
Heavenly Citizenship

2026-05-24 - Philippians 1:27-30

As the Apostle Paul writes to the church in Philippi, he reminds these believers that their citizenship is in heaven; therefore, they are to live lives worthy of the Gospel of Christ, especially in the midst of persecution, temptation, and false teaching. Furthermore, all heavenly citizens, whether in the first or twenty-first century, must obey this command and thus be marked by their unified stand against the Enemy's attacks, their urgent contention for the faith of the Gospel, and their hopeful endurance.

Good morning, Cornerstone Church. It is good to be here with all of you this morning. Maybe it's a little bit shocking seeing more of a familiar face up here, though I did try my best to bring the right outfit so it wasn't too shocking of a transition.

Well, thank you. I didn't do the tie, but perhaps next time, if I'm gonna get applause like that.

But before we get started, would you please pray with me?

Dear Heavenly Father, Lord, we thank You for this time. Lord, we thank You for the ability, the opportunity, to worship You. Lord, that You, by Your grace, have made it possible for us to worship You in faith. Lord, knowing that that is not a gift that we can ever repay. Lord, knowing how loving and how gracious You are, Lord, we thank You that we are in a nation where we are able to worship You freely, Lord, and we pray that that continues. And Lord, we pray that we would use this great opportunity, and we would fill this responsibility You have given us to share Your Word with those we encounter. We pray for Your grace, we pray for Your wisdom, and we pray for Your peace. We pray this in Your Son's holy and precious name. Amen.

So, a common question nowadays—I'm sure you've asked it or heard someone else ask it—is, "What does it mean to be a good citizen?" After all, we live under Supreme Court rulings, a Constitution, legislation. We live under political leaders whose will may or may not align with the Word of God. And we face this question: "What does it mean to be a good citizen?" And we ought to be good citizens. "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's." But how exactly we do this can be a difficult question indeed.

And as we all know, this very question has raised much debate in recent years. But this morning, we will not be discussing what it means to be good citizens of the United States of America—or at least not directly. And I'm sure some of you just breathed a sigh of relief. But don't be mistaken. This is an important issue. The Scripture has much to say about how we are good citizens of the nation that we are in.

But this morning, instead, our passage will be describing for us what it means to be citizens of heaven—not merely citizens in a nation, but citizens of heaven, our ultimate citizenship—and yet live in a world that is combative to the gospel. Whether by persecution or temptation, we have an enemy who is out on the prowl, and he seeks to kill, steal, and destroy, to restrain the spread of the good news of Jesus Christ. Our Lord warned us that this very thing would happen, and surely it does.

But before we think that this is a new question—“What does it mean to be heavenly citizens in a fallen world?”—Christians have been pondering this very idea for 2,000 years. Whether the emperor is a pagan or a Christian, whether the king is a Roman Catholic or a Protestant, whether the president prefers Coke or Pepsi, regardless of the environment, this question has been pondered for 2,000 years.

And one man writing in the fifth century, Augustine—maybe a familiar name—wrote in his famous work, *The City of God*, about two cities that exist in reality. He differentiates between the two. First, he labels the heavenly city, the City of God. And secondly, the earthly city, the city of man. But these aren't simply geographical locations, comparing Chicago and New York, but these are kingdoms—kingdoms with an agenda, with different conduct, different sets of ethics, different vocabulary, and ultimately different destinations.

And in differentiating between these two, he puts it succinctly: “Accordingly, two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self.”

And the same question of heavenly citizenship was raised in Scripture also, specifically in the book of Philippians, where we will be this morning. Now, the Apostle Paul is writing these words while imprisoned. He knew full well what it meant to live in the earthly city, to suffer persecution for his faith. And in this letter, he is both warning and encouraging these believers in Philippi—warning them of this coming persecution, but also warning about false teachers, about temptation which may creep its way into the church. He's warning them, but he is also encouraging them. He's encouraging them to be united, to be faithful, to grow toward greater faithfulness all the same.

Now, this morning our text will answer this question: “How do we live in the earthly city as citizens of the heavenly city?” We are in the world, but we ought not to be of it, but what does this look like?

We'll be examining today's passage in four primary sections. And the first one will serve as more of a header, establishing our citizenship in heaven and what this demands of us. And then the following three will be three characteristics of our citizenship in heaven.

And the command you will find in today's passage is this: that as heavenly citizens, stand in unyielding unity, contend with faithful urgency, and endure with blessed hope.

We'll be in Philippians 1:27–30. If you have a Bible with you, I'd encourage you to turn there. If you don't have one with you, there should be a pew Bible there in front of you. And if you were here on Palm Sunday some weeks ago, I preached on Philippians 2. So we're taking the section just preceding, Philippians 1:27–30. And if you are able, would you please stand for the reading of God's Word?

Philippians 1:27–30, this is the Word of the Lord:

“Just one thing: As citizens of heaven, live your life worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or am absent, I will hear about you that you are standing firm in one spirit, in one accord, contending together

for the faith of the gospel, not being frightened in any way by your opponents. This is a sign of destruction for them, but of your salvation—and this is from God. For it has been granted to you on Christ's behalf not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, since you are engaged in the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I have." (Philippians 1:27–30)

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

So our passage this morning—you may be seated—our passage this morning begins with this command from the Apostle Paul: "Just one thing." And he puts this out there as something to focus on, a point of emphasis: **"As citizens of heaven, live your life worthy of the gospel of Christ."** (Philippians 1:27)

And as I said before, this command will serve as the heading for the following three characteristics.

Let's begin with this phrase, "as citizens of heaven." Now, depending on the translation you have in front of you, you may not actually see this phrase. Now, why exactly is this phrase here? Because if we look at the Greek text, we don't see the phrase "as citizens of heaven," yet here in the CSB, out of which I am preaching this morning, we do see this phrase. Why is it here?

Well, first thing, this theology is common to the book of Philippians. Philippians 3:20, Paul makes this very point: **"Our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly wait for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ."** (Philippians 3:20)

So this idea of heavenly citizenship is common to the book of Philippians, not just in chapter 3, but throughout the entire book—that we are not truly, ultimately citizens of this world, but citizens of heaven if we have faith in Christ.

But why is it here in chapter 1?

Now, when we look at the phrase "live your life," it is actually just one word in the Greek, but it isn't the usual word. The usual word is usually translated as "walk" or "live." It describes the general conduct of a Christian. Sometimes it's even used to talk about literally walking from place to place. But that word isn't used here.

Instead, we have a different verb that only occurs two times in the New Testament. Interestingly enough, the other use is in the book of Acts, written by Luke, but in a speech by Paul. But even for Paul, this is not a common term to use.

But when we look a little bit closer, we see that this verb has a root in the beginning of it. And that root is *polis*. *Polis*. Think of English words that might have a similar root word in them—words like "political," or even city names: Minneapolis, Indianapolis. It means "city."

Now, when we look at it in the verb form, it's talking about something specific. It's about fulfilling your civic responsibilities, doing your duties as a citizen. So this term could be alternatively translated or paraphrased as "execute your duties as a citizen of heaven," because it's not talking about earthly civic responsibilities, but heavenly ones.

And how are we to do this? Well, the verse continues, saying that our fulfillment of our duties as heavenly citizens must be marked by our worthiness of the gospel of Christ.

Now let's begin with what this verse is not saying. This verse is not saying that the gospel is some bar that we have to clear in order to be saved, that we must walk worthy enough in order to be saved, and if we can't reach this impossible measure, then we certainly have no hope. Paul is not saying that at all.

Rather, what he is describing is walking in accordance with the gospel of Christ, walking in accordance with the high calling with which we have been called. Ephesians 2:10, coming immediately after verses 8 and 9—a famous memory verse, “It is by grace you have been saved through faith, not of works”—when we get to verse 10 of Ephesians 2, we see:

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:10)

So, in other words, we are not saved by works. That is not the gospel. And as we will discuss several times this morning, there are many false teachers out there who will preach a false gospel of workspace righteousness, but that is not the true gospel. We do believe in work-based righteousness, but it is no work of ours. It is the work of Christ on the cross.

Paul is not describing working, walking worthy in order to be saved, but rather, because you have been saved, walk in accordance. If you are a citizen of heaven, act like it.

And when we look at the remainder of verse 27—and fair warning, we'll spend much of our morning just in verse 27—we will see what living a life worthy of the gospel of Christ looks like, what our heavenly citizenship will be marked by.

Now, Paul describes his command with a number of expected results of what living a life worthy of the gospel will look like. And he says in the remainder of verse 27:

“Then, whether I come and see you or am absent, I will hear about you that you are standing firm in one spirit, in one accord, contending together for the faith of the gospel.” (Philippians 1:27)

Now there, for a second, remember Paul is in prison. So he's saying, “Hey, whether I'm able to make it to Philippi—whether soon or ever at all—or not, these are the things that I want to hear about you, that I want to see in person, Lord willing.”

He says, “I will hear about you that you are standing firm in one spirit, in one accord, contending together for the faith of the gospel.”

Let's begin with this phrase: “standing firm in one spirit, in one accord.”

The marker of a heavenly citizen is that he or she stands firm, but they do not stand alone.

In the beginning of verse 27, Paul uses this imagery of a citizen—our citizenship is in heaven, the verb form there. But now, as we transition into the remainder of the verse, we see the imagery shift to the language of soldiers. And that plural is important. We're talking a company of soldiers, not a sniper out in the wilderness on their own, but a company of soldiers.

Think of those images of the Greek soldiers with their shields interlocked, the spears poking out, standing firm together. Think of the soldiers in World War I in the trenches together, fighting alongside one another, standing firm, refusing to budge, refusing to give up an inch to the opposing army.

This verse does not say, "I will hear about you that you are standing firm in your faith as a bunch of individuals," that "I will be encouraged by the idea of seeing your individual faith." Rather, this is a collective—that they will stand firm together.

The marker of the one who walks worthy of the gospel, the marker of a heavenly citizen, is that we stand firm together.

And why do we stand firm? Well, because we know the attacks of the enemy will come. Paul tells us this here later in the verse, that if these things are happening to him, why should we think we're any different? And even more significantly, if these same things happen to our Lord, why should we think that we are any different?

Now note here, it says, "standing firm in one spirit, in one accord." Now it might be tempting to see the word "spirit" and think, "Oh, he's talking about the Holy Spirit directly." And the Holy Spirit is certainly involved in our unity as believers, but he puts "spirit" and "accord" in opposition. These are synonyms. They're saying a similar thing. What he's describing is the unity we have among believers.

Think of the union between a man and a woman in marriage. Well, they remain two individuals. They have their own thoughts and ideas, but they are united as one. It is a one-flesh union. Now, as we think of the body of Christ, it is a different kind of relationship—don't be mistaken—but we are united. We are one. We have a common purpose, a common goal. Our way of doing things ought to be united.

We stand firm together.

And this idea, this command of standing firm, is primarily defensive language. And within the context of Philippians, where believers are being persecuted and tempted, where the writer himself is imprisoned, we can see clearly that attacks by our enemy are to be expected.

So what does standing firm in one spirit look like?

Well, it means encouragement for our brothers and sisters. We can often think of encouragement simply as, "Well, this person went through a hardship and we're giving encouraging words," and that is certainly true. But encouragement extends further as well. It means building one another up in the faith. It means studying the Word of God together. It means praying together. It means worshiping together. It means we do not live out our faith as individuals on an island, but we are in this together.

It means knowing and guarding the truth of God together. And it also means accountability to one another.

It may be tempting to think that there is such a thing as private sin. We often talk about public sins and private sins, but ultimately there is no such thing as a private sin.

Think of those men in the trenches. Everything one person does affects the others. My sin affects you, and your sin affects me. Ultimately, there is no such thing as private sins. We must be accountable to one another.

And that can often sound like a negative thing, but realize that if we are accountable to one another, it enables us, it strengthens us as we seek to stand firm together.

But before we think that this is simply bravado—we think of these soldiers refusing to budge an inch, every inch of the battlefield matters—or we as Christians stand firm against the enemy, we’re certainly not going to budge.

As we look at the landscape of Christianity today, in our day and age, we can see many places where the enemy has seemed to gain much ground. Whether by those who dispute the inerrancy of Scripture, a topic that has been constantly under attack for the past century or so—especially the last two—the doctrine of the Trinity. Do not think it a coincidence that as all of these different cults have risen up over the past 2,000 years, but particularly over the past two centuries, that it is a common fact that they deny the Trinity. It is no coincidence.

One more recently here in our culture is the God-defined meaning of marriage and gender under attack as well. And we’re not just talking those outside of the church. We’re talking those who claim to be Christians as well.

And finally, the exclusivity of Christ as the only way to the Father, a doctrine which is constantly under attack. Perhaps certain interviews with famous so-called pastors come to mind, where this very issue is raised and the answer they gave was very flimsy at best.

And this isn’t to say that all of those who have proclaimed these things are genuine believers, but the point is our testimony to the world has been damaged. It seems that the enemy has gained much ground. But let us not despair. Remember Christ’s promise: **“The gates of hell shall not prevail against the church.”** (Matthew 16:18)

It does not mean we cannot temporarily fall into error, but it does mean that Satan will not ultimately win. We are not to rest on our laurels in that, for the command there is still clear that we are to stand firm together. But as we stand firm, knowing that the victory is secure, let us not despair at looking out at how bad things can be.

As heavenly citizens, stand in unyielding unity. We do not yield the truth. We do not compromise our faith, but we stand firm together.

But our work together does not begin and end on the defensive front, and it can often feel that way. We must sit in those trenches together—or rather, stand firm together. But by the power of God, our heavenly citizenship demands that we go on the offensive also.

Verse 27 continues, saying that we as the church ought to be “contending together for the faith of the gospel.”

Now in rapid succession, Paul has shifted from language of citizens in the beginning of the verse, to then soldiers, to now athletes.

And when we think of those who are on a sports team, if it’s a good team, it should be a well-oiled machine, each member of the team with their own responsibilities. Think of football on the offense. You have eleven guys, each with different responsibilities. This guy blocks, that guy runs a route, this one throws the ball. Different responsibilities, but when they work well together, they might win.

Think of a volleyball team. They practice these plays over and over and over. Whether it’s a bump, it’s a set, or it’s a spike, they practice over and over. And if any of these teams are good enough, they win enough games, they are labeled contenders. They can contend for the championship, contend for first place.

But unlike these teams, we are not contending for a Lombardi Trophy, for a Stanley Cup, for a gold medal, for a flag in our high school gymnasium. We are contending for something much greater.

The apostle tells us the body of Christ is marked by our commitment to the advancement of the gospel. What trophy do we seek? That God would be glorified and many souls would be saved.

We stand firm, knowing that the attacks by the enemy will come, but we also contend so that Christ would be proclaimed in our communities, in our nation, and indeed across the world.

But what does proclaiming Christ demand of us? Because at many times it may feel like it’s simply a positive command, that we are proclaiming Christ, explaining the gospel to others. And that is certainly true. But realize that there are many lies out there also. Lies about how one may be saved, lies about what Christianity is all about, lies about the person of God.

So proclaiming Christ means that we must denounce these lies also.

Paul describes these false teachers as evil workers. And I cannot imagine me being labeled this by a man of God, one who works evil. These are the false teachers.

And indeed many of these exist in our world, whether lovers of money preaching a false message of worldly prosperity—some names maybe came to mind—the sexually immoral who treat evil as something good or what is good as something evil, or those who lie, who misrepresent the text of Scripture to deny the fundamental tenets of the gospel.

Think there in verse 27, “Live your life worthy of the gospel.” That very verse has been misrepresented to deny the gospel.

So whether those who are greedy, those who are sexually immoral, or liars—or perhaps a combination of the three—there are many false teachers out in the world. But Philippians 3:19 describes these individuals well:

“Their end is destruction; their god is their stomach; their glory is in their shame; and they are focused on earthly things.” (Philippians 3:19)

But as we seek to contend together, let us also not be mistaken, because our battle is not ultimately against flesh and blood.

These false teachers that are out there, we should seek that they would repent, denounce these teachings, denounce these beliefs, and come to faith, to saving faith in the true Christ. Our battle is not ultimately against them. Our battle is against our enemy.

Similarly, we do not contend and fight as the world does. How does the world fight? With swords, with bombs, with guns, but also with insults, with slander, seeking to get one over on their opponents. We do not contend in this way.

But we must contend. Contend in proclaiming Christ positively, revealing who God truly is, what His Son has done on the cross for us, but also denouncing the lies that are out there.

As heavenly citizens, contend with faithful urgency.

Those who are false teachers are deceived, but also deceiving. They are blinded, but also blinding. But the light of the gospel shines through.

And similarly, when we think of us standing firm together, now contending together, let us not despair because there is a glorious truth: God has given the church many members with many spiritual gifts, many God-given talents—and those are two different things—but God has given the church many members.

Those who are intelligent, articulate, who can dismantle these lies in an intellectual way—that is valuable. There are those who are leaders in the church who can protect the church from false teaching. “This speaker wants to come in, declare a message.” The leaders say, “No, you will not have a platform in our church.”

But also God has given the church those with the gift of encouragement, of hospitality. Each Sunday morning, many of us walk in and the first place we go is to the cafe. There is immense value in that.

I don’t know each of you, when you came to faith in Christ, when God saved you. But speaking honestly, coming into a church for someone who is not a believer is a very intimidating thing.

Think of the first time. You don’t know what a church might believe. You maybe know a little about the Bible, the name of Jesus, but you may not know much else, and you’re coming in for the first time and you are greeted with love. And it is not just a show. We’re not just acting loving, but it is genuine. It comes from a place of faith.

Do not miss the impact that this can have on those in our world.

Now, for a third and final point regarding characteristics of heavenly citizenship, let's turn to the final three verses of this section, which I'll now read here now, beginning with verse 28:

“Not being frightened in any way by your opponents. This is a sign of destruction for them, but of your salvation—and this is from God. For it has been granted to you on Christ’s behalf not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, since you are engaged in the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I have.” (Philippians 1:28–30)

After describing Christian unity as both standing firm and contending together, he now qualifies both by saying that regardless of the attacks that may come against us, regardless of the false teachings we may encounter, regardless of the persecution in our world, we ought not to be frightened.

Why? Why shouldn't we be frightened?

The first is that the faith we have is something which cannot be taken away from us. Verse 29, we see that: that ***it has been granted to us on Christ’s behalf not only to believe in Him***. And even though that is not his primary point in this section, it has been granted to us. This term means graciously gifted.

Think back to verse 21 in chapter 1, famous memory verse. Paul writes these famous words: ***“To live is Christ and to die is gain.”*** (Philippians 1:21)

Christ Himself said, ***“Do not be afraid of those who can kill the body, but not the soul.”*** (Matthew 10:28)

Why should we be scared of those who oppose us? Why should we be intimidated? What can the world truly take away from us? Our lives?

We have no cause to be frightened.

And this isn't to glamorize, to present a Hollywood vision of what suffering under persecution and temptation looks like. It is difficult. It is hard. The desire to give in will be within all of us. It is hard. But that is why we must endure together.

This suffering is not for you as an individual, but it is suffering we endure together. And the faith you have cannot be taken away from you.

The second reason we see here in verse 28 is that the work of God in and through us is a testimony about sin, judgment, and salvation.

When we stand firm by the power of the Spirit, we testify to the world the truth about their sin, which is deserving of judgment, of destruction. We also testify to the world that while judgment is certain—and such were all of us, we were once sinners deserving destruction—thanks be to God for the salvation He has given us.

Do not be frightened. Do not be intimidated. Because when these attacks by our enemy come, they only prove God true and man false.

This passage ends with Paul's words which orient this entire discussion. Again, he has this word "granted," this idea of graciously gifted. And first he defines it according to faith, but also according to suffering. That as heavenly citizens, we have responsibilities. We can consider it our civic duty to suffer as God has appointed.

If Paul went through many kinds of suffering, if our Lord went through many kinds of suffering, we must expect the same. And it is a marker of heavenly citizenship that we will endure suffering.

But even in this, do not lose sight of what this suffering means. It is not for no reason. This opposition reveals—it is a sign regarding sin and judgment—but it is also a sign of our salvation.

So as we, the body unified, are standing firm and contending together, as we endure suffering, face opposition, remember the blessed hope that is within us.

Again, we are not speaking simply as individuals who go through hardship, who face persecution, who encounter temptation. We are talking as the body of Christ.

Remind one another of the blessed hope that is within us, because it can be very easy for us to be in this tunnel. We cannot see what is truly ahead. We are just facing things on either side, and we lose sight of the salvation we have been promised.

Never lose sight of it. It is a testimony to our world, but it is a testimony to our brothers and sisters also.

We are commanded to live lives in accordance with the gospel, to live lives which fit with the holy calling with which we have been called. We have a heavenly citizenship, and we must be marked according to it. We are first, foremost, and ultimately citizens of heaven, from which we eagerly await our Savior.

But in the meantime, we remain in the earthly city, and we will face opposition.

When the enemy opposes us, whether by persecution, by temptation, by false teaching, do we isolate ourselves? That is the temptation.

"Well, I have burdens, and I don't want anyone else to have to deal with that." I've thought that thought.

"Oh, well, I have enough going on in my life. How can I possibly bear up another's burdens as well?" I've had that thought.

But is this the proper response as a heavenly citizen? No.

We stand firm together in one spirit, in one accord. This is the calling of a heavenly citizen: that we stand firm together. And it is not easy. These attacks will come, and we will suffer greatly. But it is our calling as heavenly citizens to stand firm together.

But this is not only a defensive command. We must also contend together, to strive together that God would be glorified, souls would be saved, that we would proclaim Christ and denounce lies. We would address these false teachings as we encounter them, these false ideas in our world and even oftentimes in our church. And we must denounce them. We must address them. We must contend together.

And finally, we endure suffering together with a blessed hope.

When we face suffering, we see the promises of God are true. Well, He promised us suffering, so when we suffer, it is proof that God tells the truth. We can look to His other promises as well.

And if by the Spirit of God we stand firm and contend together faithfully, it is a testimony to our world and to ourselves about sin, judgment, and salvation. When we work together, it is a testimony to our entire world, Christian and non-Christian alike.

And this is our calling as heavenly citizens: to live lives worthy of the gospel, to live as heavenly citizens, stand in unyielding unity. Stand together. Do not budge an inch to the enemy. Contend with faithful urgency. Proclaim Christ and denounce all that is anti-Christ. And endure with blessed hope, knowing that in your endurance of suffering—not simply as an individual, but as the body of Christ—it is a testimony to our world.

Would you please pray with me?

Dear Heavenly Father, Lord, we come to You in humility, knowing that it has been graciously granted to us to believe, but also to suffer, knowing that it is by Your grace that we have been called heavenly citizens if we have faith in Christ. Lord, knowing that this is great grace indeed, Lord, we thank You. We thank You for the love that You have shown us while we were still Your enemies.

We pray that You would impress Your Word upon our hearts as we seek, as a local church body but as well as with the global church, to endure suffering together, to contend together, to stand firm together, knowing that we live in a world that is opposed to the gospel.

We pray for Your grace, we pray for Your strength, and by Your Spirit, please empower us to live lives of faithfulness together.

We pray this in Your Son's holy and precious name. Amen.

Scripture References (in order of appearance)

1. Matthew 22:21 (“Render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s”)
2. Philippians 1:27–30
3. Philippians 3:20
4. Ephesians 2:8–10
5. Philippians 1:27
6. Matthew 16:18
7. Philippians 3:19
8. Philippians 1:28–30
9. Philippians 1:21
10. Matthew 10:28