



A LIFE THAT MATCHES YOUR FAITH

"27 Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; 28 And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God. 29 For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; 30 Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me."

- Philippians 1:27-30

"1 If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, 2 Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. 3 Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. 4 Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."

-Philippians 2:1-4

A Life That Matches Your Faith

I was reading in Galatians and reminded of a statement in the fifth chapter where the apostle Paul says this in verses 14 and 15: “For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.” This is spoken to believers who are to live lives of love and not bite and devour one another and consume one another. It seems to be that that is a very important word to the evangelical culture of our day as well.

This is a very base, coarse, rancorous, angry, hate-filled, volatile, pejorative culture in which we live. It seems as though all normal restrained discourse has been replaced by ugly, bitter, attacking, devouring speech at all levels; and that has, as it seems everything does in the culture, made its way to church. And the Internet seems to be where all that is played out with a measure of escapability and anonymity where you can pour out your animosity, your hate and your ad hominem attacks and feel good about it, when, in fact, you should not. Doesn’t honor the Lord for Christians to be having a food fight on the Internet over every issue and pointing what’s wrong with everybody else, while the world watches this betrayal of everything that we say we believe and everything the Lord would have to be true about us as His people.

So I want to talk about this whole issue of unity in the church, but I want to Philippians chapters 1 and 2 to do that. So you can open your Bible to the opening chapter of Philippians; and I’ll just draw you down to verse 27 of chapter 1 and read down through verse 4 of chapter 2.

“Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by your opponents – which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.

“Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose, doing nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.” We’ll just stop at that point.

We have unleashed in our culture massive flood of identity socialization. Everybody has a certain group that they’re assigned to by certain gender or racial or social characteristics. This division of people into all these subgroups is part of an overall strategy to overpower those in authority in our nation. It attacks education, it attacks law enforcement. It attacks all authority. Everybody’s in a group and every group has an agenda. The justification of this on a social level has managed to corrupt the church, where the same kind of group identities are becoming hostile to one another.

As I said, when we went through Colossians 3, came to verse 11, “In Christ there is no Jew or Greek; circumcised, uncircumcised; barbarian, Scythia; slave, freeman,” – and you can add Galatians 3:28 – “male or female.” Our new identity in Christ is we are all the children of God: Christ is in us all, God is all and in all. We have a new family, we have a new Father, we have a new brotherhood and sisterhood, and all those old identities do not exist in the church. They’re artificial and they’re jammed into the church from the culture in order to do the devil’s work in the church, in order to rip and shred the church.

This is nothing new. As I read from Galatians, Paul’s concern was that people in the church were biting and devouring one another and consuming one another with various kinds of hostility. Here in the passage I just read to you, it is apparent that there were issues about unity in the Philippian church as well. He says to them, “Make my joy complete” – in verse 2 – “by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose, doing nothing from selfishness or empty conceit.” This is to address the fact there was division in that church.

In the fourth chapter, very specifically, in verse 2, Paul identifies two women: “I urge you Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord.” Now you don’t really want to be the two women who God called out in a biblical book. But these two women did. And in

verse 3 he asks, “Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help women.” You’ve got to resolve this hostility.

Now there’s a very, very basic, basic desire on the part of the Holy Spirit for the church, part of the Lord for the church and those who shepherd the church, and Paul identifies it in verse 27. This is where it all begins: “Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.” Paul is writing from jail. He is writing under the duress of being a prisoner in a Roman situation. He is writing under the ugly reality that there are those who are basically his enemies, who are preaching Christ, and at the same time denouncing Paul. There are people who are saying he’s in jail because he has some great sin in his life. They are attempting to elevate themselves by pushing him down. So Paul is facing the rigors of incarceration in a primitive situation, and the deep disappointments of preachers condemning him.

In the opening part of chapter 1 he talks very personally, and he’s okay with this. He’s okay with prison. He’s even okay with people who criticize him as long as they’re preaching Christ, and he will rejoice that Christ is being preached, because in the end, he says in verse 21, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” “It’s never been about me. I live for Christ. Whatever comes my way is within the framework of His purpose for me, and even death is gain.”

But in verse 22, he says, “If I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I’m hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith.”

“Look, I’d like to go to heaven. I’d be happy to go right into the presence of the Lord from this stinking jail. I’m happy to be done with all the suffering. But as much as I would want to be with the Lord, which is far better, I am willing to stay for your sake, for your spiritual progress.” And he says, “I think the Lord’s going to let me stay.” As much as he wanted heaven, he would postpone heaven to help this church.

So what is it he wants? If you're going to postpone heaven and say, "Lord, leave me here." For what? To confront what? That leads us to verse 27. Here's the issue: "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ." That sums up every pastor's heart appeal. If you're going to say you're a Christian, please act like one. Act like one. Live a life that is consistent with your profession.

Now look at verse 27. The first word is "only." It's first in English and it's first in the Greek original text, because it is the priority. "Only" is placed there emphatically as the first word because he is pointing to only one issue that would cause him to postpone heaven. "This is the only issue, that you would conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ." That is the pastoral passion, it simplifies everything. If the pastor's concern is that you conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, then he's going to do everything he can to see that that is done. That's the direction of his preaching; that's the direction of his praying; that's the direction of his counsel.

Paul is not complicating ministry, he is simplifying it. "Only this, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ." That's the whole issue of being a Christian in the world. Conduct yourselves in your behavior consistently with your confession. Look, the Lord left you here after He saved you to be a shining light for the gospel: "Let your light so shine before men they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven," Jesus said in Matthew 5:16.

But look what Paul says in Philippians 2, verses 14 to 16: "Do all things without grumbling or disputing." Again, talking about the fact that there was discord and grumbling and disputing. "Do all things without that, so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life." You're going to have to get rid of the ranker and the discord and the disruption and the distinctions and the division and the disputes if you're going to live "above reproach in the midst of this crooked and perverse world and appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I didn't run in vain or toil in vain." Paul says, "Look, when I get to heaven, I don't want to see that all of the efforts I made were in vain because you never let your conduct match your confession."

This is not a small issue in our contemporary Christian culture. It seems like every day that goes by there's another massive open public default of some Christian leader, or supposed famous Christian, famous for I don't know what, who says, "I'm not a Christian anymore," or, "I'm having to cancel my meetings because of immorality," or whatever. It's just endless. It's endless at the leadership level, which means it's everywhere at the level below that leadership.

So how do we conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ? What is the gospel of Christ? The good news that Jesus can deliver you and will deliver you from sin, that whereas you were the slave of sin, through Christ you've become a servant of righteousness. The gospel is that you've been born again, you've been regenerated, you've become a new creation, old things have passed away, new things have come. You're not who you were, your life is different. And I've said this to you before. Now as a believer, your life is marked by love: love for the Lord, love for the Word of God, love for the church, love for the lost. Your life is marked by humility. Your life is marked by the pursuit of righteousness. Your life is marked by obedience – joyful, thankful obedience to the Word of God – and your life is marked by thoughtful worship. That's all that he's saying. That's the kind of life that matches up with a confession that you have believed the gospel and been transformed.

Now notice the verb "conduct yourselves." It's very instructive, because the first part of that word in the Greek language is polis, from which we get politics and political. It's the Greek word for state, for state. And the verb actually means to behave as a citizen of a polis, to behave as a citizen of a free state.

The ancient world was broken up into free states, mostly city states; and there was a lot of pride about your city states. Paul chose this term because it closely relates to the thinking of the Philippians and those in the ancient world. Philippi, for example, was a free polis, a free city state. Philippi was 800 miles or so east of Rome, but it was a Roman colony, and it had been elevated because of what Rome had done. That was pretty much true in the Roman Empire, as it expanded, it elevated people. It brought in all of the riches of the literature and the education and the advancements of Rome to the rest of the Mediterranean world. The Philippians were proud to be Roman citizens. They prided themselves in being a Roman colony. They therefore were protected by Roman law, as we see in Acts 16 when there's

horror over punishment that might be rendered to a citizen of Rome. There was great pride about the fact that they were the Roman city state of Philippi.

In Roman colonies, for example, the citizens never forgot that they were Romans because they spoke Latin, the Roman language. They wore the Latin Roman clothing. They called their magistrates and their officials by Roman names. They insisted on being stubbornly Roman however far they might be from Rome itself. They understood much about the privilege of being Roman and being protected by Roman power and Roman law. They understood that to be a Roman citizen carried with it some level of nobility. It brought about – these are words that are very important – duty and responsibility.

To the ancient Greeks and the ancient Roman colonies, the state was not just a place to live, it was a partnership with other people which had privileges and duties designed to promote the common good, the good of all society. In the state, the individual citizen would develop his capabilities and his abilities not simply for his own sake, but for the sake of the polis, for the sake of everyone else. Mutuality, interdependence led to pride, proud to be a Philippian. I can remember a few years ago when there was a song, Proud to be an American. I don't think we sing that song anymore. They did in the ancient world.

So the verb means to live as a citizen. Paul is saying this when he says, "Conduct yourselves." He saying, "Live as a citizen of the kingdom to which you belong, with the all the rights and privileges, yes, but with all the duties and responsibilities for the good of all. You can't be in the polis of God, the kingdom of God, the city state established for those who trust in Christ and live for yourself." That's why down in chapter 2, verse 3, he says, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but regard one another as more important than yourself." That's consistent with living in the ancient city state. He's not talking about our earthly politics, he's talking about heavenly reality. So Paul is saying, "This is my only concern, that you live as a citizen of heaven, with all the rights and privileges, and all the duties and responsibilities, partners with each other in the spiritual kingdom, for the good of each other, for the well-being of each other, not looking on your own things, but on the things of others, humbling yourself. Live as citizens governed by the life and law of God, governed by righteousness, faith, love, service, worship."

Hebrews chapter 12 says that we are a part of heavenly citizenship. “We are a part of the general assembly and church of the firstborn enrolled in heaven.” And I told you this when we were studying Colossians 3:11, that those identities that were part of our former life before Christ are gone, and we are all one in Christ. God is our Father, Christ is our brother; we are brothers and sisters with all who are in Christ. This is our polis, this is our state, this is our kingdom, and we are to live according to the life and laws and duties and responsibilities and privileges of being a part of the Lord’s kingdom.

That’s why, as we saw some months ago in Colossians 3, Paul says this, verse 1: “If you’ve been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things that are on the earth. For you have died, your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you will be revealed with Him in glory.” Set your mind on things above; you are a citizen of the heavenly kingdom.

Now that just gets us a couple of words into verse 27, so let’s go back. “This is my only concern, that you live in such a way as being consistent with the kingdom of which you have become a part. So you conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”

Let’s take the word “worthy,” *axiōs*. Simply means comparable, or equal, or consistent. In other words, live in a way that is consistent with the kingdom you are in, consistent with what you believe, consistent with what you know to be true; consistent with what you confess, with what you teach, with what you proclaim. This is integrity. This is what it is to be a Christian: live a life consistent with your confession.

The worst of all possible things to undermine the integrity of Christianity is to profess to be a Christian and behave in a way that is absolutely antithetical to what it means to be a Christian. Better that you never say it than that you claim it and don’t live it. It is only when the church lives true to its message, true to its confession, true to its belief, true to the transforming power of the gospel. It is only when the church lives like that that its witness has any power. So if Christians are going to get on the Internet and spew hate at each other incessantly, they’re not living in a way that is going to enhance the gospel. Integrity says, “This is what I believe and this is consistent with how I live.” That’s integrity: your confession and your behavior are consistent.

Paul is fearful that the Philippians are coming short of that. And again, he's willing to postpone heaven to hang around long enough to help them on the way. But he also acknowledges that they need to behave in the correct way whether he's around or not; it shouldn't depend on him. So in verse 27, he says, "so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you." Consistency, integrity in the church, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, worthy of salvation, transformation, regeneration.

"Is the gospel the power of God unto salvation?" Romans 1:16. "Does the gospel produce a new creation?" 2 Corinthians 5. The gospel is the good news that God loves and saves and transforms sinners from slaves of sin to slaves of righteousness. That ought to be manifest. So the life of a believer in the church is to be like the life of a noble citizen of a great state, only vastly more significant with a whole lot more at stake. How can we, according to Paul in chapter 2, verse 15, prove ourselves to be the children of God unless by blameless and innocent behavior in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation where we hold fast the word. So we hold fast the word, and our behavior is consistent with that word.

Look at chapter 3 for a moment, verse 17. Paul still speaking about the importance of behavior, says in verse 17, "Join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. You have had examples of how to conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Follow my example, and others, you have seen. For many" – verse 18 – walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ." He, no doubt, is talking about people who are connect to the church.

But they are actually enemies of the cross of Christ. Why? Verse 19, "Their end is destruction, their god is their appetite, their glory is in their shame, they set aside their minds for earthly things." In contrast, verse 20, "Our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." There are plenty of people professing Christ who are earthly-minded. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, their glory is in their shame, they're proud about their wretchedness, and they mind earthly things. There are more people claiming Christ, but actually living in that category than we could ever imagine.

So the main verb here in Philippians 1 is a call to consistent conduct on the part of believers so that their lives are as Christlike, or Christian, as their confession. “Whether I come and see you, remain absent, this is what I want to hear.” This is a heart of a pastor. I can tell you, that’s what I would long for you long after I’m gone. I’m not always going to be here. But I would love to believe that the unity that is called for here between your theology and your behavior will continue.

Paul had reasonable fears, reasonable fears, because he was seeing things that weren’t right, because he knew, as he said in Acts 20, that wherever there’s a church, evil men will rise up to corrupt it theologically, and wolves will come from the outside, not sparing the flock. He knew because of his experience with the Galatian church. The people could easily be led astray even from the gospel, and that they could actually begin in the Spirit and think they were perfected by the flesh. He had reasonable fears for all that could go wrong in the church. So Paul says, “I just have this one issue, and that is that Christians behave in a way that is consistent with the transforming power of the gospel. If you’re going to confess Christ, then undergird the reality of that confession with your conduct.”

Now what does this look like? Paul’s going to give us four features of this kind of conduct. Number one, go back to verse 17, “So that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm.” Let’s stop right there. Here’s the first feature of worthy conduct: standing, standing firm. The Greek word *stēkete*. It is a military word and it basically looks at a soldier who doesn’t leave his post. No matter what happens, no matter what comes, no matter how great the assault, how difficult the task, he never moves, he never flees, he never cowers. This is where it all begins. Your conduct starts with standing firm, standing firm, unyielding fidelity.

To what? What is it that we’re supposed to be unyielding and devoted to in such a way that we are immovable? Over in chapter 4, verse 1, Paul says, “Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.” “Stand firm in the Lord,” what does that mean? In all that is consistent with Christ. That would be doctrine and behavior.

At the end of 1 Corinthians in chapter 16 and verse 13, Paul says it another way: “Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.” Stand firm in the faith, “the faith,” not

subjective faith; objective faith, the Christian faith, the body of revealed truth inscripturated. Stand firm in the faith. Be unwavering in your devotion to biblical truth.

Galatians 5:1, “It was for freedom Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.” Stand firm in the grace with which Christ has set us free from the law, and don’t go back into legalism. Stand firm in your doctrine. This is, of course, where our conduct is grounded.

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 3, Paul says, “Now we really live,” – verse 8 – “if you stand firm in the Lord.” Paul says, “My life is so bound up in the fact that you stand firm in the Lord that I don’t even really live unless you’re standing firm in the Lord.” That is deep into the soul of this man.

Everything in his life was about people standing firm in the Lord. “In the Lord” means in everything that is consistent with the Lord, and that would be, again, truth and conduct. “My life” – he says – “is tied up in that.

Second Thessalonians 2:15, “So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or by letter from us.” Stand firm in the New Testament revelation from the apostles. Stand firm in the truth. So listen, folks. Unity in the church begins at the point of doctrine, doctrine. Doesn’t end there, but it begins there.

We are called to stand firm in the truth, firm in spiritual character, godliness, purity, virtue, holiness, obedience. Ephesians chapter 6, verse 11, “Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.” The devil’s going to come after you. The devil’s going to assault you through the system. How do you stand firm? How do you stand firm doctrinally when the devil throws error at you? How do you stand firm in virtue and righteousness and holiness when the devil throws temptation at you? You put on the whole armor of God, the whole armor of God.

Verse 14 says – here’s the first part of it, “Stand firm, having girded your loins with truth.” This is a picture of a Roman soldier, and the first thing was that the Roman soldier got his tunic wrapped up and tied down tightly. He was wrapped up and tightly tied so that he could

go into battle. No loose ends. That's the truth. That's the truth. Everything begins with the truth.

And then on top of that, "Put on the breastplate of righteousness." So you have a commitment to the truth and you have a commitment to righteousness. Then you go into battle, knowing that "your feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace." What that means is that you've made peace with God. God is on your side and you're anchored in His power and His strength, and as Romans 14:4 says, "The Lord is able to make you stand." And in that situation, you take up the shield of faith, put on the helmet of the hope of eternal salvation, take out the sword and go to battle, and the sword is the word of God.

So many are falling all over the place. So many are falling, and the church picks them up, dusts them off and brings them back again. They show up somewhere else. The collapse of known professing Christian leaders is epidemic. And the church is rejecting Scripture, there's no real discipline in the church. Church is eager to push people back into prominence. Church minimizes their sins, doesn't confront them; and the world watches and has no idea what a Christian is. We are called to stand firm both in doctrine and in obedience and virtue. So that's Paul's only reason to postpone heaven, to see a church that won't compromise with error and it won't compromise with sin.

You can look and survey the Christian landscape well enough to know that people say, "Well, there are a lot of different views. Everybody's got a different idea of the Bible. Everybody's free to interpret it any way." That's not true. There's one accurate interpretation of Scripture, and every other interpretation is wrong. It doesn't mean whatever you want it to mean, it means what God intended it to mean. And if you're comfortable, if you're comfortable with no accurate interpretation of Scripture, then you're basically comfortable with no unity in the church, because it has to be unity around the truth. And the truth is available to us in the Word of God. So stand firm in the truth, don't compromise with error. Stand firm in the Lord, don't compromise with sin. This is essential. Stand firm.

Second word here – and we'll see a lot more about this ahead – is "single-minded." Standing firm, single-minded. Back to verse 27 of Philippians 1, "standing firm in one spirit, with one mind." Not just standing firm, but firm in unity: unity of doctrine and unity of life, unity of behavior. This is an issue constantly in the church. Paul is frequently addressing this in his

letters. Romans 12:5, “So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” Therefore, verse 10, “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor.” Is that what we do, give honored preference to one another?

It’s essentially what he says exactly down in verses 2 and 3 of chapter 2: “Be of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose, doing nothing from selfishness or empty conceit; but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves. Do not merely look out for your own personal interest, but also for the interests of others.” Constantly calling the church to this single-mindedness. You start with sound doctrine, a commitment to doctrine and holiness, and you go from standing firm in what is true and what is right to being of one spirit and one mind.

Listen to 1 Corinthians 1:10. “I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree,” how about that? – “that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe’s people, that there are quarrels among you.” “Stop it. Stop dividing up the body of Christ for your own petty reasons. Humble yourself. No divisions agree.” How can you agree? How can we all agree? We all agree on the truth of Scripture, what it affirms doctrinally and what it demands in behavior.

In Galatians – and we’ve made mention of this a number of times, but in this context I’ll expand it a little bit. Galatians 3:26, “You’re all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.” That’s our family. “You all have been baptized into Christ, you’ve all been clothed with Christ. So there’s neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free man, neither male nor female; you’re all one in Christ Jesus.” “Why are you quarreling? Why are you fighting? Why are you biting and devouring, consuming each other?” Jesus said in John 13, 34 and 35 that you’ll know them by their love, right?

So Paul is speaking of unity in basically two terms: one spirit and one mind. “What do you mean, one spirit?” It’s not a reference to the Holy Spirit, although there is only one Holy Spirit. But it’s best to see this as an internal attitude, a kind of heart compactness, as one writer puts it, where we’re all together like in the book of Acts when they were all together in chapter 2 and they were all together in chapter 4. This is this inner compactness of spirits or

minds and hearts solidly knit together in love and harmony and unity that resisted discord, disruption, distrust, division. And one mind is literally one *psuchē*, the word for “soul,” just another way to say the same thing. We are to be of one spirit, one soul, just using another term to make the force one degree greater.

People criticizing other people, tearing into other people, condemning other people, labeling other people, attacking other people shreds the body of Christ and devastates the testimony. We have to work hard to have unity, and the work starts in our own hearts. You can’t be of one mind and one spirit till you get your own heart in the right place. Internal harmony leads to unity, unity leads to effective witness; then you will be lights shining in the darkness. The church today battles all kinds of unfounded, unnecessary internal discord and hostility that divides and dishonors Christ. All these racial, social, sexual, individual agendas are not what honors the Lord.

So Paul wants us to conduct ourselves in a manner that is consistent with us as citizens of the heavenly polis, the heavenly kingdom. And that means that we stand firm for the truth and righteousness, and it means that we are single-minded, that we pursue the same spirit, the same mind, built around the same truth; and the only way to do that, as we saw in chapter 4, is by humbling ourselves and regarding others as more important than we are.

The apostle Paul again is denying that within the spiritual family of God there is any distinction such as Jew, Greek; slave, free; male, female. We’re all one in Christ Jesus. This is talking about our actual real unity. This exists, this is true; we are one in Christ if we are true believers.

Back in chapter 3, verse 21, Paul said prior to coming to Christ, we were also united, but united in a different way. We were all under the bondage of the law. From verses 21 to 25 he talks about the fact that, “We were all” – verse 23 – “kept in custody under the law.” So we were all in bondage to the law; and as such, we were violators of the law; and because we violated the law, we were headed for divine judgment.

So all of humanity without Christ is united, united in common bondage under the condemnation of God for violation of His law. People think they are independent operators, they think they’re unique. The truth of the matter is that whatever may be the choices they

make within the framework of their bondage, the whole human race is in bondage to the law of God; having violated the law of God, they are in bondage, headed for a sentence from God, which is eternal damnation. We have been delivered from that unifying reality into a new unifying reality. We are all in Christ. We are all in Christ. We have been justified by faith, we are all sons of God. We've all been joined to Christ in His death and resurrection, and clothed with Christ is how Paul describes us. We have been literally covered with His person, covered with His righteousness.

Down in chapter 4, verse 6, "Because we are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, 'crying, 'Abba! Father!'" That's intimate words that we can speak to God as if we said, "Papa," to Him. We have that reconciliation with God that allows us to speak to God as a loving Father, because, "We are" – as verse 7 says – "no longer slaves, but sons. And as sons, we are heirs through God."

So we have been literally delivered from the family of Satan in to the family of God. We are all sons of God. We all possess the Spirit of God. We are all in union with Jesus Christ. His righteousness covers us. All prior distinctions disappear. We are no longer in bondage to the law, we are no longer distinguished by our race. We are no longer distinguished by our social status. We are no longer distinguished by gender. All of us are in Christ. That is what Paul is saying in Galatians 3, and he's saying it to call for a practical sort of manifestation of this spiritual reality. We are to behave ourselves in a way that's consistent with our true unity.

We also looked for a few weeks at Colossians chapter 3 – and I would encourage you to go back to that. We were there not too long ago, and we read in chapter 3 that, "We have been raised up with Christ, we have been seated with Christ at the right hand of God. We are to set our minds on things above, not on things that are on the earth. All the earthly connections, all the earthly relationships, all the earthly realities disappear in favor of heavenly ones. You have died in Christ, your life is hidden with Christ in God." So as a result of that, we have really no interest in what is part of this earthly life.

"We even consider" – verse 5 says – "the members of our earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry." Those are the things that brought about the wrath of God on the sons of disobedience. "We once walked in them when we were living in them. But we are no longer living in them, so we put aside all anger,

wrath, malice, slander, abusive speech from our mouth. We do not lie to one another. We've laid aside the old self with its practice, its evil practices, and put on the new self." So this is the picture of our transformation, of our salvation.

And because of that renewal, verse 11 says, "There is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all." So again, the point here is we have a new family, a new father, a new brotherhood and sisterhood. We are related to Jesus Christ, we are covered by His righteousness. We are to set our affections on things above and not on things on the earth.

So this is reality: we are one in Christ. But that reality needs to show up in how we live. So verse 12 of Colossians 3 says, "So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved," – here's how you behave – "put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity."

Now look, we are all united spiritually and it needs to be made manifest that we are united practically. That is the call here. We are to be marked by love, which reveals itself in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and forgiveness. This is how we put on the bond of unity, perfect bond of unity, which is defined by love. So we should be known by our love, by the shalom. "They know that you're My disciples" – John 13, Jesus said – "that you have love for one another." So the church, which is one, the true church is one in Christ; God is all and in all, and all are in Christ, should be manifestly, visibly one. There should be a pervasive dominating unity that gives testimony to the validity of the gospel because of our unity.

Now I want to show you Ephesians 4. Again, this is very familiar revelation for anyone who reads the apostle Paul's writings, because he speaks of it so often. Now chapter 4 of Ephesians Paul is imploring us to, "Walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." It sounds a lot like Philippians 1:27, "Conduct yourselves in a worthy way." Here he says, "Walk in a worthy way."

Now what is the way he wants us to walk? “With all humility and gentleness,” – very much like we just read in Colossians – “with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Again, it’s the same instruction. We should be known by our unity, and that’s because everything about our salvation speaks of unity. “There is one body,” – the church – “one Spirit,” – the Holy Spirit – “one hope of your calling,” – and that is the call to eternal glory. “There is one Lord,” – the Lord Jesus Christ – “one faith,” – the gospel – “one baptism,” – that baptism which is the public confession of faith in Jesus Christ and union with Him symbolized in the water. “There is one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.”

Marvelous statement about God. He is overall: sovereign. He is through all: omnipotent. He is in all: omnipresent. So we have one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father. We should not be anything other than one church. “We are as one,” – 1 Corinthians 3 says – “the temple of God. We are the temple of God.” God is one, God is three-in-one, and yet God is undivided; we should manifest that same unity. Because of such spiritual realities, we are to live in unity – and that means live in humility, and live in forgiveness, and live in compassion and kindness and love, and pursue the bond of peace. Now let’s go back to Philippians 1.

Paul here is doing essentially what he does in those other places. He is speaking to the church about the basic foundation of Christian living, which is unity. If you’re going to conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, or in the language of Ephesians, if you’re going to walk worthy, it’s going to demand unity. He says, “Whether I come and see you or remain absent, I desire to hear about you, that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.” Down in chapter 2, verse 2, “Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.”

Again, this is a call for unity that is parallel to the other ones that I just read. And this action is against the reality, the sad reality that believers have to pursue this with the full power of the Holy Spirit and all the means of grace. The sad truth is that Paul continues to bring this up because believers very often do not pursue this kind of unity.

In Galatians chapter 5, Paul talks about the fact that, “You bite and devour one another. Take care that you are not consumed by one another.” The whole law is fulfilled in this. “Love your neighbor as yourself. Walk by the Spirit and you won’t carry out the desires of the flesh that rip and tear and bite and devour.” I don’t know that in my lifetime I’ve ever seen so much internal biting and devouring going on in the church, not our church, but the church at large. Constant bickering and fighting. Verse 27, “Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.” That means to pursue unity.

There are four features of this unity right here in verse 27. Number one is standing firm. “I want to hear that you’re standing firm.” We looked at that. We looked at 1 Corinthians 16:13 and 14, “Act like men, be strong, be courageous.” We looked at Galatians 5, “Stand firm in the freedom with which Christ has made you free.” We looked at 1 Thessalonians 3:8 and then Philippians 4:1, “Stand firm.” We looked at Ephesians 6, the armor of the believer, which says, “Having done all, to stand, stand firm, putting your armor on,” and then the armor describes both righteousness and truth. So we have not only the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of the hope of salvation and the loins girded with truth, but the sword of the Spirit. So it’s about righteousness and truth. Those two things come together in the believer’s armor as the believer pursues unity.

Now I want to introduce something here that may sound a little bit odd, but it has to be said, and you will realize the reality of it very soon. Unity is divisive. Did you get that? Unity is divisive, because based on the Word of God, true spiritual unity excludes some people. This unity demands exclusion. When we talk about unity we’re not talking about some kind of sentimental collection of people without regard to what they believe or how they behave. This unity is by definition exclusive, and it does exclude people. It excludes them on two levels: on the level of doctrine and on the level of behavior. Or you could say it the other way: it includes those whose doctrine is sound and whose behavior is virtuous. This is a true unity.

Now we’ve already seen this in chapter 3 – I commented on it last week – verse 17, “Brethren, join in following my example. Follow my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us,” those who follow apostolic conduct and apostolic doctrine. “For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, they’re

the enemies of the cross of Christ.” “You don’t want to follow those people. Follow my example, not the example of those who are the enemies of Christ.”

First Corinthians chapter 11, verses 18 and 19, is very instructive with regard to this. Read to what Paul writes: “For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it.” And then he says this most interesting, “For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you.” There have to be divisions. “There have to be factions, so that you are separating those who are approved from those who are not approved.”

So again, unity is divisive. Unity demands exclusion. And those who are to be excluded from our unity fall into two categories. Number one, those in error, those in error.

The end of the book of Romans chapter 16, verse 17, Paul, after this glorious epistle laying out gospel truth so consummately says this: “Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.” Anybody with contrary doctrine. “Such men are slaves, not of the Lord Jesus Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.” Keep your eye on those who cause dissension and hindrance by countering the biblical message with false teaching. Turn away from them.

That is one of the reasons a couple of weeks ago I preached the message on “What Does the Bible Say About Women Preachers?” and we talked about how blatant that disregard for Scripture is. You can’t embrace those people in this manifest unity that declares our oneness with Christ if they are propagators of something that is in defiance of Scripture.

In 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 and verse 6, listen to this: “Now we command you, brethren,” – these are not suggestions – “we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,” – that is consistent with His will – “that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition” – or the doctrine, or the revelation – “which you received from us,” – the apostles. But rather, verse 7, “Follow our example.” This is a command: “Keep away from every brother leading an unruly life and not according to the revealed apostolic doctrine.”

Titus chapter 3 adds to this clear revelation these words, verse 10: “Reject a factious person, a factious man, after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.” What do you mean by a factious man? That’s in some ways kind of an odd translation of the Greek. The Greek word is *hairetikon* from which we get the English word “heretic.” It really is, “Reject a heretic.” And what does *hairetikon* mean? It basically has the meaning of – the basic meaning is to have the power of choice, or a self-chosen teaching or idea. You need to stay away from people who rather than submitting to the Word of God make up their own doctrine, make up their own theology.

Psalm 119:63, “I am a companion of all those who fear You, and of those who keep Your precepts.” That’s the kind of people that I will be a companion with. People who make up their own theology, people who misinterpret Scripture, people who are defined by self-chosen teaching are simply manifesting a form of heresy. So these Scriptures in Romans and 2 Thessalonians and Titus indicate that our unity excludes those with false doctrine, and we are to stay away from them.

The second thing that is excluded is what was mentioned by Paul as the unruly life, and that is people who are sinful, people who are sinful. Back in 1 Corinthians chapter 5, the word of the Lord is very explicit. Listen to verse 9: “I wrote you in my letter” – previous letter – “not to associate with immoral people.” Oh. So they can’t be a part. So this unity does divide and it separates itself from people with false teaching and it separates itself from immoral people. “Immoral” is a very broad term, so let’s define it.

“I did not at all mean” – verse 10 – “with immoral people of this world,” – that is, the unconverted – “or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world.” That’s not good because you need to reach them. “But actually,” – he says, verse 11 – “I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler – not even to eat with such a one.” Don’t even have a meal. You have to separate from them. So our unity, again, excludes those in doctrinal error and those in sin.

Second Thessalonians chapter 3, verses 14 and 15: “If anyone doesn’t obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.” If he

doesn't follow the instruction in this letter, that is, as to its doctrinal truth and its demand for behavior; and it's particularly the behavior mentioned back in verse 6. "We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the doctrine and revelation of the apostles." So, that's standing firm. We stand firm in unity with those of sound doctrine and righteous life.

Now let's go back to Philippians chapter 1. That was just a little review from last time with a few bonus points. But back to chapter 1. The first point of our unity is we have to stand firm on doctrine and virtue. The second point is be single-minded – and we looked at this last time. Verse 27 again: "Standing firm in one spirit, with one mind," in one spirit, with one mind. What does that mean? That means, as we pointed out last time, exactly what it says down in chapter 2, verse 2, "Same mind, same love, loving everyone the same, united in spirit, intent on one purpose." And that happens when you, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not look out for your own personal interests, but for the interests of others." It's when you are humble and selfless. So pursue, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, with love and humility.

And that brings us to the third feature of this unity. This is very important: "Striving together for the faith of the gospel." Striving together. So the third word is "striving." Standing, single-minded, and striving. "Striving together for the faith of the gospel," – then encompasses verse 28 – "in no way alarmed by your opponents – which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God."

What do you mean "striving"? Well, it's a very interesting verb. It's basically the verb *sunathleō*, the verb *athleō* from which we get "athletics." It speaks of struggling. *Athleō* is a verb that means to struggle. When you add the preposition *sun* at the front of it, it means together. Struggling together. It's a magnificent word. You struggle along with others. It's a composite word.

So our unity is basically dependent on standing firm in doctrine and conduct, being united in heart because we are humble and loving, and striving together for the faith of the gospel. Struggling along with everybody else. The idea is of an athletic team in competition because

they have a common objective. Could be used of soldiers in a group, a squad, that have a common enemy.

Now I didn't fight any battles in war, but I fought my battles on the football field years ago. And there's something about football that obviously brings out the deepest and basest reactions in people because it's so physically destructive, so that fights broke out in practice all the time. I remember being at the Red Skins training camp when I was a college student who was invited to visit the Red Skins training camp, and I never saw – this was NFL-level football – I never saw so many fights. They were fighting each other the whole day; and they're all on the same team. And I noticed that the coaches didn't break the fights up. That's how it works, if all you do is just hang around with each other. All the bickering, however, and all the backbiting and all the internal fighting stops when you show up in the stadium on Saturday and you all have a common enemy, and you now know you have to set aside all those internal issues for the sake of the greater good, which is to defeat the enemy. And if you escalate that to a war, you magnify the seriousness of it.

Somebody said to me last week that they think one of the greatest problems in America is we're not fighting a war; so when we're not fighting a war we just fight each other all the time. As stupid as it is, it's what people do. But all of a sudden when there's a war and there's the threat of defeat or the threat of death, everybody starts turning away from the bickering and focuses on the greater enemy.

This is missing in evangelical Christianity. Every once in a while you get a feeling that it's going to start. So organizations start kind of built around the gospel – and several of them in the last decade or so – and they define themselves by the gospel. But it seems it's not very long before they're no longer fighting as a team collectively unified for the faith of the gospel because they can't stop fighting each other, because they've lost sight of the real war: the war against God, the war against the Bible, the war against the gospel, the war against the church, the war against the family, the war against children, the war against women, the war against men, the war against marriage. Only when Christians realize that they are in a war, “not wrestling against flesh and blood, but principalities and powers and the rulers of the darkness of this world and spiritual wickedness in heavenly places.”

Only when we understand that will we stop bickering with each other, gather around biblical truth, humble ourselves, love each other, and go to battle for what really matters. It's a war on holiness. It's a war on virtue. It's a war on character. It's a war on your children. It's a war on God. Satanic assaults coming out of the profoundly corrupted culture and aided by pragmatism and cowardice, the church falls prey to internal bickering and sets aside the war for the honor and glory and faith of the gospel. It's amazing how they can start out fighting for that and end up biting and devouring each other. That's when I back out.

This unity doesn't work in a static, comfortable situation. If a church just tries to maintain unity by fussing with its own people, the motive is not strong enough. If it seeks unity for the sake of victory over a deadly and powerful enemy, that changes the motive. So we're fighting for the truth, are we not? Jude 3, "Earnestly contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Earnestly contend, go to battle, fight with all your might, because certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand crept into the church, marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." We've got people inside the church tearing up the gospel, denying the lordship of Christ, and we're fighting each other.

Paul uses the prefix pronoun *sun* sixteen times in Philippians because it's so critical that we be together. The church has to seek unity in order they can fight the common destructive enemy. And if we think the world is our friend and we're just supposed to entertain it and we're just supposed to roll out sentimental platitudes and make people feel good, the church will become victim to its own insipid weakness. This unity is the unity that comes to those who are in a common battle against a deadly enemy, and all the petty conflicts fade away.

What are we fighting for? Back to verse 27. We're fighting for the faith of the gospel. We're fighting for the faith of the gospel. Read 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy. Paul is pleading with Timothy to do that, to deal with the people who are tampering with the gospel, to guard the treasure, to fight the good fight. Paul says that at the end: "I have fought the good fight."

We're in a conflict to protect and proclaim the faith of the gospel; that's our priority. And when we get sidetracked on any other priority we start biting and devouring each other. So there must be a striving for the truth to bring about true unity. Only by total cooperation of believers striving together with each other in this fierce contest for the minds of men that are

captive to lies and deception, understanding the eternality of the souls of these sinners, only when we grasp that are we pressed in our compassion and passion to fight.

Paul says this, verse 28; it's going to take courage: "In no way alarmed by your opponents." Guess what; you're going to have opposition. Surprised? No. You're fighting against the kingdom of darkness. You're fighting against spiritual wickedness in high places. You're fighting against sinners who would do everything to defend themselves. You're fighting against the proud in the church, those with bad theology and those with sinful practices. You're fighting all of that. And obviously they know it, if you're faithful in the fight; and so you're going to have opponents. But don't be alarmed. Don't be alarmed. This should not surprise you, because you are basically in the fight on the attack. There's no other way to look at it.

As the church courageously struggles to protect the faith of the gospel, to propagate the faith of the gospel, it is never to be intimidated, it is never to be frightened, it is never to be terrified. And by the way, the verb here is very interesting where it says, "alarmed, in no way alarmed." That is a verb used only here in the New Testament. We find it in secular Greek used of frightened horses. "Don't be like a spooked horse. Don't be frightened by what's going on around you by the opposition." And perhaps this is an allusion to Cassius, who at the battle of Philippi committed suicide out of the fear of defeat. This according to the Cambridge ancient history.

Don't be afraid, be courageous. Take the hits and the shots. Your opponents, your enemies, really, your adversaries – the first part of that word is anti, those people who are against you, those who attack, those who reject you, who reject what you're saying, who don't like it, are more conciliating, more compromising, those in the world who hate the things you say. Don't be alarmed by any of that, because in reality, verse 28 says, "It is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God." So what's happening is, you're literally putting on display the proof that sets apart those who are headed for destruction and those who are headed for salvation. When the battle is fought the way it should be fought, with the truth, with boldness, with courage, with biblical conviction, it divides, it separates those headed for destruction from those headed for salvation. We find out who the enemies are. We find out who those are who are headed for divine judgment.

The word “sign” there is actually a word that means evidence. How people react to the truth when I preach the truth, how people react to that truth separates them into the categories of those who are headed for judgement and those who are headed for salvation. Where there is hostility and hatred and anger, confirmation is that that person is headed for destruction. And where there is affirmation and support, that is proof that those people are headed for salvation. And then at the end of the verse, both are from God, both judgment and salvation. Both destruction and salvation are God’s work.

So listen to me. When you have courage, when you have boldness, when you preach the truth, when you fight the battle, you are doing God’s work. You are laying down proof of those who are headed for destruction and proof of those who are headed for salvation. Those who fight against the truth are headed to destruction, those who fight for the truth are headed to salvation. So this striving is not only the right thing to do, it’s a very definitive thing to do, because it immediately separates. And again, I say what I said at the beginning: this is unity that divides.

Now there’s a final word, just briefly, verses 29 and 30. There’s one other component in this unity that comes out of that third striving. Verse 29, “For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.” Standing, single-minded, striving will inevitably lead to suffering. It will inevitably lead to suffering.

I love how this is framed up, verse 29: “For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.” Twice it says, “for Christ’s sake, for His sake,” to let you know that you’re taking His place. You’re doing this on His behalf. You’re doing this in His place. If you have been granted for Christ’s sake to believe in Him, you’ve also been granted to suffer for His sake.

“For unto you has been granted,” – this is an amazing verb. “It has been granted.” It’s basically charis, it’s grace, it’s the word for “grace.” The same grace that came to you to believe in Him also has granted you to suffer. Well, I get the part about grace enabling me to believe, but what do you mean grace to suffer? Do you understand what a privilege it is to believe in Him? You do, don’t you? Do you equally understand what a privilege it is to suffer for Him?

You say, “Well, I’m trying to avoid that.” Really? You’re trying to avoid that? Then you’re trying to avoid a grace. You say, “Well, where’s the grace in suffering?” One, it assures you of your salvation to suffer for His sake. Two, it produces a brighter hope of heaven. Three, it perfects us in usefulness. It brings joy due to privilege. It leads to eternal reward. It strengthens you. It weans you away from the world. It helps you to glorify the Lord. Peter was told he was going to die, and that was the way he would glorify God.

Suffering is no punishment, suffering for the sake of the truth, being abused and brutalized and vilified. Suffering is a grace gift. Just as believing was a grace gift, suffering is a grace gift. Who wouldn’t want that gift; because in the suffering comes the assurance of our salvation, the brighter hope of heaven, the perfection that makes us useful, the richness of our union with Christ. It drives us to Him in prayer. It brings joy due to its privilege, leads to eternal reward, glorifies the Lord. So why would a believer say, “I don’t want to get in this fight because I don’t want to suffer any hostility. I don’t want people not to like me. I don’t want to be unpopular.”

I don’t care about being popular. I really don’t find myself motivated by what people are going to say. But I do find myself motivated by what the Lord would say, and I am motivated by the fact that suffering for righteousness’ sake causes the spirit of grace and glory to rest on a believer. So it is as much a grace gift to suffer for Christ as it was a grace gift for you to believe in Him.

And, oh, by the way, to finish: You’re not alone. You’re not alone. In fact, you’re in some good company. Look at verse 30: “experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.” Where was Paul when he wrote this? Prison, suffering, for Christ’s sake. He was bearing in his body the marks that were intended for Christ. Christ wasn’t there, so they gave them to Paul.

Paul says, “Look, if you’re suffering, you’re in the long line of noble believers,” right? “You’re doing what I’ve done. You’re experiencing the very same conflict which you saw in me.” This is the grace of suffering; it puts you in the long line of the most courageous, the most faithful, the most noble, the most useful, and the most blessed of all believers.