

Philippians 1:27–30

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 September 2024

Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 0 0] Again, Philippians chapter 1, verses 27 through 30. Please stand, if able, for the reading of God's word. 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.

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.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, good morning. It's so good to be with you today. And you'll notice that the reading today just jumped right into the middle of a book, something we don't normally do.

We kind of sequentially work our way through things. But given the fall launch and the uniqueness of the season, I just wanted to take one week and center in on our life together, together as worthy citizens.

I mean, all fall we're going to be taking a look at whether or not we can find a church worth joining. And some of these hallmark verses right here actually sit on that entire thing.

[1 : 3 9] Together, a worthy witness. On January 20th, 1961, newly elected President of the United States, John F. Kennedy, gave his inaugural address.

It was a frigid winter morning. His address contained only 1,366 words, and it was the first such speech to be delivered on full color in television around the country.

As President Kennedy arrived at the oration's conclusion, three sentences only from the close, he delivered a line that cascades down through the corridors of time.

You probably know it and you could say it with me if you've got it. And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you, but ask what you can do for your country.

Not before or since has there ever been such a succinct, elegant, elevated, clarion call to the privileged responsibilities of citizenship.

[2 : 4 8] And it's only grown larger with time. That line continues to reemerge in the fabric of our discourse with almost elevated purpose, uniqueness, due no doubt to our national character, which is increasingly fixated on our rights rather than our responsibilities.

We often talk about the things we want the government to confer upon us, but we think little about the commitments that are to be taken up by us. And that's why Kennedy's line just never seems to dissipate from our national discourse.

Sadly, in the church, things aren't all that different than they are in the country. Many people are now emerging, even after all these months and years of COVID, just now to determine whether or not they can find a faith family, a church worth joining, worth coming on to, worth their time.

But when they come, they're normally looking for churches that cater to their personal proclivities. I mean, it's no secret. We're all like that.

We're guided by considerations concerning the things that we think we are owed rather than the commitments that we make. Entitlements are not only the watchword for a culture, they certainly have become the character of the church.

[4 : 20] Rare is the man or woman who enters into a church or visits a church and asks, I wonder what this church will call me to. That's just not the question that they're entering into the door with.

Very few of us are asking, what I ought to be accountable for? Instead, we're hoping to find places that acquiesce to our personal preference.

And so the question is simply, what is the solution to this problem? To where do we turn? Given that we're all captive to this rights and not responsibilities.

Interestingly, you might be interested to know, and I hope you've got the Bible open before you, that the text we just read actually employs this very word citizenship, even though you can't read it in the translation.

Look at verse 27 of Philippians chapter 1. Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ. That phrase given to us in our understanding, your manner of life is literally your citizenship.

[5 : 39] He's actually saying here, only let your citizenship be worthy of the gospel of Christ. In one sense then, as we begin our fall together, you could say these verses almost function as an oath of allegiance.

They're going to define for us what it means to be citizens of the kingdom of heaven while walking in the city of Chicago.

It's going to call us to something. So we're going to acquire things of us. It's really a perfect word choice, citizenship, not only because we're all looking at the fall and we're thinking about our own country and our responsibilities going forward, but it's perfect for those who are living in Philippi.

To have lived in Philippi would have meant that they conferred upon you all the rights and responsibilities of Roman citizenship, which weren't conferred upon every city-state, as it were.

But the residents of Philippi, like those born or becoming citizens in this country, in Chicago, they have all the rights and responsibility of Roman citizenship.

[6 : 52] So Paul using that word is interesting. Philippi was populated in 42 BC on the back end of Mark Antony, which you might have heard about through this significant other, Cleopatra.

But at any rate, they were actually populating the city by retired veterans, those who were citizens. And so this city has a rich history of citizenship.

They would have not needed any description or definition of what are the rights and responsibilities of Roman citizenship. And so it would be good for us to think of it as well.

To put it differently, what does Paul in these verses want others to hear about Christ's church Chicago? I mean, that's the way he puts it here to them.

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. What does he want to hear on the street concerning the citizenry of Christ Church Chicago?

[8 : 07] First, together, firm in the faith. Standing firm. I get the word together from that little phrase so that I may hear that you are standing firm in one spirit and with one mind.

He doubles down on the oneness of what he wants heard concerning the church in Philippi. Wouldn't that be great for us?

Up and down the streets and around the city, perhaps in different parts of the globe. Well, when I think of Christ Church Chicago, I think of men and women and children who have decided to be one.

They're together. And not only that, they're actually standing firm in the faith. What does that look like, to stand firm in the faith?

Plutarch wrote of standing firm as a necessary characteristic of anyone who wanted to be a leader or a statesman in his day. Listen to what he says.

[9 : 16] Same language here. In his words, to stand firm was one who holds fast and avoids the tumultuous and mad impulse of empty opinion.

They're not swayed. He goes on, against difficult conditions and times, they stand firm in resistance and struggle to the end.

For the one who stands firm does not create storms in himself, and yet he must not desert the state when storms fall upon it.

I love that. That's what it means to stand firm. It's someone who's, in a sense, upright, planted, not subject to the winds, not running when the storms.

It's a wonderful image. In this sense, though, he wants them to stand firm in the faith. Do you see that in verse 27? Standing firm in one spirit with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

[10 : 25] That's Christ Church Chicago. What does our citizenship look like? As one, standing firm for the gospel.

That means that you and I will be laboring together to preserve the Christian faith. Now, you can't preserve that which you don't know.

So we're going to have to give ourselves, and this is why we do it, this church family, give ourselves to the teaching, the reading of the Bible. This is why we actually govern our once-a-week moment on God's word for us to put the Bible at the center because this is the faith delivered to us.

It is a faith that was delivered to us through the apostolic preaching and teaching as they committed it to Scripture. The revelation of God concerning His Son has unfolded in the Scriptures that brings transformative relationships with the Lord and with all that we know.

This gospel is that which we preserve. So we sit under the word. That's what it means. You are right now fulfilling in some measure what it means to stand firm in the faith.

[11 : 44] That is, if you haven't fallen asleep in those wonderfully comfortable chairs. Everything at Christ Church Chicago will stand on the ground of attempting to read and understand the Bible.

When the world's teaching separates how we live from the truth of God's revealed word, then we will resist. But it's not only preserving the faith.

That's a manifestation of standing firm. But get this, I also think it has something to do with what we do together in prayer. Now we just had an exercise where one person in the congregation represented all of us in prayer.

So that as Lydia was praying, she's not just praying for us, concerning us, but we ought to be praying with her in all of this.

Corporate prayer. How do I arrive at that? I don't actually get it from this particular paragraph, but just turn with me for a moment and take a look about standing firm by praying together.

[12 : 55] Chapter four, flip over, Paul will double down on these words, stand firm. You can see it there in verse one. Therefore my brothers whom I love and long for my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord.

And notice, verse 20, just above it, it's in relationship to our citizenship. So citizens of heaven are standing firm not only by preserving the faith, but I'm going to say by praying together.

I mean, look what follows that word in verse four, one. If you walk all the way down to verse six, do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your request be made known to God.

A church that is standing firm together actually is a church that prays together. prayer, that most neglected corporate activity of family life.

This is something I think we need to learn this year. prayer. The logic is simple. Where there is no corporate prayer, there is no deep understanding yet of what it looks like to stand firm.

[14 : 21] A church that struggles to pray together, individual Christians who fail to gather together for the purpose of prayer actually will have trouble standing together.

together. But as we kneel together, as we're on our knees together, as we pray together, we actually know how to stand together. This is a learned behavior, not an intuitively engaged one.

I mean, Jesus' disciples came to him and said what? Lord, teach us to pray. Well, we'd like to do that. We'd like to teach one another how to pray together.

I don't mean merely yourself in your closet, but praying together. We have an opportunity tonight. I'm a little, well, caught up short.

Can't lean in on this too far. I'll be on a plane tonight. I won't be there after telling you to be there, but I'll put it to, unless you're providentially hindered, and I'm just talking to the members of the church here, those men and women in our midst who took vows of membership to this family, family.

[15 : 31] If you took vows of membership to this family, then tonight at five o'clock is kind of an expectation of gathering to pray together.

It actually becomes a prioritization. It's hard for me to envision pastors, elders, deacons, community group leaders who are in town and neglecting the corporate activity of prayer together.

But as we do learn that, as people do make an oath of allegiance of sorts, that if I'm going to stand firm in the faith, I'm going to come to understand and preserve the faith as put down in the scriptures, and I'm actually going to join my family in prayer together.

together. That's not all. Standing firm in the faith, but striving side by side.

Together, side by side. Just flip back again to verses 27 and 28. Only let your manner of life, your citizenship, be worthy of the gospel, so that whether I come or see you or an absent, I may hear, one, that Christ Church Chicago is standing firm in one spirit with one mind, and two, striving, side by side.

[16 : 55] The standing, stand, strive. The word strive is derived from the word athlete.

There are parts of the Bible I resonate with. An athlete is one who knows what it is to compete.

to train. They know what it is to deprive themselves of some things so that together they might gain other things. Striving side by side.

What he's really saying here is that your Christian growth is not merely an independent exercise, it's collective. This church is a team game. Now that's hard for many of us, people but it's important for all of us.

We're to be striving side by side. That's what it looks like to have a worthy witness. This idea of athleticism means that we have to exert energy together.

[18 : 08] together. You have to exert energy on behalf of this team. I mean, where there's no sweat, I can tell you there's no striving.

Where there's no personal cost to you as a responsibility to this church family, then there's no collective gain for us. There's no sacrificial service on your part.

There's no way of living a life worthy of the gospel. We are called to compete together. Steve Kerr, who played for my dad for some years in the NBA and most recently is the winner of, what, nine NBA titles, including most recently the Olympic gold in Paris, spoke about just winning the gold medal a few weeks ago.

He reminded us that our team, the United States of America, was comprised of 12 athletes from different parts of the country who, in his words, came together to accomplish a goal.

And for many on that team, I mean, we took 12 of the finest basketball players in the country who on their respective teams are the best.

[19 : 27] Some of them didn't even get into certain games. In other words, striving together means, I'll play whatever roles necessary given the situation in front of me if we are actually going to go toward a goal for the faith of the gospel.

That's what it means. And so after they won the gold medal, those 12 athletes and their coaches mounted onto a platform and they stood what? They stood side by side, hands on hearts, celebrating the achievement of team success.

This little letter of Philippians is filled with these kinds of things, striving together. Chapter 1, something the whole church does, they were partnering with Paul and sending the gospel around the world and as we collectively partner with men and women in our global missionary fellowship, we are striving side by side with others for the gospel.

That's a very tangible necessary activity. It's also there not only in our leaders but it's got to be there among each person. What does it mean to strive side by side?

Look again at chapter 4, verses 1 and 2 where these things come back. Verse 2, I entreat Yodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, notice, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of the fellows workers whose names are written in the book of life.

[21 : 03] Competing together is essential but it takes commitment to the relationships on the team. I've been in good locker rooms, I've been in bad locker rooms but the secret sauce of any successful team is they know how to resolve differences, get on the same page and move forward.

And the teams that don't, well they draft first in the coming year. Welcome to our Chicago sports teams. These were two great women striving side by side, clearing things up so that the team can make progress.

For us, Christ Church Chicago, it's got to go way beyond the notion of two women in congregation because our challenge is to become one body that strives side by side, according to our mission statement, to build up a multi-ethnic and cross-cultural church that does this.

Now those are hurdles that most of the country has decided are insurmountable. They're not going to attempt it. men. But when I see in this church over the last few weeks, four individuals get baptized and I just notice by way of observation that one of them is a white young man who grew up in the church, a young African American woman, an Asian American, and Hispanic, Latino, I thought, my word, when I see that, it is an indication that you sit in a room that is committed not only to competing together but we're going to work out things together so that we continue to strive side by side.

When I see our worship team comprised as it is, I sense that we are a church making commitments to compete together. when I see young people in this congregation coming from all walks of life and others in the youth encouraging, strengthening, and supporting one another, I see a church making commitments to strive side by side.

[23 : 28] When I see someone who's been trained in classical music, willing to take on a lesser musical role, perhaps even teach kids in our church at the same hour, I see someone who's determined to strive side by side.

And so I'm just going to ask you, what have you put your shoulder to? What part of this work falls or fails for lack of your engagement? If the answer isn't immediately known to you, then I'm telling you, it's time to tap in.

It's time to get in the ring. It's time to shoulder a part of this load. For many of us, today should be a consequential Sunday. because we've got a lot to do.

It's a day for deciding to stand firm in the faith in this family, to strive side by side in this family, to end perhaps long seasons of sitting or relying on others to get the job without you.

Ask not what Christ Church Chicago can do for you, ask what you can do for Christ Church Chicago. Let me put it in the language of citizenship. It's time for some of us to think about taking an oath.

[24 : 47] You know, America has a long history of adding to our citizenry by taking in foreign-born men and women who by an oath become naturalized citizens. It's been that way since the 1790s.

For 100 plus years after that, it was required. The language used was up to individual judges in different parts of the country. So how you took an oath or the language of the oath where you actually entered into the family of United States citizenry was kind of hodgepodge until really in 1926 the oath of citizenship emerged.

Some of you have taken it. Some of you were born into it. But here it is. Let me read it. I hereby declare on oath that I absolutely and entirely renounce and adjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince potentate state or sovereignty and particularly to and then you fill in the blank wherever you were from of who or which I have heretofore been a subject or a citizen that I will support and defend the constitution and the laws of the United States of America against all enemies foreign and domestic that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same and I take this obligation freely without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion.

So help me God and an acknowledgement whereof I have here unto affixed my signature. Wow. It's happening even today.

We need to think about oaths of our life together. Together a worthy witness. We will not accomplish what God's given this church to do without scores of new men and women determining voluntarily to say I'm in.

[26 : 44] I'm going to stand firm in the faith with this group. I'm going to strive side by side with this people. And when people hear of Christ Church Chicago they will hear of an ever growing number of people who have given themselves to this wonderful work.

The text turns. So just flip back again 127-28. My final point and I'll bring it home and land this while you can get home to lunch. We not only stand firm in the faith.

We not only strive side by side but together we will be fearless in the face of suffering when it comes to Christ's sake. You can see it there.

Verse 28. And not frightened in anything by your opponents. It's a clear sign of their destruction but your salvation in that from God. For it's been granted to you for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.

This is a difficult sentence I am sure. I would acknowledge this this is the unwanted obligation. Runs counter to my own understanding.

[28 : 03] We often think that if we give ourselves to good things particularly God or the gospel then we should expect only good things in return.

That's just the way our minds are governed to think. So when the going gets rough people bail. When courage lags commitments are dropped.

When it gets too hot another church family is sought. Give me no drama please. Yet Paul assumes that we're going to have opposition.

Notice that thing he said there? This conflict we're engaged in. The faith of the gospel entering into our neighborhoods is going to be in conflict with the minds and hearts of those who won't actually follow Christ.

You just got to know that up front. I mean just read the fine print. There it is. The unwanted obligation is ours. But notice Paul not only assumes you're going to have opposition.

[29 : 15] This is no inner squad scrimmage but he actually speaks of the obligation in terms of being an embedded privilege. He's strange on this point isn't he?

He says for it has been granted to you for the sake of Christ that you should not only believe but suffer. Think of it.

We're not only supposed to stand firm. We're not only supposed to strive side by side but we have to understand that we will suffer and we take that suffering as a privilege when it's for Christ.

Granted you. We are so fortunate then to have the right. Here's your bill of rights. What's your right?

You are so fortunate to have the right of resembling your Lord who suffered for the faith of the gospel. It is your privilege to share in the sufferings of Christ.

[30 : 26] And not only that you don't just share in it it should never be feared. Well I want to live in a church like this. I want to live in a confident church. No one's fearing what's going to happen because I believe in Jesus.

And that lack of fear has two different parts. When you don't have fear it's a sign to them it says of their destruction and it's also a stamp of approval for you.

So your fearlessness points to your victory and your fearlessness is a certificate of your own authenticity. That's kind of the way this logic is rolling.

You ever compete against somebody in an athletic event and it's really everything's on the line but they just don't flinch. They're confident.

It is a sign that they're going to destroy you. And what Paul says is I want every Christian man, woman, and child to not run around cowering in fear.

[31 : 31] This idea of fear here is used of horses that rise up because they're intimidated. intimidated. He doesn't want us on our back heels. He wants us just riding forward, participating in the sufferings of Christ, come hell or high water.

And it's a certificate of your own authenticity. I mean, he says it's a sign of your salvation. So we shouldn't worry about these things as we go forward together.

I can tell you the way fear is going to manifest itself in your life is going to be a lack of verbally witnessing to your family, your loved ones, your neighbors, and others that you believe in Jesus.

That's where fear always starts. It's going to make you quiet. You're going to sit in a restaurant. You're going to be across from somebody. There's going to be a table near you, and you're going to want to make sure that if you're talking about Jesus, you're doing so in a low enough tone that they don't actually pick up on it.

Because fear always comes with having to speak or not speak the word. And yet what Paul says in this chapter, verse 14, most of the brothers have become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment.

[32 : 50] They're much more bold to speak the word without fear. Jesus, my Jesus, can I tell you about Jesus.

That's a sign that you're actually fighting off the fear. I could give it to you in the words of Shakespeare's King Henry who told his troops, O God of battles, steal my soldiers' hearts, possess them not with fear.

Take from them now the sense of reckoning if the opposed numbers pluck their hearts from them. Not today, O Lord. Wow. There it is.

This is the clarion call of the oath of citizenship for Christ Church Chicago in the coming year. Together, a worthy witness. The elements, let us stand firm in the faith.

Let us strive side by side. Let us meet suffering for the gospel fearlessly. And then notice what Paul does.

[33 : 59] I love this drop the mic moment, verse 30, and with this I'm done. He says, you'll be engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had, here it is, and now hear that I still have.

What a bookend to the text. Paul says, you know, there's certain things I want to hear about you. And he lays it all out, and he lays it all out, and he lays it all out, and then he kind says, you know, they're the things you hear about me.

May that be so for us. I'm calling you to this in the coming year. I'm calling you to an oath of citizenship.

I'm asking you to take on the responsibilities. I want you to pledge your lives. And can you see it?

Can you envision it? Can you imagine a church family on its feet the way young grade school students like myself did in the 60s at the start of each day of school, standing, had, hand on heart, one voice, I pledge allegiance to the faith once delivered to all the saints, and to the others with whom I stand in one mind striving side by side for the advance of the gospel.

[35 : 27] Without fear, we will declare the gospel. We will count it a privilege to suffer when called upon to do so, and I make this vow, we make this vow, without reservation, the purpose of evasion, for together, together, I want to be part of a worthy witness so help me God.

And if you're not a Christian today, well, just keep coming and see whether we do it or not.

And if we don't put on display a worthy witness, let me put it differently for you that aren't yet believers, believers, if we do not prove ourselves worthy of our citizenship in the gospel, then I say to you today, go your way in peace, for we would have failed you.

But if we do do it, I pray you will find your way to our common faith, that one day you may stand with us in this great cause.

Amen. Thank you.