

A Gospel Worthy Life

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[0 : 00] So if you are new to us, we are going through the book of Philippians. Those of you who've been here for the past few weeks, you know that we are on part three. We're in the third iteration of our series here on the book of Philippians.

So go ahead and turn to chapter one. If you got a Bible, if you don't, we got the verses up on the screens as well. And kind of what would be helpful today before we read this passage is realize that we are going to encounter on the front end a very sobering charge.

And it's a charge I want us to really pay attention to because really this is what today's passage and sermon is about. And it's the charge is this. Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ. Now it's helpful and I got to geek out on some historical context here, you know, so bear with me, but I hope that it's helpful for you. But, you know, this letter is written to a particular place at a particular time in history.

It's written to these believers in a city called Philippi. And when we hear the gospel of Christ, they would have heard that in a very unique way because they would have known about another gospel, the gospel of Caesar, right?

[1 : 09] And they were under Caesar's rule. Philippi was this city within the Roman Empire. And the gospel of Caesar was the good news of Caesar that to be under his rule was to be under the peace and the prosperity that only Caesar can bring.

And so now Paul is saying, you know what? There is something better. There is something that every other gospel must bow to, including you Philippians believers, and that is the gospel of Jesus. You're not citizens of Rome. You are citizens of heaven. And our passage today, what it's going to do, it's going to tease this whole idea out.

And it asks and answers the question, what is then, as citizens of heaven and not citizens of America, not citizens of Rome, what then is the gospel worthy life?

Let's jump into it. Philippians 1, 27. Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents.

[2 : 28] This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation and that from God. 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.

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit. But in humility, count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form.

He humbled himself by being, by, by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

[4 : 05] This is God's word. Amen. Amen. So, there's a lot there, but one thing I think we have to see, this major proposition, and you can respond to it in one of two ways.

You can reject it, but kind of makes the rest of this sermon pointless, doesn't it? But you have to see this proposition and receive it as true, and it's this, there is such a thing as living a gospel-worthy life.

And here's the good news. The good news is that is possible. Here's the honest news. It's not easy. Otherwise, Paul wouldn't say things like, don't be frightened by anything in your opponents.

Well, Paul, I wasn't frightened, but now that you said that, I guess I should be. Now I got some new intrusive thoughts happening. And that's not even the worst thing he says.

He goes on to say, you not only get to believe in Jesus, also you get to suffer for his sake. If you're wondering where the benefits are to being a Christian, don't get the wrong impression, because there are a ton, there are plenty of victories, mountaintop moments.

[5 : 11] We sometimes get to see God do some incredible things. We were just out front praying this morning, and we had a guy share his testimony. Chris shared his testimony, and he put on display how much of a mess he was until Jesus got a hold of him and how much that mess he turned into something beautiful and redemptive and glorious.

We get to see those things. People healed, restored broken relationships. We get to experience things like God bringing uncommon peace during situations where actually anxiety would be very well justified.

And there is a call here for Christians to live with that kind of victorious faith that believes God can do anything that he wants, and we should. He is sovereign.

He is almighty. And he is for us. But I would also say this. If that's all you got, that's only part of the fullness of the truth of the gospel.

Because to be a Christian is to enter into a conflict that has two different sides. Paul talks about this conflict. Now here's the thing.

[6 : 18] One side gets to fight as ugly and as unfair as they want. We don't. But that doesn't mean we don't win. It just means that we have at our disposal to, we have the means at our disposal to avail ourselves in this conflict in a very different manner.

And it looks really different. And I would say this. The path to victory, the path to glory, the path even to exaltation as a Christian is achieved in a paradoxical manner.

It doesn't make sense. And when you look at it, you're just like, that ain't going to work out. And then it turns out, yeah, it actually does. Some good news and some bad news here.

Good news is you don't face this alone, right? You don't live this kind of life out alone. And nothing exposes our need for life together, like life in Christ together, than suffering does.

In a lot of ways, Christians, Christianity living this life of Christ, I would say, arguably, if you've been along enough in community, it would be a lot easier to just live in isolation, except for the suffering part.

[7 : 30] Then you start to realize how much you need people. Community is the good news, right? You have amazing people around you. You have family, spiritual family around you to face these things with you, to do life together with.

Right? But when you join a community and you spend time in a community, you realize how different we are from each other. And that's where the problems start to come, right?

We are so different to each other in so many ways. The longer you're in community, the more you see those differences amplified. And it can make you long for isolation after a while, right?

You may want the community of me, myself, and I in Jesus Christ, right? That sounds a lot easier, because I get along just fine with me. When it comes to life together, there are really only two responses to our differences.

Unity and conformity. The gospel life is marked by unity, not conformity. And on the surface, conformity and unity seem like the same thing, but actually, they are vastly different.

[8 : 36] Think of it this way. Conformity is achieved through imposition, in order to coerce behavior. Unity is achieved through invitation that compels the heart.

Those are very two different approaches. The gospel is good news. It is invitation. An invitation to believe in Jesus. It is an invitation to follow him.

It is an invitation to be united to Christ. It is an invitation to have your very mind renewed and your heart's desires change to be more and more like his.

Now, to get an idea of how conformity gets confused with unity, we can look at the problem at the center of the Galatian church. The Jewish law of circumcision and dietary laws were starting to be

imposed on Gentile believers.

They were saying, hey, we're all in this together. Jew, Gentile, God's making, you know, one humanity out of this, one new kind of people out of this.

[9 : 41] So we should all be the same here, right? I'm circumcised. You should be circumcised. I don't eat bacon. Neither should you. I mean, bacon was on the line here. We should take this very seriously. Conformity may not be a good thing, right?

Even the apostle Peter got sucked up into the conformity problem. He stopped eating with the Gentiles. He pulled away from fellowshiping with them when the strong conformity personality type showed up.

And Paul says, actually, I opposed him to his face and called him out. Galatians 2, 14 to 16. These are recounting this episode. But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the gospel, I said to Cephas, before them all, if you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?

We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners. Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ. And so we also believed in Christ Jesus in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law, no one will be justified.

What Paul is saying here is where the gospel had united a diverse group of people, Jew and Gentile, conformity, aka legalism, was dividing them.

[11 : 06] The very thing conformity promises, unity around values and conduct, is the very thing it will never deliver. Why? Because conformity uses behavior in a way to communicate, I am better than you, or we are better than you.

There's an in-group and an out-group. And conformity seeks to attain that unity through fear and through punishment. Legalism and moralism are methods of conformity that are opposed to the gospel of Jesus.

They are heavy on imposing rules and shame and guilt in order to control people to conform their behavior. And while it can provide a veneer of unity, which it often does, what lies underneath really isn't unity at all.

And here's why. It doesn't get at the heart issues. It doesn't change anybody's heart. And I'll go ahead and wade into some treacherous waters here.

Politics is a great example of trying to achieve unity through conformity. Right? We vote. Here in a democratic republic, we get to vote. And we vote to get a majority.

[12 : 16] And that majority, we hope our side wins so that we can exercise our preferences through the power of government. And even if we are using it to try to achieve good solutions, we as Christians should think critically about the role politics plays in our lives.

And now I say that believing there is a role of politics in our lives that it must play. However, I would warn us, politics is seductive because it uses power, aka conformity, as the means to our desired ends.

And that's why we kind of love it when our side is in power and we really hate it when it's not. Right?

I remember my grandpa through the Clinton years, the Clinton's presidency years, I would have thought his life was falling apart and the world was coming to an end, and yet here we are.

We must not be so tethered to a political side that we fail to see that politics is a power and control business. It's conformity at a grand scale.

And the gospel is the antithesis of our politics. Like I said at the beginning, there is the good news that Rome could have given the Philippians.

[13 : 35] There is the good news that you can get from the Republican Party or from the Democratic Party. And what Paul is saying, again, is everything has got to bow to the gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news of Jesus Christ.

Knowing that, we should approach politics with sobriety. We should approach it with wisdom.

Because it will deceive our hearts into thinking conformity is an acceptable way to get things done.

We'll bring that into the church and how we do life together. Now let's face the facts. The gospel-worthy life, think about the fact that it uses a unity that relies on invitation that compels the heart.

And I'm just going to acknowledge that sounds extremely weak and a little naive and maybe comes across as a little foolish as well. And you know what?

I agree with that. And you should agree with that. The gospel is foolishness and weakness to the world. The Bible claims that for itself. So this idea of unity that sounds foolish and weak and kind of like, man, is this really going to work?

[14:44] Actually, if we say yes and amen to that, it means that we're probably closer to the gospel-worthy life. So then, how do we live in that gospel-worthy life of unity that Paul is laying out for us?

Right? He says this in chapter 127. It includes things like standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel. And again, in chapter 2, verse 2, he says, Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord.

Literally, that word is soul harmony. And of one mind. Man, if you were hoping that maybe this unity bar, Paul is going to just set it really low so that we could, like, achieve it.

Man, that bursts the bubble right there, right? Paul is expressing a tall order for unity. Think of it this way. How impossible this should sound to us.

Think of it this way. If we were to take a private poll right now in this room, just to decide on what the best restaurant in town is, what are the odds that we are going to write the same thing in?

[15:51] That's never going to happen, right? It's never going to happen in a family of four. So if we can't agree on a restaurant, what hope of unity is there with hundreds of adults who see things differently and hear things differently and experience and process the world differently and have different needs at different stages of life?

Gee, Paul, why don't we just try to solve world peace while we're at it, right? It sounds impossible. And frankly, according to what we have at our disposal from the world, it is impossible.

So if we can't use these conformity methods, and if the unity of the gospel life is laid out like it is here, and Paul says we should be attaining to that, what in the world is the answer for how we achieve this?

And Paul gives it to us in chapter 2, verses 3 to 8. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

[17:17] The kind of unity Paul lays out is impossible because the only way it can be achieved has been revealed from heaven, through the person of Jesus Christ.

He came and achieved it for us and showed us and put it on display. Unity is only possible through cross-shaped humility.

And you're not going to like what I'm about to say about this. Because I don't. Humility is dying to yourself in order to bless and elevate those around you.

The gospel-worthy lies, the cross-shaped humility that Paul just spoke about, means that we are called to die a lot more than we want to. A lot more than we want to.

And also in ways that feel unjust. But the cross-shaped life brings a totally different kind of justice.

[18:26] Jesus brought a totally different kind of justice, didn't he? The cross is the letting go. It is the release of power for the benefit of others, even our enemies.

I'm going to say it again. The cross is the release of power or the use of power for the benefit of others, even our enemies. When you look at the life of Jesus, you see humility.

He left heaven, right? Paul talks about it. He emptied himself. He came down. He made himself lower than the angels, being born in the likeness of men. He put on our weakness, our frailty. Now you can say, yeah, Jesse, but he was still God's son, eternal, almighty, all those things.

Yeah, but look what happens when Satan comes and tempts him to use that power selfishly. He refuses it. All alone in the desert, after weeks of fasting, Satan comes to Jesus saying, man, turn these stones.

You're hungry. Turn these stones into bread. Use your power to eat. Fill your belly. And you know, it would be so easy for you to do, and nobody's watching. Who cares? Jesus said no.

[19:32] He says again to Jesus, man, go, let's go to the top of the temple in Jerusalem, the most populated place, and the religious center, and throw yourself off the top of that temple, and everybody can see you, and you can make a big spectacle about how you can order angels around.

Who can doubt you then? And Jesus says no. On trial, before his accusers, he's maligned and he's slandered. He doesn't utter a word.

On the cross, he doesn't escape. He doesn't come off of it, though he definitely could have if he wanted to. Jesus, we see again and again, humility upon humility upon humility.

He humbled himself by coming to earth and putting on our weakness. He humbled himself more by refusing to use his power for selfish gain. He humbled himself more by not justifying himself before his accusers.

And then he humbled himself even more by choosing the cross. The gospel worthy life is a life of cross-shaped humility. It is a life where we think of ourselves less and more of others.

[20 : 39] Paul didn't say stop looking to your own interests. Just stop only looking to your own interests. Consider the interests of others.

Here's the thing. Any relationship you can be in, marriage, parent, friend, work, whatever, it is like having an invisible core tied to you and tied to the other person.

Now, there's two options. You can live in that relationship looking to your own interests. Right? And that kind of looks like if somebody was next to me, right? It would be us walking in different directions.

I need to go get what I need. Well, guess what happens as you're moving in different directions trying to meet your own needs? What happens? Life becomes a tug of war, right? In that relationship.

The stronger, more manipulatively capable person typically wins. But when we live in the gospel-centered, cross-shaped humility way, looking for the interests of others, it's more like, come along with me and let me help you get what you need.

[21 : 46] And we help them get what they need. And then they come along with us and they said, well, let me help you get what you need. And we get what we need. And everyone's needs are met. As we look for the interests of others.

But you know what's missing? The tug of war part. Isn't that nice? Yes. When both people's needs are being met and we are helping each other meet them, that is the kind of gospel-worthy living through cross-shaped unity that is possible.

And that's when you get testimonies like we see in Acts 2 verses 42 to 45. And again, in Acts 4 verses 32, when it says things like, man, they had all things in common.

They were of the same heart and mind. They, like, were commonly devoted to the same things. No one counted his possessions as his own. Now, those are amazing testimonies, right?

But before you get to that, there's going to be a lot of dying along the way. A lot of giving away things. A lot of losing. And I think that's a bit of the irony of the Ananias-Sapphira part of this story in those first few chapters of Acts.

[22 : 56] Where others were selling their possessions and their real estate to support the poor and the needy among them. Right? Ananias and Sapphira, they only sort of died to themselves, right?

They sold a field, but they kept back money for themselves, and then they gave it the rest to the apostles. They didn't want to die all the way. They didn't want to fully step into cross-shaped humility.

Humility. And the great irony is that they did end up dying just in a different way. Not in the spiritual maturing way of humility.

Now, I'm not saying this to scare any of us. I'm saying that, like, if you misstep just a little bit, God's going to smoke you. It's just an interesting point to this cross-shaped story that God calls us people to do in life together.

Humility calls us to die a lot more often than we want to. And in a lot more ways than we want to. But the cross-shaped life demands it.

[24 : 01] Now, so far we've just been talking about the difficulty of the demand and the dying, right? But here's the good news. This life of dying is tied to this other powerful promise.

You know, Paul talked about Christ's humiliation and going to the cross, and then it ends with this. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Because Jesus chose ultimate humility, God gave him ultimate glory. And this is the reward of the gospel-worthy life.

The gospel-worthy life is exaltation through humility. Jesus had to humble himself in a rather unglorious death. He was beaten, mocked, stripped, paraded before the crowds, and then he was lifted up on a cross with the condemnation over his head, King of the Jews. He was made to be a mockery. Jesus received the greatest glory by becoming our sacrifice, by sacrificing himself for us.

[25 : 24] And so he was exalted by the Father. His exaltation is preeminent, meaning he is the first and therefore the greatest. And he will always be the first among us, his adopted brothers and sisters.

But through Christ, his forgiveness that comes through our repentance, our humiliation, we get to share not only in his suffering, but we get to share in his exaltation with him.

In Christ, we get to do that. In Christ, we are people who repent. Right? We go through that humility of saying, I was wrong.

Blow to our pride. In Christ, we forgive as he forgave us. That also is an act of humility as we die to leverage any power over those who owe us.

Through such humility, we are exalted with him. That is the life together in Christ. That is the life of Christ-shaped humility. And that is the gospel-worthy life.

[26 : 31] As the band comes up and we look to respond. In a moment, we're going to take communion. And what I want to say to you, if you're here and you're not a follower of Jesus, man, I'm so glad that you got to listen to what the gospel is really about.

And, you know, we're about to come to the communion tables. And these things point to the sacrifice that Jesus made for us. But before you come to the table, come to the one that these things point to.

You know, Paul says, you know, one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. But then it will be too late. Today is the day of salvation.

You must humble yourself and confess him as Lord and Savior while you still have breath in your lungs, friend. Today is that day. Confess and believe and put your faith in Jesus Christ.

There's going to be a prayer up on the screen in a few moments for you to pray. Pray that prayer.

We believe that you will be saved. Now, I want to say to us, if you are here and you're a follower of Jesus, I want to ask you, how is God calling you to respond to this?

[27 : 42] Is it renunciation of conformity things that you hold? Maybe you're holding on to them as too important. Maybe it is the way you hold politics.

Maybe most of your life, maybe politics is like your politics are causing you to bow to the elephant and the donkey more than the lamb.

Maybe it's just your opinion on things. Your preferences, your rules. Or perhaps it's with withholding repentance or forgiveness.

How is God calling you to respond? And I'm going to give us a chance to examine our lives today. Before we go to the table, because communion is a clear reminder of the cross-shaped, gospel-worthy life that brings unity through humility.

And we come together. Not a people that are conformed to one way of being and thinking and behaviors, but we are united around the person of Christ.

[28 : 49] His sacrifice. His love. His purpose. His goodness. I'm going to pray. And then I'm going to invite you to go to the table and take the bread and the cup and bring it back and spend some time doing business with God with those elements in your hand.

And when you're ready, take it. Lord, I ask your blessing on this moment. As we all go to you in various ways, to my friends in the room who are yet to be followers of Jesus, that they would come to you and find that you are worthy of their very life.

That you are worthy of their faith and trust and belief that you are the Savior who saves. And the only way to eternal life and reconciliation with God the Father.

And I pray for those of us who are coming to the communion table that you would convict us where we need conviction. You would help us to see the beauty of this cross-shaped, humble life that is worthy of the gospel.

Thank you that you are a God of grace who meets us right where we are. Amen. Amen.