

Studying Philippians Part 3

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[0 : 00] Philippians 1 verses 27 to 30. I only let the manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.

What does it mean to live worthy of the gospel of Christ? Usually when we think about being worthy of something, we think about earning it. So, Usain Bolt is worthy of being called the fastest man on earth because he's got the medals and the timestamps to prove it.

Or, Mary Curie was a worthy recipient of not just one but two Nobel Prizes in physics and then in chemistry because of her groundbreaking work in radioactivity.

But that's not the kind of worth pools got in mind here. We also might think of worthy as paying someone back or having to live up to someone's legacy.

A lot of people live under a crippling weight of trying to live up to a grandparent or parents' legacy and trying to earn or live up to that. But that can't be what Paul's getting at either because even with our best efforts we could never make repayment or Christ sacrifice for us, we could never live up to his legacy in that way.

[1 : 51] Living worthy isn't about earning, it's not about repaying, it's about honoring. That's why I want to be asked to see this evening. Imagine you've been given the greatest gift in the world, a place on the Welsh Rugby team.

And everyone on tour is going to be watching you from all different countries and when you're on TV they're going to be looking at you, when you're in the country they're going to be watching you. As you give interviews, as you sit outside cafes, as you're walking down the street, when you're buying stuff in the supermarket, if rugby players do that, I don't know, if they're checking into the airport.

On the pitch and off the pitch you're going to be representing your country because you're wearing the colors of your country. And your good behavior, therefore, is going to honor your country. But your bad behavior is going to disown your country.

That's why the Irish women's football team got in trouble this week because a video emerged of them singing a song that they probably shouldn't have.

Just like a football team on tour, God expects his people to live and behave in such a way that brings honor on his name. That shows off the supreme worth of Christ and his gospel.

[3 : 05] Whether in this building, whether in our homes, whether at the school gate, whether watching the football, whether at the supermarket, God expects God wants our lives to live worthy of the gospel.

And Paul has spent the previous 14 verses that we looked at last week showing what that looked like in his life. Whether he was imprisoned, whether he was testifying to the judge, whether he was in a different way, Paul showed how he wanted to live for the supreme worth of the gospel.

And now he turns to the Philippians and he gives them the central command of this letter. He gives them their constitution that they need to live by. That only, you see at the beginning, that's not an accent.

He's saying only this one thing. If you're going to do one thing in my presence and in my absence, let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.

And to do that, first of all, we need to remember who we are. The Philippians and us, we need to remember who we are. And that's our first point. The Christian is a citizen of heaven. Now, it's there in verse 27, but it's actually a bit disguised.

[4 : 15] If you look in your footnotes, it might say only behave as citizens worthy of the gospel. You might have a little footnote in verse 27, but essentially I've stuck the Greek up there.

Not because we normally want, well, not to show it, but literally, I put the literal translation below the Greek, only worthily of the gospel of Christ, let your life as a citizen, that's what it would be.

So that last word there means life as a citizen, essentially. So another translation of it might be, let your citizenly behavior be worthy of the gospel of Christ.

And using the language of citizenship would have really struck a chord with the Philippians. You see, Philippi, you might remember, was a Roman colony. So the Philippians enjoyed all the privileges and rights of being a Roman citizen, even though they didn't live in Rome.

While their city was in Greece, in some ways it functioned as an outpost of Rome itself. And the Philippians were really proud of their citizenship. That's one of the reasons Paul got in trouble when he was in Philippi.

[5 : 21] They said he was advocating something that's not proper to be believed in Rome. And so even though the Philippians didn't live in Rome, they still lived with the values and the attitudes of Rome.

And now Paul says, let your behavior be worthy of your citizenship. Now Paul could be encouraging them to live as good Roman citizens. That's possible, but it's more likely he's reminding them of their most important citizenship.

The fact that they're citizens of heaven. See, because the word citizenship only turns up one other time in the Philippians, and that's in chapter 3 verse 20, where Paul says, don't keep your mind, don't set your mind on earthly things, but our citizenship is in heaven.

And from it we await a saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. So Christians are first and foremost citizens of heaven. That's what he wants the Philippians to remember. And the basis of their citizenship and ours is mentioned all the way through Philippians.

So Paul actually from the very first verse, we get a glimpse of our basis of our citizenship. So chapter 1 verse 1, Paul calls them, where is it? He says to all the saints in Christ Jesus, who are at Philippi, he calls them saints.

[6 : 38] And that little in is really important there, saints in Christ Jesus. No person is a saint or holy to God by default, only by being in Christ.

Only by being clothed in Christ, inside Christ. And you don't get in Christ because of your background or your behaviour or your zeal. Well Roman citizenship could be bought at a price.

One of the centurions is really surprised it acts that Paul has citizenship by birth. He bought it. But while Roman citizenship could be bought at a price, you can't buy citizenship in heaven.

Later on in chapter 3, Paul will talk about how he reached the top. He had the top of Jewish pedigree, he was so zealous he persecuted Christians. He was, as to the righteousness, he said he was, where is it?

Flawless basically. But Paul reached the top but his achievements couldn't buy righteousness. Being in Christ, being a citizen of heaven, only comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

[7 : 43] That's the basis of citizenship. Well what about the privileges? Well we also see in Philippians, there's different privileges that citizens of heaven have.

Again I'll just mention from the first two verses of Philippians. Paul says, grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Often it's easy to just skim through the opening words in a letter.

But even there, that gives us two privileges of citizenship. One we have peace with God. The person who trusts in Christ, who is in Christ, who is a citizen of heaven, is no longer an enemy of God.

But they're a friend. And as a result, they have access to God. God is their Father. They can speak to God on the throne in the same way a child can speak to their Father sitting on their knee.

But citizens also have responsibilities. Now I looked at various kind of constitutions of other countries and often that includes stuff like military service or you have to or jury duty, obeying the laws, etc.

[8 : 46] Well citizens of heaven also have responsibilities. We also have a constitution that we're to live by, a gospel charter as it were. And that's what Paul is giving us here. To live lives worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Citizens are to perform our citizenly duties if you like, in a way that holds up the gospel, in a way that shows its supreme worth to the world.

So when the Philippians woke up every morning and looked in the mirror, what Paul wanted them to see first and foremost was that they were citizens of heaven. Before there were anything else, before they were a shopkeeper, before they were a father, before they were a daughter, before they were anything else, they were a citizen of heaven.

That's what mattered the most. That's where they belonged, that's who they were. And that's not because their life in Philippi didn't matter. That's not because their job didn't matter or because they were a dad or a mom or a sister or a brother.

It's not because those things didn't matter. It's precisely because that does matter, Paul wanted them to remember their citizens of heaven. Now citizens of heaven, they were ambassadors everywhere they went.

[10 : 01] In every aspect of their lives, they were ambassadors of Christ. And so Paul wanted them to remember who they were standing for as they went out, as they went about their life for the rest of the day.

You think of, you know, when soldiers have time off and they go around the town, you know, what people see in those soldiers will refer to them. And those soldiers will reflect on the regiments. So if those guys are acting boisterously and kind of shoving their way around, that's not going to reflect well.

But if the soldiers are acting with compassion and kindness and gentleness and self-control, people will think, wow, you know, having this military base next to our town, that's fine. These guys are great and they'll think well of the military. They'll think well of them.

In a similar way, the lives of Christians should elevate the gospel. Because when we go, after we look in the mirror in the morning, remember we're citizens of heaven, whatever we go out and whatever things we do, those shouldn't drag Christ's name through the dust.

That should exalt Christ. It should exalt his gospel. And key to this is remembering that we're citizens of heaven. We constantly need that reminder. You know, when a soldier gets shoved roughly, when he's, I don't know, at a cafe or whatever it is, and someone says something derogatory about the army, remembering that he's in uniform, remembering that he's representing the army, will help to restrain him from shoving that guy back or getting in a fight or something.

[11 : 29] Miss Christians, we need to remember in some ways that we're in uniform. We need to remember we're wearing the kit of Jesus Christ. And remembering that shouldn't just restrain us, though.

It should motivate us to bring honor to him in the way we live in every aspect, in every sphere of our lives. So what does it look like, though, then to live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ? That's our second point.

Paul unpacks what that means in the following verses. So let me read from verse 27. Again, let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ so that whether I come and see you or I'm absent, here it is, I may hear that you are standing firm in one spirit with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel and not frightened in anything by your opponents.

So you see, first of all, it looks like standing firm. Citizens of heaven live worthy lives when they stand firm, when they don't budge in what they believe.

Followers of Jesus may be citizens of heaven, but we had lived life as travelers in this world. Christ is sovereign, he is king, he is ruler overall, but most many people in this world still refused to bow their knee.

[12 : 49] And as a result, we live in some ways and sometimes in hostile territory. Just like Philippi was a Roman colony, we live in a colony of heaven, if you like.

That doesn't mean we're isolated from the world. That means Jesus says we should be sought and light in the world. But that does mean that every day, rightly, we rub shoulders with those who don't bow the knee to Christ.

And there will be times when that won't be easy. Paul expects the Philippians to be facing opposition. In verse 29 he says, For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ, you might not only believe, but also suffer for his sake.

Suffering isn't an optional thing. Suffering is to be expected. It might look different for different Christians at different times and different parts of the world, but suffering comes part and parcel with following Jesus.

Our king suffered before he entered glory and so for us as believers, in this track of this world, before we too enter glory to be with him, we go down, we will suffer like our Savior.

[13 : 56] And that's why we need to stand firm. That's why Paul says stand firm. The Philippians needed to be reminded of that. In verse 30 Paul will say to them, You're engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now still here I have.

So maybe like Paul, they were beaten. Maybe they were mocked. Maybe they were thrown in prison. At the very least, they were facing the pressure not to live as citizens of heaven, but instead live as citizens of earth.

Maybe their businesses suffered. Maybe they lost their livelihood because people were shunning them for being Christians. Maybe they were getting falsely accused of different things. Maybe they just felt pressured to join in with their old way of life and not stand as they should to join in the jokes, join in the gossip, join in the slander.

I don't know what it would have been. But in a town where the power of Rome loomed large, treating Christ as number one, worshiping Christ, that would have been scary.

But Paul says stand firm. Verse 28, Don't be frightened in anything by your opponents. Stand firm. Stand firm. It's the language of, of holding, standing your ground.

[15 : 12] You know, like, I don't know if we think rugby again, you're getting ready for the tackle. So that's they're going to pound into you as if you think of military as two shield walls collide. It's the language of standing firm, holding your ground, not being frightened by your opponents, not budging in what you believe.

The thing is that opposition isn't always intimidating. Perhaps the most dangerous opposition that we face isn't being thrown in prison or anything, but rather just the way that the world's way of thinking is constantly washing over us.

It's there in TV, it's in adverts, it's in Netflix and social media, all these things, not things that are bad in and of themselves, but things that just carry a message that subverts the gospel.

Because it carries a message that our home is on earth. It carries a message that you are at the center of the universe, that what gives you most pleasure, what gives you the most satisfaction, that is what you should live for, what makes you the most you, that's what you should live for, what makes you feel the most respected, what makes you, I don't know, find yourself or whatever you want to say.

The world puts you at the center and says, you know, says, live life worthy of you. In contrast, Paul says, you don't belong here, you're just passing through. Jesus at the center, not you.

[16 : 40] So stand firm against those subtle lies of opposition as well, live lives worthy of the gospel of Christ. The most powerful opposition we face isn't mocking or prison, it's in the battle for our hearts.

To whom do you belong? Who is worthy of your devotion? Who is worthy of your allegiance? Is it you as the world, the flesh and the devil would want to believe? Or is it Christ?

Paul says, stand firm. Second, he says, stand side by side, strive side by side, sorry, strive side by side for the faith of the gospel. My standing firm is the defense, striving is the offense, it's that refusing to back down, refusing to compromise, but trying to seek to advance the gospel.

And the church strives for the faith of the gospel as it tells people about Jesus, as it tries to bring people to faith, you might say, and as it tries to build people up in their faith.

And if you were to read through the letter of Philippians, which I'd encourage you to do, you'll see loads of examples of that. So last week, for example, we saw of people becoming bold to speak the gospel because they saw Paul's fearlessness in prison.

[17 : 56] And those weren't people who were pastors, probably most of them weren't pastors or ministers. They were just people looking for opportunities to speak of the difference that Christ had made in them to those around them.

At the end of chapter two, you meet probably my favorite character in the whole of Philippians, the Paphroditus. Paphroditus was just really, he helped advance the gospel by being Paul's mailman.

He went back and forth with Paul's letters. You know, the modern equivalent, maybe, might be the person who's, I don't know, uploading sermons, distributing books, giving a helpful article to a friend, just making sure that God's word gets in people's hands, whether that's spoken or heard or watched.

And at the beginning of chapter four, we see probably the most explicit link. Paul talks about two women, Yodere and Sinterki, who strived side by side with him, exactly the same phrase for the faith of the gospel.

And so you can imagine, I don't know, you can imagine them meeting up to discuss the gospel with people. I don't think they had coffee, but whatever they would meet up and talk about the gospel they believed in, they probably were encouraging other believers when they met together in their house church, praying for them, meeting up with them, seeing how they could meet their needs.

[19 : 14] But as well as striving for the gospel by speaking of Christ, the book of Philippians is also very clear that our lives matter as well. So later in chapter two, verse 14, I'm just giving all these things away, aren't I?

Later in two, verse 14, Paul will talk about the importance of not grumbling or disputing, so that you shine as lights in the world. You just think to yourself, the difference that it makes when believers aren't in the office grumbling and muttering about their boss and bad-mouthing them like everyone around them, that's going to stand out.

People are going to see the difference. Likewise, next week we'll see the amazing witness that the church will be when it's not full of people trying to get at people's throats and getting one up on each other, but instead when it's full of people who serve each other and put others' interests first.

That's not like this world. That's not like being a citizen of this world. People who put each other first. That's the activity of citizens of heaven.

Citizens of heaven then honour Christ as they strive for the faith of the gospel. I think the language of striving is also really important here. It's really helpful because it shows that this is something that requires exertion.

[20 : 29] Paul models that later in chapter three when he says, forgetting what lies behind and straining for what lies ahead, I press on for the goal to win the prize for the upward call of Christ Jesus.

He calls Epaphroditus a fellow soldier who nearly died for the work of Christ. Paul and Epaphroditus are both examples of striving because they gave their all for the faith of the gospel.

I don't know about you, but I need that reminder because all too often I find myself surprised by how hard the Christian life can be. It's easy to wake up in the morning.

Maybe it's just me, but naively think that it's going to be a bit more of a walk in the park than it turns out to be. Sin never ceases to be a battle.

You get anxious about the same things. You get impatient with the same people. Prayer can feel hard. I lack love for the lost around me. I lack care for those who God has given me as brothers and sisters in Christ.

[21 : 31] Now praise God, that's not all the time. But striving for the faith of the gospel to make Jesus known to build up brothers and sisters, that requires effort.

For the gospel we need to strive and it's just a helpful reminder that we need to strive. This isn't something easy. The help is on the way because the Christian life isn't a solo quest.

Do you notice the Philippians are to be united both when they're standing and striving. In some ways this shouldn't be a point on its own because that unity language runs all the way through this section. All the use that I hear are plural.

Paul isn't giving instructions about how individuals live worthy of the gospel. He's giving instructions how a church lives together worthy of the gospel.

You don't get solo Christians. That doesn't exist in the Bible. Did you notice the unity language though in verse 27?

[22 : 32] Stand firm in one spirit with one mind striving side by side. That one spirit language reminds us that followers of Jesus don't just need to act united.

They are already on the same team. They are united in the triune God. They have one Father who is God. They are part of one body which is with Christ Jesus as the head.

As Paul reminds them they have one spirit who dwells within them all equally and powerfully works through them. Believers are united together through the Godhead in Christ.

In a similar way they have one mind. Now that one mind is an important phrase that you'll see coming up next week as well. It refers to an attitude of counting others more significantly yourself.

We're told in chapter 2 to have the mind of Christ. What's the mind of Christ? It was the mentality of not grasping and thinking I'm going to hold on to the throne of heaven.

[23 : 41] Rather than the mentality of giving that up for the sake of the salvation of others. The mind of Christ is one of self sacrifice.

That side by side language as well is one of active partnership. Like we've said before whether it's passing the pizza or laying the bricks or hauling in the pots. Working side by side for the faith of the Gospel.

One spirit, one mind side by side. If you want an illustration maybe think of a Roman legion under one standard with one goal. Shields locked, moving together, striving, standing as one.

Another illustration, pulls instructions in some ways like those in a rugby scrum. You hear them crouch, bind, set when they lock together in a scrum. And he's instructing the players to stand their ground and then push forward.

And key to a scrum you'll probably know is not falling apart. If the players aren't, if they're not holding on to each other, they don't bind together. If they don't push as one the scrum falls apart or it turns and it fails.

[24 : 44] Choose whatever illustration helps you to remember. The point is though that the Philippians, you and me, we must all remember that we can only live in a manner worthy of the Gospel when we live as a single team.

When we are united as one, when we're standing as one, when we're striving as one. If we're not, we'll collapse. And that's where being a citizen of heaven is so important.

Remembering that we're citizens of heaven. If our identity belongs to anything else, then we're going to pursue that. And then the whole church will lose its cohesion as people pull towards different purposes.

Indeed, the church can't fulfill its purpose if everyone sees their identity in something else and their goals in other things. To live a life worthy of the Gospel, we need to remember we're citizens of heaven.

And then pursue the goals of citizens of heaven together. Well, that's our third point. We've talked about who we are. We've talked about what it means to live a life worthy of the Gospel.

[25 : 49] But as we've been saying throughout, that's going to have an effect in the world. People are going to see that. And so let's briefly look at that in our third and final point. The effect of living worthy of the Gospel.

What does the world see when it comes across people living worthy of the Gospel? What does it come see when it sees people united around Christ? Laboring side by side, unafraid of opposition.

Well, Paul says, Paul tells us in verse 28. He says, this is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation and that from God.

Now, that might be surprising. But I would probably expect Paul to say, now when people see the church, they see that as a sign of their salvation. But Paul's statement actually fits him perfectly with what he's just said.

You see, when the church truly embraces its citizenship in heaven, it will live as if this world is going to be imminently destroyed. It will live as if the thing that most matters rather is Jesus Christ.

[26 : 58] So Hebrews 11 verse 7 illustrates this, actually, with the example of Noah. It says, by building the ark, Noah condemned the world. Why? Because Noah lived as if this world was going to be destroyed.

Noah lived as if that world wasn't his home. He put all his hope in being in the ark, in that vessel of salvation that God had provided for him. Brothers and sisters, and I'm preaching to myself as well, when we live as citizens of this world, for the things of this world and put our hope in the world, we just will think that on this world they can find solid ground, and that this world isn't going nowhere.

Because they'll say, well that's how the people in the church are also acting. However, if we live as citizens of heaven, if we live as if we're passing through as pilgrims, if we live as if this earth is going to be going soon, if we're investing not in the things of this world but the things in heaven, if we're going to face loss for what is eternal, if we are unafraid in the face of opposition because we're following a suffering saviour, if we speak to people and pray for people and love for people with the same urgency that Noah urged people to get into the ark because they're going to otherwise be destroyed, that's going to be a sign to people of their destruction.

And may I just say that's not a bad thing. It's necessary to have a canary in a coal mine, because it tells people when there's trouble and when they need to get out. Yes, some people will mock.

Yes, opposition will come. But when believers live as citizens of heaven, saying this world is not our home, actually people will have their eyes open by God's spirit to see the destruction that is imminent, and they'll ask like the Philippian jailer, what must I do to be saved?

[28 : 52] And then we can answer verse 28, our salvation is from God. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, and you shall be a citizen of heaven.

Our time is going to be up soon. I've just got some questions as we close so that we can think about this passage. As individuals, where is your citizenship?

Are you living a life worthy of the Gospel? Do you want to live a life worthy of the Gospel? As a church, where do we need to help one another stand firm?

Where can we grow in striving side by side? Are we living for this world? Are we living for the next?

Paul says, only let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel of Christ.