

The sermon

Intro

Last week Paul said, *“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”* A good slogan, but what does that mean for a 21st century American? What does that mean for Christians who are out of step with the culture? Where do we go from here?

Let’s turn to Paul for some answers.

READ PASSAGE

Body

Passage Focus

How do we make Christ our life? How do we honor Jesus while we live? Paul sheds some light.

Point 1: Live worthy of the gospel by standing firm in one spirit.

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ,

The **ESV** has a footnote that says the Greek is *“Only behave as citizens worthy.”* Several ideas are present here:

- 1) Conduct, behavior, how we live, the choices we make, our words, our actions.
- 2) Conduct fitting of citizenship.

The verb translated *“let your manner of life be”* speaks to behavior fitting of one’s citizenship. Like Americans who think it’s fitting to stand for the national anthem at an athletic contest, but it’s unbecoming to burn the American flag. You likely have your own ideas about American citizenship.

Here it’s not citizens living worthy of the Roman Empire or America. It’s citizens living worthy of the gospel. Yes we’re American citizens, but our primary citizenship is heavenly. We’re citizens of a kingdom to come. We live in ways that correspond to that kingdom.

- 3) Conduct fitting of the gospel.

What’s *“the gospel of Christ”*? The good news about Jesus Christ. The good news of rescue from sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The good news of forgiveness and God’s mercy in Christ. The good news of newness of life to fight the power of sin today. The good news of a kingdom to come where Jesus will rule and sin and suffering and death will be a thing of the past.

Broadly conduct worthy of the gospel includes being merciful. Treating sinners in the way God treated you. As people who are new by the Spirit, living in new ways. Replacing sinful patterns with godly patterns. New ways of using our mouths, navigating our relationships. And new hopes. Hopes that shape our goals today. Like prioritizing honoring Jesus over personal recognition or power or wealth or things. These are some ways to live worthy of the gospel.

Specifically, Paul has three worthy ways in mind. These are our three points this morning.

so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit,

Paul wants to know how they’re doing. He’ll find out in person or through Timothy who he plans on sending to find out (2:19, 23).

The first thing Paul wants to hear is *“that you are standing firm in one spirit.”*

It could mean the Holy Spirit, but virtually all English translations besides the NIV opt for the human spirit because “one spirit” is parallel with “one mind” (*“standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side”*). Mind is the word

for soul. Since the spirit and the soul are synonymous expressions that refer to our inner being, the human spirit is likely. Meaning mind, emotions, affections. That's stand firm together of one heart.

How are we able to stand firm? By the power of the Spirit. The Spirit who enables Paul to honor Jesus despite the threat of impending death.

What does it mean to "stand firm"?

It's holding our position and refusing to back down. Like soldiers in battle stationed to hold the line. They're called to hold their position and prevent the enemy from getting through. In this way, the enemy fails to gain ground. Enemy soldiers come in waves attacking to break through, so holding ground puts you at great risk.

The Philippians faced great risks in standing firm in the gospel. They lived in a Roman colony where Caesar was Lord. They were expected to take part in civic pride where Caesar was worshipped. And Philippi was heavily populated by former Roman soldiers. We can imagine intimidation to worship Caesar, ostracism for failure to worship Caesar, accusations for failure to worship Caesar, and consequences for failure to worship Caesar. Loss of employment? Family rejection?

Verse 30: The conflict they saw was Paul publicly stripped, beaten, and imprisoned (Acts 16:19-24). Paul's present conflict is Roman imprisonment (Phil 1:12-14).

What choices do soldiers holding the line have?

- 1) Join with the enemy.
- 2) Surrender and plead for mercy.
- 3) Run away and abandon their post.

Note this. Paul doesn't say run away and hide. Paul doesn't say retreat. He says stand firm in the midst of opposition. Endure and give no ground. Be in the culture that's frightening. Don't run away and hide out in a Christian bubble. Stay in the fight. We're supposed to be shining lights in the world (Phil 2:14-16).

We're like the Philippians. We're out of step with our culture. We face pressure to conform. And we fear the consequences of holding the line.

There's pressure to give into the sexual revolution and affirm what God does not. Are you worn down by the shame and insults? Wrong side of history. Bigot. Transphobic. Ignorant. Hateful. Dinosaurs who need to die off. There's pressure to back down and affirm sin.

Maybe it's pressure to give into religious pluralism? The idea that all religions are equal and acceptable ways to God. To talk about love for Jesus isn't offensive. To talk about private faith or God in general isn't offensive. To talk about a loving God isn't offensive. But to talk about Jesus as the only way to God offends. To talk about sin and hell and holiness offends.

We're faced with a choice? Will we hold our ground? Will we join with the opposition? Will we turn away from Jesus in fear?

We hold our ground in the strength of the Spirit. And we do this together. Why the local church? One reason is to have a group of people who help us stand firm in a culture where sin is normalized and God's ways are marginalized.

Point 2: Live worthy of the gospel by laboring together with one mind.

with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,

One highlights unity. Mind highlights our inner life. A united front. Loving the same things. Sharing the same goals. Seeing life the same way. "To live is Christ, to die is gain."

“Striving side by side” speaks of working together with a group of people in a common struggle where opposition is present. The picture is fighting a battle together.

We work together *“For the faith of the gospel”* (faith which is based on the gospel of Jesus Christ) in a culture where sin is normalized and God’s ways are marginalized. We advance the gospel by proclaiming this good news to those outside the church. Making new disciples. And by conforming our lives more closely to Scripture. Growing in Christlikeness. Moving in a direction of church health.

What’s the picture of the local church here? Doing life together. Doing gospel work together.

There’s two challenges here to functioning as a church the way God intends. First, external opposition. Intimidation may cause us to join with the enemy or run and flee. Second, internal opposition. We may self-implode as a result of internal strife. Thus, the call to be of one mind. It’s highly unlikely that a church will succeed in mission when opposed from the outside and at the same time fighting each other from within.

Paul’s made much of gospel partnership thus far. We need to see each other as partners. We need to share common gospel beliefs and common gospel goals. And labor together for these beliefs and goals. **When we fight against each other we fail to fulfill our purpose!**

A word of caution. There are numerous beliefs we need to hold in common. The inerrancy of the word of God. The Trinity. The deity of Christ. The resurrection. Salvation in Christ alone through faith alone. The new birth. The new heavens and new earth. But total uniformity isn’t the intent of one mind. In Romans 14, the Christians in Rome could labor side by side while disagreeing on the implications of the New Covenant. Can I eat meat? Can I drink wine? Do I have to celebrate the Sabbath? They could disagree on these and labor side by side.

Given cultural opposition to the gospel today, we need the help of each other to stand firm. The idea of a Christian not part of a church, not working for gospel advance with a group of believers is foreign to Paul. If someone asks you why I have to be part of a church show them Philippians 1:27.

Point 3: Live worthy of the gospel by not being afraid.

and not frightened in anything by your opponents.

The church had opponents. The church had reason to be frightened. Their fears were real rather than imaginary. Opposition called for unity and courage to stand their ground.

This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.

Standing their ground and failure to be frightened amidst intimidation, ostracism, accusations, and real consequences was a sign to Roman citizens. It’s a sign to American citizens.

When we maintain our Christian beliefs and conduct in a world that’s attempting to squeeze us into its mold, when we stand for God in a culture where God is marginalized and sin is normalized, when we don’t given into the intimidation, pressure, and shame, we are a sign to the world. We’re a sign of their destruction and our salvation.

When the world sees a person who has nothing to gain, but much to lose, refusing to fall in line with the culture, it gives them pause. I have a paycheck to gain, but what do you have to gain earthly speaking when you refuse to affirm a Christian cult or sexual immorality or the LGBT agenda? What do you have to gain earthly speaking when you affirm salvation in Christ alone, the new birth, the wretchedness of sin, and hell’s destruction?

When we stand firm, we’re a sign.

First, we’re a sign of their destruction. In Matthew 7:13, Jesus speaks of a wide gate *“that leads to destruction.”* He proceeds to talk about people *“cut down and thrown into the fire”* (7:19). People who thought they knew God being excluded from the kingdom (7:21). And Jesus says to them, *“I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of*

lawlessness” (7:23). 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3 speaks of “*sudden destruction*” that comes on the day of the Lord. 2 Thessalonians 1:8-10 says “*those who do not know God and...do not obey the gospel...will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints.*” That’s destruction happens swiftly on the day of the Lord, but destruction is eternal so it doesn’t end. Revelation 14:11 speaks of a place where the wicked experience torment with “*no rest, day or night*” after that day.

What’s destruction? Rejection, expulsion, exclusion, separation, location, torment. Eternally.

Second, we’re a sign to our own salvation. Salvation present. Salvation future. When they see a person who refuses to buckle, they see proof of the new birth promised in the gospel. The empowering presence of the Holy Spirit is on full display.

When they see gospel promises lived out, they realize destruction is coming, but for the believer, the eternal kingdom awaits. The gospel is confirmed when we stand firm. When we don’t change our stance on sexual morality we’re a sign!

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.***

“For” explains the fright and the salvation. God has granted two things to believers for Jesus’ sake: belief and suffering.

The word granted means to give freely, to give graciously. It’s the verbal form of the word grace. You’ll recall grace is unmerited favor. Meaning belief and suffering are unearned gifts of God. We did nothing to merit belief. We did nothing to merit suffering. Both are gifts from God.

Belief is a gift of God. Paul is saying we and the Philippians believe because God gifted us to do so. The world lies dead in sin (Eph 2:1). In the fall, Satan blinded the world “*from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ*” (2 Cor 4:4). But, if we believe, “*God...has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*” (2 Cor 4:6). No one can see. But God shines light in some.

Why is it that we of all people believe? God gave us belief. When we heard the gospel we embraced it. Looking back we see that we embraced the gospel because God gave us faith. He shined light in our hearts such that we embraced the gospel. It’s a different way of saying God began a good work in us (gave us faith), a work he’ll complete (Phil 1:6).

There came a period of time in my life when I counted the cost. Will I follow Jesus or keep living a partying life? I knew if I believed it would be the end of fraternity life as I knew it. So there was a period of intense personal wrestling. Will I chose Jesus or a lifestyle contrary to God’s word? There were personal decisions to be made. I willingly chose to forsake sin and follow Jesus. Later I discovered in my Bible why I made the decision I did. God gave me faith.

If you’re tracking with what I’m saying, Paul is hinting at predestination and election. Topics he covers in depth elsewhere at length. I know there’s mixed reactions, questions, curiosity about this topic in this room. I’m not addressing the issue in depth because it’s not the central point of the passage. But if you have questions, we can talk.

Suffering is also a gift of God. It’s not something to flee from. It’s something to embrace.

Does God leave us to suffer on our own? No. He gives us his Spirit so that we may honor Jesus in each and every situation. And he gives us the local church. So that we may have a people to lock arms with in the struggle. God is a giving and empowering God!

Non-Christian

Maybe you’re here this morning and you’re realizing I’m one of the ones who will be destroyed because I don’t believe in Jesus and his gospel. Friend, there is good news. You can escape the destruction to come by trusting in Jesus alone, not yourself. Jesus died on the cross so that anyone who believes can escape the wrath to come. No matter what you’ve done.

Jesus' death is worthy to take the wrath you deserve for your sin. All you need to do is turn from sin by trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection.

Conclusion

Live worthy of the gospel by standing firm in one spirit.

Don't give up gospel ground.

Live worthy of the gospel by laboring together with one mind.

Lock arms together.

Live worthy of the gospel by not being afraid.

Embrace the gifts of belief and suffering.