

One Thing We ALL Need

Philippians 1:27-30

Introduction: Sports provides a venue where lessons can be learned and metaphors for life can be used. Coaches use words like struggle, conflict, opposition, fear, together, striving, and unity as they train athletes to compete together for a common goal. In fact, there is much crossover to a General's speech to soldiers heading into a battlefield (which has far greater consequence) and athletes heading onto the athletic field. These speeches inspire, direct, and motivate before heading into the endeavor. If you've been on a team or in a battle, you know these speeches well. If you've never experienced it, listen to the late Bill Stewart, coach of the West Virginia Mountaineers as they faced the higher ranked Oklahoma Sooners in the 2008 Fiesta Bowl. He took a team coming off a disheartening loss to an instate rival to winning by 20 points in this prestigious Bowl.¹

As we come to this pivotal section of Philippians, we see that there is a distinctive shift in tone. Paul had talked much about his own situation, tensions, and desires. He expressed his desire to be with Christ, but was convinced that staying on the earth would produce fruitfulness, would be for the growth and maturity of the church and their deepening of joy. Now he turns to address and give clear commands to the church, taking on the tone of a coach or general directing those he cares about deeply. A coach and a commander do not actually enter the fray, but direct it from the sideline or behind the lines. Paul is currently in prison, and though his desire was to see the church face to face, that happening was far from a certainty. So his hope was that "***whether he came to see them or was absent, he would hear***" about their progress. He had high hopes for this church which he loved and thought of highly. But he also knew what they were up against: schemes, opposition, suffering, and struggle which could easily cause them to be frightened, dis-unified, and ultimately ineffective for the gospel.

How we live matters because the gospel changes everything. The gospel is not only what transforms and changes our lives, it is what we command to others, calling them to yield to Jesus Christ, knowing that He gave His life for ours. We have been impressed so far in Philippians that Christ must be the central focus of our lives, and if that is the case, the gospel must compel and drive everything that we do. This morning we will look at how we are to live in light of the gospel, particularly how we do this **together, unified in purpose and standing firm together.**

How we live each day matters: Citizen's Conduct

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ (27a)

Living with Dual Citizenship (sort of)

Paul begins this section of command, which will go all the way to chapter 2:18, with the word "Only". He is summing up what was most important, saying there is one overarching command that needs to be understood and carried out. What he says is that the church needed to live up to every aspect of the gospel in every way. Oh, that's it? Its equivalent to what he called husbands to in Ephesians 5: ***husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church.*** Is that it? We are only supposed to love our wives with the fervor, consistency, sacrifice, and passion of the way Christ loves us??!! The point he was making is that this singular command rules all other commands, and everything else hangs from this macro one. Get this right, everything else will fall into place.

His command is linked directly to our **conduct**, the way we live in the world. The word is translated "manner of life", "conduct", or perhaps even "walk" (as he stated similarly in Eph. 4:1, Col. 1:10, 1 Thess.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MW63PcDPPZk>

2:12). Though the idea is similar, the word used here is unique. He used a word with the root word *polis* or political (*politeuomai*), referring to their functioning as a **good citizen** of a city-state. This would have been striking to the readers in Philippi. They were proud to be a part of a city that was known as a "little Rome". As a Roman colony, they had a highly privileged status along with several rights not enjoyed by other colonies (free from taxation, self-governance, owning property). Roman citizens were committed to an interdependence of the community, were community conscious, and were willing to use their skills and talents for the good of the State. They would not want to bring anything negative as far as reputation to the State, and were honored to be considered a citizen. Pride, privilege, and responsibility would have been catch words for a Roman citizen.

Though the expectation for Paul was that they would function well within Roman culture, what he was truly getting at was the fact they had a **greater citizenship** (see Philippians 3:20 - 'Our citizenship is in heaven). All of us experience a type of **dual citizenship**, the one we were born into (or applied for) and the one we were **born again** into. Being citizens of heaven means we are representing God, Christ, the gospel, and each other in everything, meaning everything we do reflects against the whole. Not only should our conduct be characterized by "blamelessness and innocence" (2:15), it will be noted by the world around. I remember wanting to crawl into a hole when I was travelling with a team from Encompass in France, and got "shoooshed" by Dave Guiles since I was talking and laughing loud (hard to imagine, I know). He reminded me that Americans have an reputation of being loud, boisterous, and arrogant, and I was reinforcing that stigma. We are citizens of heaven, and that must affect our actions, both from the inside out and outside in.

Living up to Gospel Demands

As citizens, we have a new rule of life, and that is all of the gospel. We are to live in a manner **worthy** of the gospel. Our manner of living is always based on our citizenship, identity, and family name that we are living up to. I've said before of the lecture I received from my dad leaving for college, reminding me I was representing the Bakker family name and Jesus Christ. I was a member of both families, so had the potential to represent or bring shame to both (so don't mess it up).

When we say "the gospel", its important to define our terms or it simply becomes another *churchy* word that gets flung around with no weight behind it. The gospel has both **informational & transformational** components, meaning it is a set of facts that we must believe and something that changes us until the day we are with Christ. The facts of the gospel are simple: *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.*" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). This is the **power of God for salvation to everyone who believes** (Rom. 1:16). Anyone who understands they are sinful, have offended a Holy God and are under His judgment as a result, who believes in Jesus, that He lived a perfect life, died a substitutionary death, and rose again to conquer death, and ask for forgiveness, repenting of our sin by faith will be **SAVED. But this salvation is NOT simply about what we are saved from, but what we are saved to!** We are **reconciled to God** (2 Cor. 5:17-21), meaning that in Christ we can approach, access, and worship God in a restored way, and have now been given the **ministry of reconciliation, imploring others to be reconciled with God**. In other words, the gospel was something that affected us in the **past**, where we were declared righteous. It affects us in the **present** as it continues to perfect us and make us holy, and **future**, as we will one day be with Christ in a perfect state.

So when Paul says live worthy of the gospel, he refers to all of these aspects. We are forgiven and declared righteous, so we strive to live holy lives, striving to please the Lord and worship in all areas of our life. We have been given a mission as **ambassadors of Christ**, as God makes His appeal through us. We live out this reality in every venue, with everyone, and it should consume our very lives. This is **so important to understand this we CANNOT understand the rest of the command.** God did all the work

for our salvation so we cannot earn it, but demands all of us in salvation, not asking us to earn anything, but demanding maximum effort through the strength of His grace.

How we live together matters: *Unity Imperative*

*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, 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. (27b-28)*

Standing up Together

But what does it look like to live as citizens? It has direct impact on our **how we live together, walking in unity**. The first consideration is that we **stand firm**, which is a military term of a soldier holding his ground at all cost. It envisions the Roman phalanx, where soldiers would stand shoulder to shoulder with shields and spears drawn as the enemy would try to penetrate the line. If one soldier would back up or let down, the whole line would fall. Each soldier put his life into the hands of the man next to him, trusting that he would do his job as you did yours.

In the book of Ephesians, believers are called to **walk** in all kinds of areas: manner worthy of calling (4:1), not as Gentiles do (4:17), in love (5:2), as children of the light (5:8), and in wisdom (5:15). But toward the end of the letter, they are called to **stand firm** (6:10-14), putting on the full armor of God. We are up against the **schemes of the devil, in an evil day, wrestling against cosmic forces of evil in heavenly places**. So we stand with a commitment to the truth (belt), holiness (breastplate), new identity in the gospel (shoes), trust in the sovereignty of God (shield of faith), assurance of salvation (helmet), and on the Word of God (sword). We stand firm with **tenacity, digging in** knowing that the arrows and attacks will come. We stand firm in our faith not only because we are assured of our own salvation, but convince that we have the best and only gift that will help those in the world. The hard part of standing firm:

As we stand firm, the world will continue to shift, creating a greater chasm between us

In other words, we are going to feel more and more out of step with the world, and they will think that we are MORE backwards, narrow-minded, stuck-in-the-mud, irrelevant, non-progressive, and thus foolish and strange. And they will be right. We lose all influence and impact when we decide to let down our guard, lower our shields, and let the enemy access.

Unity in Spirit

There are two ways that we gain this kind of unity. The first is in or through the Holy Spirit, in Whom we were all baptized into one body --- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free --- and all were made to drink of one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), and in whom we maintain unity (Eph. 4:3). In other words, the foundation of our unity is our salvation and possession of the Spirit who fuses us together.

Unity of Mindset

We also have a singular mindset that keeps us together. We all come from different backgrounds, levels of education, and environments. How do we maintain the same mindset? We all come from and function out of the same source. The Holy Spirit guides us in the Truth, and ground ourselves in that source. This is why we commit to hearing the Word preached and sing the Word proclaimed. This is why we study different areas of God's Word on our own, and the Spirit sews it all together in our minds are hearts. Not only that, but we share a commitment to each other, like a soldier who does not care

about the politics or upbringing of the brother next to him, we are committed to fellow believers since the gospel fuses us like no other bonding agent could.

Disunity or conflict is always born out of competing interests. Two people have preferences that are at odds with each other, and as long as each party is dug in and unwilling to defer, conflict continues, in marriage, friendship, or in the church. So often it is NOT a matter of right vs. wrong, but what we *think* is the best way to do something. We want to make it a matter of right/wrong, but most of the time it is simply a preference. Even *if we are right*, we can absolutely be wrong in pressing our opinion to the detriment of another, or from a motive of pride. This is why Paul emphasized doing **nothing from selfish ambition, but rather consider others as having surpassing value greater than ourselves, and looking to the interests of others, rather than our own** (Phil. 2:3-4). It is only when selfless humility rules that unity can breathe. As long as we think about these exchanges as "I never get my way, therefore I never win", we cannot truly move forward in unity.

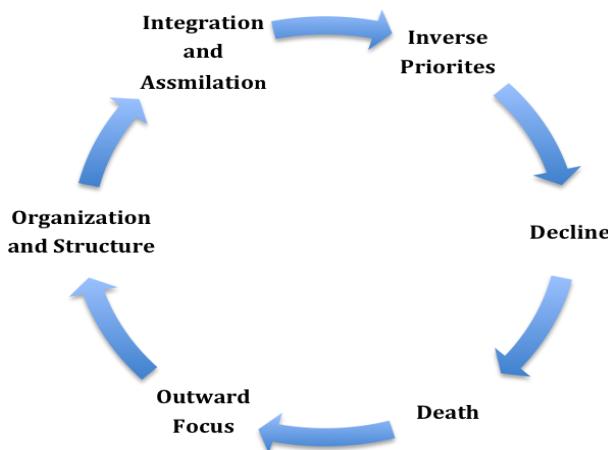
Struggling forward Together

The next word and metaphor Paul uses is one from athletics, as the word struggle here is the word that means to *contend or compete together* in an athletic contest. Here is a picture of a group of athletes working together to win the prize (see 1 Cor. 9:24-27 for how this metaphor plays out). It reminds me of an offensive line in football, where each man has an assignment to protect the quarterback or open up running lanes for the running back, lining up shoulder to shoulder. **But what does this contending or competing look like?**

Unity in Mission

The struggle here is NOT a struggle against each other, but for a forward thinking mission, the purpose being faith in the gospel. Again, athletes compete for a common purpose of winning together, and teammates may not have much in common off the field or in daily life, but everything in common on the field. This is the idea Paul brings to the forefront. Unity is maintained when there is a greater purpose other than our own preferences, and that is seeing the gospel go forth in the lives of those around us. This struggle is one of proactivity and relentlessness.

Studies have shown that in there are life-cycles, and without intentionality, death is an inevitability.²



If you start with "outward focus" and work out, you'll notice that when a church reaches inverse priorities, it's where unity wanes, comfort rules, and the previous two sections become *ends* instead of

² <https://thomrainer.com/2018/01/understanding-where-your-church-is-on-the-congregational-life-cycle/>

means. That is why we must never lose or perhaps regain our outward focus, training up to send out, equipping disciples to make disciples, evaluating structures and programs as to whether they help us accomplish our mission or not. When we are committed to a mission like being ambassadors of the gospel, unity will be high and preferential comfort will be low. This means we will not get our way, will not have it easy, but will actually be effective in the harvest.

Unity in the midst of Opposition

The struggle was real. There was, and will be, genuine opposition to the gospel. The opponents of the church at Philippi tried to frighten them, like startling a horse to bolt and throw his rider. Since our enemy cannot take away what is most important and valuable to us (Christ and our salvation), he absolutely can cause havoc in causing fear that everything else could be taken away. The encouragement gave at this point is pivotal. When we are opposed in gospel ministry, **three foundational truths are present:**

- 1. Signals the destruction of those in opposition** - This does not fill us with delight but sobriety since people are blind to the gospel
- 2. Assurance of our own salvation** - The enemy does not try to oppose those who are not a threat to his kingdom. If we are being attacked and opposed, we are making progress
- 3. God is absolutely in control of it all** - All of it, from our unity to our opposition, is under the mighty hand and control of God, so we take heart.

Unity is not born out of focusing on itself, but rather on our mission and common enemy

How we live with suffering matters: Grace's Privilege

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, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have. (29-30)

Gracious link of salvation & suffering

Why is all of this such a struggle? Why do we have to suffer in this process? The answer is found in our Savior and God's grace. Jesus Himself was willing to suffer, first becoming a man and experiencing pain and suffering, and second giving Himself over to death, even death on a cross, so that God's wrath would be satisfied and we could have His righteousness. All of this was so God could extend His grace to us in salvation (Eph. 1:3-11). But here is where our mind gets blown. We can wrap our heads around the fact that salvation is all by grace and NOT by works (Eph. 2:8-9), but here Paul uses the word "granted", which has the root word "grace", not only for salvation, but for suffering. Suffering is an extension of God's grace in our lives, particularly suffering for the sake of the gospel. We follow in the footsteps of our Savior who emptied Himself and humbled Himself, enduring unfathomable suffering. And because suffering is an extension of God's grace, He will sustain us by His grace through it. Why is it all worth it? Because we do it **for the sake of Christ**.

Salvation and suffering are both privileges, both extended to us by God's grace

Historic link of agony & joy

When we engage in this kind of ministry, we join a historic throng who have gone before, not the least of which is Paul himself. It was through conflict or agony that he operated, and when the church at Philippi faced opposition, they simply were following in his example. The ministry we have been called

to is a struggle, will require complete effort and will cost us greatly. If we are going to be effective to reach others with the gospel, we need to stand firm together, struggling together for the faith of the gospel. If you are here this morning, you are called to join the team, enter the conflict, and struggle with us. This is why the focus on joy for the whole first chapter is so key. When our joy is in Christ, we can risk our own comfort, our own preference, our own glory.

Questions for Discussion:

- Commitment in the gospel is complete, a totality of effort and work (Phil. 2:12-13). What are areas that we struggle with in living up to conducting ourselves worthy of the gospel? Are these attitudes, motivations, actions, or something else?
- Can you explain the gospel in both information and transformation? What is the difference between the two?
- What are preferences that you hold onto in life that inhibit unity in your relationships? What are other factors that cause disunity among us? How does that change?
- What are ways you see our enemy tries to get us to walk in fear, or be frightened? What are areas that we would begin to compromise and capitulate the truth because of pressure from outside of us?
- Why do we usually describe God's grace only in the positive ("I got the job...God was gracious") rather than in all things ("I got laid off....God was gracious"). What would change in our attitude and outlook if we saw God's grace in all things?

Counseling Thought:

Conflict is a result of competing interests and raising my preferences over the love and care of others. What are habits, opinions, or preferences that you have been holding onto that have harmed relationships, causing disunity rather than maintaining it? This requires true humility, since it dies to self and considers others as having surpassing value greater than ourselves.