

One Thing

Philippians 1:27-30

Introduction (2 Minutes)

I want you to imagine that you are in a foreign prison. You can write one small letter to someone close to you. As far as you know, this may be the last letter that you ever write this person, and you want to impart to them the most important truth that you know. What would you write to that person? What would be your top priority in that letter?

Philippians 1:27-30

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel²⁸ without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God.²⁹ For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him,³⁰ since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

Background – Paul is writing from a Roman prison to the church in Philippi to thank them for their partnership in the gospel.

Exposition (25 Minutes)

As Paul contemplated his life and ministry from a prison cell, he wrote to the church in Philippi regarding the most important piece of counsel that he knew. In verse 27, we read, “Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.” Other translations stated as, “One thing: let your life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.” This was Paul’s “one thing” – more than anything, I want your life to reflect the value, the worth, the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This, of course, leaves us asking, what does a “life worthy of the gospel” look like? There are **five characteristics** of the “gospel worthy life” found in our passage this morning:

I. The life that is worthy of the gospel is a Transformed Life.

Look with me at the beginning of verse 27 where Paul speaks of the believers in Philippi “standing firm in one spirit, with one mind.” In order to “stand firm with others in one spirit and one mind,” your life must be transformed. By nature, your life is not inclined to such humility and unity. Paul describes the state of our minds prior to salvation as “futile, darkened in understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to hardness of heart” (**Eph. 4:17-18**). Elsewhere, Paul describes our life apart from Christ as a when we “were dead in trespasses and sins, following the course of the world, living in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath” (**Eph. 2:1-3**). In other words, we are sinners by nature and by choice. We are not inclined to unity. By nature, we are proud and arrogant. Yet, for those that have been truly saved, their formerly darkened minds have been renewed, and they have “put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (**Eph. 4:23-24**).

They have been saved “by grace through faith. And this is not their own doing, it is the gift of God” (**Eph. 2:8-10**).

And one of the fruits of this salvation is reconciliation to and unity with others. As Paul wrote in **Ephesians 2:13-16**, “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile *believers* to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.”

So, when Paul writes about his readers “standing firm in one spirit, with one mind” in **Philippians 1:27**, he is not speaking about some earthly unity or manufactured humility. He is referring to lives that have been transformed by the grace of Christ. He is not speaking of some cultural Christianity that simply associates with Jesus and the church because it is good for business or helpful for political credibility. Paul is *talking about real-life, supernatural transformation that manifest itself in unity and humility*. This is a life worthy of the gospel – a life that exhibits that it has been transformed by the grace of Christ, seeking unity with, and practicing humility before others in service and in love.

T.S. - If the first characteristic of the gospel-worthy life is transformation, then the second characteristic is evangelism...

II. The life worthy of the gospel is an Evangelistic Life.

Look with me at the remainder of verse 27, where Paul writes, “striving together as one for the faith of the gospel.” This is the theme verse for our Missions Month. Notice how Paul moves from the unity and humility of the first portion of this verse to its relationship to evangelism. According to Paul, humble and unified Christians labor to advance the gospel “side-by-side” as opposed to “face-to-face.” Paul’s point is important for us to grasp. The unity that he spoke of earlier is *unity in evangelistic mission*. Paul would not have looked at a church that merely enjoyed the same recreational activities or that pulled for the same team and concluded that the church was unified. The unity that Paul cared about was the unity in the gospel that led to *a concerted missionary effort*. In other words, the church that was actively “striving with one mind, side-by-side for the faith of the gospel,” was a unified church.

The unity that resulted from transformation necessarily led to evangelism, that is, sharing, declaring, preaching, teaching the good news of salvation by God in Christ for everyone who believes! For Paul, he could not fathom a scenario when someone who had been transformed by Christ did not tell others about Christ. Preaching Christ was Paul’s ambition (**Rom. 15:20**). Evangelism, the “side-by-side striving for the faith of the gospel,” is *an undeniable mark of a true believer in Christ*. In fact, to not desire or strive for the faith of the gospel, to not care to share the gospel, to not be compelled to tell others the good news of Christ is to undoubtedly demonstrate that you do not know the gospel or the Christ of the gospel. C.H. Spurgeon put it this way, “Have you no wish for others to be saved? Then you’re not saved yourself, be sure of that!”

Evangelism, while not easy, is one of the favorite activities in the transformed life. The transformed life glories in, celebrates, and tells others about the new life in Christ that it enjoys! Evangelism is the overflow of our joy and satisfaction in Christ!

T.S. - When we refuse or fail to proclaim the good news to others, the issue most often lies with our own heart that needs to be renewed and emboldened by the Holy Spirit, which is Paul's next characteristic in the gospel-worthy life...

III. The life worthy of the gospel is a Courageous Life.

In verse 28, Paul wrote, “without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God.” According to Paul, the life that had been transformed by the gospel for the purpose of proclaiming that gospel to the world was also the same life that should “not be frightened in anything by their opponents.” The context of this call for courage is in obedience to the call of Christ. As Christians manifest a transformed life, full of evangelistic zeal, there will be opponents to their efforts. When you are attempting to follow Christ and bring others with you in obedience to him, get ready, your opponents will emerge. Be prepared to be opposed!

But you, as Paul wrote, are not to be frightened, but rather, courageous. We are called to obey Christ, count the cost, no matter what the threat may be. We must remember at that moment who is truly in control. The early church was intimately acquainted with this reality. One only must think of **Acts 12:23**, which recounts the sudden death of Herod Agrippa for failing to give glory to God. No matter how great the threat of our opponent may be, we must remember Who it is that stands by us. As A.W. Tozer once wrote, “No matter what the circumstances, we Christians should keep our heads. God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, of love and of a sound mind. It is a dismal thing to see a son of heaven cringe in terror before the sons of earth.”

As children of heaven, those of us who have truly believed in Christ have no need to fear our opponents, for Christ stands by us! Vengeance belongs to Him! He will repay everyone who has opposed us for obeying Him. Our responsibility is to be faithful to His call!

T.S. - Therefore, we are to live with courage, but not just courage, not simply with evangelistic zeal, and not just with initial transformation. We are also to live with continual faith, which brings us to the fourth characteristic of the gospel worthy life...

IV. The life worthy of the gospel is a Believing Life.

According to Paul, faith does not end with our initial transformation. Faith is not past tense. If your understanding of Christianity is that you believed something long ago and that you are fine now, then you do not have a true understanding of Christianity. Christian faith is a present tense faith. It is an active faith. Note what Paul writes in the first part of verse 29, “For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him.” The belief found in this verse is “right-now” faith.

Often, when I am speaking to someone about their faith, they describe it simply as a decision that they made in the past but that doesn't have any bearing on the present. I ask them, "So how do you know that you are a Christian?" And they typically respond with comment about something that they did as a child, yet the Bible constantly speaks of faith and assurance as realities rooted in the present experience of the professing Christian.

Paul makes a lot of people uncomfortable when he tells them to "work out their own salvation with fear and trembling" (**Phil. 2:12**) or "examine themselves to see if they are in the faith" (**2 Cor. 13:5**) or when Peter writes about "making your calling and election sure" (**2 Pet. 1:10**).

People get really nervous when they hear these verses and tend to ignore them because they worry that if they actually obeyed those passages of Scripture that they might find that they are not truly Christians. Of course, this makes about as much sense as a person who has symptoms of a serious disease not going to the doctor to get a test done because somehow, they believe that if they just don't know the truth, then the truth won't end up killing them. Yet, the best thing that could ever happen to **someone that is not truly a Christian** would be for them to come face-to-face with their lost condition and ask God to save them.

In Paul's mind, you couldn't consider yourself a Christian if you were not presently and actively trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation. For Paul, the true Christian never graduated from their need to remember and believe that Jesus loved them and gave Himself up for them to save them and reconcile them to Himself. The gospel was good news not just for their past, but also their present and their future. The life that is worthy of the gospel is the life that recognizes that it needs the gospel daily! It's the life that acknowledges its need for Jesus, every second of every minute of every hour of every day. This life had been granted not only to have believed once, but to keep believing! The gospel worthy life doesn't stop believing! Belief is the air that the gospel worthy life breaths!

T.S. – And as the gospel worthy life believes, it does so to persevere in the face of trials and difficulty, which leads to the fifth and final characteristic...

V. The life worthy of the gospel is a Suffering Life.

Staggeringly, according to Paul, the Christian's suffering is just as much granted to them by God as their faith. Admittedly, these verses may not initially appear to be very comforting, but that is only because we have been conditioned to believe that we have been delivered from suffering by Christ, yet, instead, we have actually been delivered for suffering by Christ.

Many false teachers in our day and age teach that God never intends for us to have trouble in this life, that God only wants us to be blessed with health, wealth, and prosperity, and that anytime we experience suffering, it must be Satan attacking us, for God would never want His people to suffer. Yet, this is the opposite of what we find in scripture. Not only does **Philippians 1:29-30** tell us plainly and clearly that it has been granted to us to suffering for Christ's sake, but multiple other places speak of this as well.

In **Philippians 3:10-11**, Paul states his desire to “share in *Christ’s* suffering, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible *he* might attain the resurrection from the dead.” In **2 Corinthians 11:23-29**, Paul recounts all the sufferings that he had endured on account of Christ. But this is not just for Paul as an apostle, it is for all Christians. **Romans 8:16-17** speaks of suffering as a necessary part of the Christian life, stating, “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” Peter, also, in **1 Peter 4**, tells Christians to “rejoice insofar as you share in Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.”

There is no escaping it. If one wishes to live a life worthy of the gospel, they must be willing and ready to suffer the loss of all things for that gospel! For by their willingness to suffer, they demonstrate the genuineness and depth of their love for Christ! They prove with their willingness to suffer in this life that Christ is better than life!

And is this not just exactly what Jesus Christ himself said about those worthy of the gospel? In **Matthew 10:38-39**, we read, “And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” Furthermore, we read in **Luke 14:26**, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” Of course, this message is not popular these days. You won’t catch many bestsellers or TV preachers speaking about the fact that the Christian life is a life marked by suffering for the sake of Jesus. Instead, you will find what H. Richard Niebuhr described, a message about “a God without wrath bringing men and women without sin into a kingdom without judgment through a ministry of a Christ without a cross.” Yet, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer once so prophetically wrote, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”

The life that is worthy of the gospel is a life that chooses suffering, yes, even death, over disobeying Christ.

Conclusion (3 Minutes)

If this was to be Paul’s last letter, he wanted them to know that the life that was worthy of the gospel, that was worthy to bear the name Christian, was a life transformed by the gospel, evangelizing the gospel, courageous in the gospel, believing on the gospel, and suffering for the gospel. This life meant everything to Paul. It was of utmost importance!

So, I ask:

Do you have a transformed life?

Do you share the gospel of that you believe with those that do not yet believe?

Do you boldly and fearlessly obey Christ in the face of opposition?

Are you believing, this morning, at this very moment, in Jesus Christ for your salvation and full acceptance before God?

Are you willing to live and suffer for this Christ?

Are these realities of the gospel worthy life your top priority? Is this what you shared in that letter you started from your foreign prison cell at the beginning of this sermon? I hope so, because this is the most important thing a person could ever share with another person. This one thing – living a life worthy of the gospel of Christ. This is why Copperfield Church is committed to partnering with evangelists and missionaries all around the world. Because nothing is more important than the good news of God’s grace in Jesus Christ being declared to sinners in need of salvation.

Are you living this life? Do you need repent this morning of living a life contrary to the one described by the apostle Paul in Philippians 1:27-30? Do you need to be transformed this morning by the gospel mentioned in these verses?