore, my brothers," this is verse 1 of chapter 4, "whom I love and long for, my joy and my crown, stand firm thus in the Lord." I think he's saying the exact same thing in verse 27. Stand firm in one Spirit, the Spirit of God. Stand firm in the Lord.

And the Bible elsewhere will teach of the essential role that the Holy Spirit plays in the unity of the church. Ephesians 4:4, "There is one body and one Spirit." Or 1 Corinthians 12:13, "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free." This is why he's called here in verse 27 "the one Spirit." He is the Spirit that brings oneness. And so, the point Paul is making here is that we cannot live faithfully in a hostile world, one which in every way is antithetical to the principles of our faith, we cannot do it if we do it alone. And the only source of true and lasting unity is God himself.

And so, if we're going to be faithful to this mandate to live worthy of the gospel, we need to dig down deep into the sufficiency of God, what he's provided for us by his Spirit. We need to make sure as a church that we make the main thing the main thing. We need to stand firm not on our preferences, not on our tastes, not on our culture, not on our tradition, but we stand firm upon God himself and in the Spirit of God.

Strive Together

And when we do that, we can fulfill the second method that Paul gives, which is that we strive together. First, stand firm. Second, strive together. It comes at the end of verse 27. He wants to hear that they stand firm in the Spirit, with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel. Striving. And do you sense how the language here is demanding that faithfulness can only be found through this sort of collective effort, even combat?

If Paul was a little facetious, he might say, good luck trying to be a Christian on your own. Good luck trying to live a Christ-honoring life all by yourself. It can't be done. We were not designed to withstand the wiles of the world and the flesh and the devil all by ourselves. We're not strong enough for that. We're not built for that. Paul says, "No, we need to be united in purpose, and we need to be linked arm in arm if we're going to be faithful in this world." Alec Motyer put it so well. He said, "The church which is experiencing unity must be a church without passengers." He says, is there unity where there's the tacit or spoken attitude, "Well, I agree with you, but I will not do anything for you," or "I agree with your aims, but I will not go with you to fulfill them"? He says, acquiescence is not unity. Consent is not cooperation. Approval is not partnership. We need to strive together.

That reminds me of the quote from, I think it's Ben Franklin, one of the founding fathers, right? "If we don't hang together, we certainly will hang alone." We were watching the BBC documentary series this past week, *Planet Earth*, with the kids. We're watching that with them for the first time. And there's a sort of famous scene in the opening episode of the African buffalo making their migration across the flooded delta in Botswana. And that delta is of course infested with crocodiles. I mean, it makes for great viewing. You're on the edge of your seat. But you know what these buffalo know by instinct is that the only way for one buffalo to get across is if they all cross together.

Paul's saying something similar here. He says there's strength in numbers. And isn't it such a grace from God that he's given the church not just fellow members, but fellow soldiers. And there perhaps is nothing more tragic than when the church looks at her own as an enemy to fight against rather than a friend to fight beside. And so, we must strive side by side together if we're to be faithful in living out the call of the gospel.

Fear Not

Well, there's a third component, though, to fulfilling this mandate. It's not just that we must stand firm. It's not that we must strive together. We also need to fear not. Verse 28, Paul says, "I want to hear that you are not frightened in anything by your opponents."

Who are the opponents? Let's make this very clear. They're not the Philippian church. It's not a section within the Philippian church. There are other letters in which Paul deals with issues going on inside of the church. But the issue that the Christians at Philippi are facing is from the outside coming in. It's the Roman elites who are looking to stop this growing movement called Christianity. It's the pagan world that surrounds the congregation in Philippi. And we know that because of what he says in verse 30. He says that they're facing opposition. And at the end of the chapter, he says, "You're engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have." Well, what's the conflict that Paul's engaged in right now? It's not a fight within the church. He's in a Roman prison. He said, "we're sharing this conflict right now. We're facing the world." And against that opposition, Paul says, "you can't be afraid. Do not fear."

Why is that command so critical, to not be frightened? The word means the sort of panic that would cause a stampede of horses. You know, that one gets scared and they all go running. Why is that so critical? Well, we cannot operate faithfully if we're operating from a position of panic. We won't think straight. We'll make poor decisions. We might even be tempted to compromise on our convictions if we are afraid. Fear has never set anyone up for success. We could use, just by way of example, the events in the '30s with the Great Depression and our economic troubles. It was, you know, bank runs, where depositors were withdrawing money out of fear of insolvency, that became a self-fulfilling prophecy, and thousands of banks failed. Even healthy banks failed, and it was evident that fear made the Great Depression all that much greater. And so Christian ethics, gospel-informed living, it requires confidence, it requires bravery, and it requires boldness.

And now we ask, well, how do we get it? It's not like there's nothing to be afraid of, right? Paul is not suggesting that for the Philippians. He's saying, "Your opposition's real. I'm really in prison." Like, we are facing problems. So, he's not saying there's nothing to be afraid of, but he's saying, "Don't be afraid of that which is out there." How can we live for Christ in a world that's going to make us suffer without being intimidated? How can you do that, brother or sister? How can you face the potentiality of

suffering for the sake of Christ, perhaps the reality of suffering right now that you might be going through, and not give up? The suffering we're talking about here, the suffering Paul's talking about, is particular suffering for the sake of the gospel, suffering for Jesus. Not just the suffering that comes to all people who live in a fallen world, but the suffering that comes to Christians as they try to live faithfully in a fallen world. How can you face that fear instead with confidence?

3. The Motivation

Well, here finally is the motivation Paul gives. And it's to show us that the hostility of the world is actually a confirmation of our faith. That's the motivation we need to inhabit and to believe and to embrace: that the hostility of the world is actually a confirmation of our faith. It's there in verse 28. "Don't be afraid in anything by your opponents. This," that is to say, the reality of your opponents or the opposition, "is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God."

Is that how you think of opposition in life? Oftentimes when we face opposition, it's a sign that we're doing something wrong, and we think, I've got to rethink my strategy here. You can think of the football coach who watches his team's running game over and over again get crushed at the line of scrimmage, and he would properly say, "Okay, I think we've got to change things up and we're going to try our passing game now." Or think of the driver who sees the wall of brake lights on the highway and says, "You know what? I'm not going to go this direction. I'm going to take this exit," because this opposition, this resistance on the roadway, is clear that I need to go a different direction. Or maybe if you're into hiking, our brother Chad is really into hiking, and we hope that he'll find his way home soon. He's out doing some adventure in the Appalachian Mountains right now. As he hikes, maybe he comes across a river that's not on the trail map, and that would tell him, you know, I need to retrace my steps. Maybe I made a wrong turn somewhere. So, we come across opposition in life, and oftentimes we rightly would say this means I made a mistake somewhere. I need to go back. I need to rethink this.

And Paul says, but that's not how you should think about the Christian life. Amazingly, opposition to the Christian faith is not necessarily a sign you're doing anything wrong. It could be the sign that you are doing everything right. I say *could be* as an aside, right? Because if you're suffering for the sake of Christ, then it means you're doing everything right. But Christians sometimes suffer not because they're so pious and they're so principled, but because they're jerks. Okay? And so, you might, if you're suffering because of your faith, need to rethink, how am I sharing my faith? How is my faith coming across? Right? You might be suffering because you're not being very gracious. You're not being very kind. But assuming that you are suffering for the sake of Christ, it's actually a sign you're doing everything right. That goes contrary to our nature, doesn't it?

For the Philippians, Paul believes this is the case, that the opposition they face in the world around them is a twofold confirmation. One, it confirms the looming destruction of those who oppose them. But two, it confirms the salvation of God's people. That's why he says there at the end of verse 28, "and that from God." That's the motivation we need as we face opposition: that this is coming from God. I'm not doing anything wrong. God has ordained this. In fact, Paul doubles down. He doesn't just say it comes from God. He says it's a gift from God. Do you see that in verse 29? It has been granted, literally gifted, to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe (faith is a gift, but it comes with another gift), but you should also suffer.

How could we view suffering at the hands of the cruel world as a gift from God? How could we ever view suffering from wicked people, opposition from evil men and women? How could we ever say that's a gift from God, something that's supposed to cultivate our faith and not crush our faith? Well, we need to remember what the Bible actually teaches about those who suffer for the sake of Jesus. And when we do that, we will see it is nothing less than the greatest gift one could receive in this life. Could I remind you of three things, as we close, very briefly, of what the Bible teaches about those who suffer for Jesus?

Hated by the World, Loved by God

First, the Bible says those who are hated by the world are loved by God. Suffering is a confirmation of our status as the children of God. Remember when Jesus says that to his disciples in the upper room? "If the world hates you, know that it hated me before it hated you." And he says, "If you were of the world, the world would love you. But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." You've perhaps been slandered because of your faith, boys and girls, in school by your classmates. Or maybe some of you who are older, in college, by your professors. Maybe others of you have been let go from your workplace because you were unwilling to just wholesale endorse new policies or to use preferred pronouns. Maybe some of you have even been left by a spouse because they despised the faith that you held so dear. That's so hard. It's tremendously hard.

But these are not only hard things, dear Christian. You need to see these are also gifts. Because when the world is turning its back on you, it is only so that you might better see the smiling face of God, who is your Father. Those who suffer for Christ and who are hated by the world are confirmed to be those who are loved immensely by God. And that's a gift.

Rewarded Like Jesus

Second, the Bible says that those who suffer for Jesus will be rewarded like Jesus. And that's a gift. First Peter 4: "Rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." Or we could think of the final Beatitude, right? "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you." You're blessed, Jesus says. Why? "For your reward is great in heaven." Paul will say elsewhere that the sufferings of this life aren't even worth comparing to the glory that's soon to be revealed.

So we are grateful for the gift of suffering, even intense suffering. Because the greater the suffering, then the greater our appreciation for the glory that is soon to come. It expands our love for the life to come. It widens our expectation of how amazing that will really be. And that's a gift from God.

Made Like Jesus

Thirdly, and finally, the Bible teaches that suffering for Christ is one of the best ways to be made like Christ. Sinclair Ferguson said, "Suffering is the friction which polishes our graces." Now, you'll recall that we said earlier that living worthy of the gospel means living a life that's informed by the gospel, that lives out the gospel. It's a life of humility, we said, and sacrifice and grace. The gospel is always also about suffering. To live out the gospel means you live a cruciform life, a cross-shaped life. And we are to take up our cross as Christians, friend. And when you do that, you come to know more about the one who took up a cross for you. You come to know Jesus more as your suffering servant when you suffer

along with him. We come to know his heart better, to sense his love more, to experience his mercy more deeply. And all of that will change you and make you more like him.

To know Jesus better will make you hate sin more. And could there be anything more important in all of life than that? To flee sin and to run after righteousness, to forsake this world, and to have fuller, richer faith in our Lord. Could there be anything more important in life for you personally than your own sanctification, becoming like your Savior? This is God's will for you. Paul says, in 1 Thessalonians, your sanctification.

Conclusion

And so that *only* that begins our passage in verse 27, that's not really just Paul. That's coming from the Lord. He's the one saying, this is the one thing that matters. This is the thing that matters most. It's living a life that's fitting or suitable with the gospel of Christ. That's what God wants from us in our life here. He wants a life that's modeled after his Son. He wants you to look like his Son. He wants it more than you and I want it. But he knows how badly we need it. He knows there's no eternity without it. And so God is willing to go to any lengths in order to conform you to the image of his Son. He's even willing to let you suffer if it'll make you more like Jesus.

And before that offends us, before we would take offense at a God who would allow us to suffer to make us more like Jesus, we remember that he too was willing, in the person of his Son, to suffer even unto death. Why? So that you would be able, dear brother, dear sister, you would be able to live a life out of the gospel, to live a life that is worthy, compatible, reflective of the gospel. He was willing to do this to save you from sin, to open up heaven to you, to send down his Holy Spirit, and to make you into the one thing that matters most, to make you more and more into the image of his Son.

What a God we have.