

Citizens of Heaven

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[0:00] All right. Thank you all for that. That was great. Well, good morning. It's good to see everybody today.

! Thank you for joining us for worship. We're going to continue on in our Philippians series. We're going to be in Philippians chapter 1, at the end of chapter 1, verse 27, into chapter 2 today.

So we're making a leap. All right. So would you stand with me to honor the reading of God's word? Just one thing. As citizens of heaven, live your life worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Then, whether I come and see you or am absent, I will hear about you, that you are standing firm in one spirit, in one accord, contending together for the faith of the gospel, not being frightened in any way by your opponents.

This is a sign of destruction for them, but of your salvation, and this is from God. For it has been granted to you on Christ's behalf not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him.

[1:16] Since you are engaged in the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I have, if then there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, make my joy complete by thinking the same way, having the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.

Let's pray together.

Dear God, thank you for your word. Thank you for who you are. God, I pray that you would transform our lives to look more like Jesus Christ, especially as it pertains to unity, after studying this passage today.

We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen. You can be seated. Well, if you were here when I came to preach in June, in view of a call before I was voted in this pastor here, you might recognize that this is the passage that I preached.

Mostly it was 2, 1 through 11, which was a large chunk and probably a mistake. But the title of that sermon was Unity Through Our Humility. It was too long.

[2:30] And so today I'm going to expound on that a little bit, the idea of unity occurring through our humility. And so we're going to explore that concept a little bit more.

And so today, as we get into this, we're looking, starting at verse 27. Let's look at what Paul is reminding this church. He's reminding this church of something that is supremely important to their faith, and that is the unity of the local body of Christ.

And as we look through this, what we'll see is that unity is the proof of salvation, and also the proof of salvation is unity. So the way that this passage works, it kind of flips at the midway point.

And so he introduces this idea of unity by calling them, the church in Philippi, citizens of heaven. There's one thing as citizens of heaven. And we understand citizenship, right?

We're all proud American citizens. Go USA. And proud Tennesseans, right? Anyone proud to be a Tennessean? Not so much. You know, it's interesting because I just came from Texas, and if you know anything about Texans, you know that they are insane people when it comes to being a Texan.

[3:41] I mean, Texans love being Texans more than, I think, most people love being Americans. More than most Texans love being Americans. They love being Texan, okay? And it reminded me of, as I was thinking about this idea of citizenship and why Paul would bring this idea up to the church in Philippi, which is they were very, very proud of their Roman citizenship, okay?

So for him to bring up this concept of citizenship, it wouldn't have been surprising. But how proud were they? I thought of a story back from 2018 in the New York Times about this man who was a Texan by birth, and he was living in New York at the time.

He worked for the New York Times, and his wife was pregnant and going to give birth. And so he decided that he didn't want his daughter to be born over New York soil.

So what he did was he had his friends in Texas and family in Texas gather up a bunch of dirt in a box and mail it to him. And the plan was simple. He was going to put the box of dirt under the table, under the bed where his wife was giving birth.

And the goal here was that his daughter would be born, you know, over Texas soil because he was proud of Texas. He actually didn't come up with this idea by himself. He had studied, this guy, his name was John Schwartz.

[4 : 56] He had studied in Siena, Italy. And he says, this is in the article, the Sienese have a fierce loyalty to their neighborhoods. Since there was historically only one hospital in one neighborhood, people from the others would bring some dirt from their own neighborhood into the delivery room for birth.

So that's what led me to think about having the baby born on Texas soil. Talk about being proud of where you came from, right? He's a proud Texan. Unfortunately, the story goes on.

You know, it makes sense because he was in New York. He was stuck in traffic and didn't make it to the birth of his daughter. And so he and a box of dirt were sitting in New York traffic when his wife had to have an emergency delivery.

So he didn't make it there. But that wasn't the end of the story for the dirt because he had Texan friends who would go and use the dirt at their birth. They would take his idea and actually use it. So I was just thinking about that.

I think it's kind of a funny story. But he took being a Texan very seriously, right? He took his citizenship. He was very proud of his citizenship. And I think a lot of people are very proud of our American citizenship.

[6 : 00] And that's a good thing. We should be, right? We should be good citizens. But what Paul is telling the church in Philippi and what God's word tells us today is that we have a higher citizenship than just a state citizenship or a nationality that we belong to.

If you are in Christ, then you're a citizen of heaven. You are placed there by Christ himself who lived a perfect life, died on the cross for your sins and rose again. And so what he's telling us here is that as citizens of heaven, think about that more than you think about your nationality, right?

Your country of origin, your citizenship on earth. Because you're going to be a good citizen on earth in the country that you live in, the state that you live in, if you're a good citizen of heaven first, right? It's kind of the idea here. And the people in Philippi, like I said, they were very proud of their Roman citizenship. Very, very proud of it. They were a Roman free state, so they could buy land.

They had no taxes that they had to pay to Rome. They were living the good life. They could use the Roman road system throughout the ancient world to travel without any issue. Their Roman pride really showed up in Acts chapter 16.

[7 : 11] If you remember, when Paul and Silas and the team were there sharing the gospel, there was the slave girl who was possessed. And he rebuked the slave girl, and the demon left her.

And then these men lost their business on their slave girl who could tell the future. And so they were put in jail. They were beaten, and they were left, you know, to sit in jail to sing hymns at night.

And during that time, the magistrates of Philippi discovered that they were Roman citizens, and they were deeply embarrassed and scared because of what they had done to Paul and Silas.

They had treated them wrongfully as Roman citizens. This is all, of course, I don't know what's popping here, if it's my mic, I don't know. Anyways, this is all, of course, because they were proud of their Roman citizenship.

So it would not be surprising at all for Paul to bring this idea of citizenship up. And it's not really surprising for us either because, as Chris mentioned, we have a country that we're proud of, and yet we see division, right?

[8 : 08] Well, we can't let the division of the country come into the church. And that's what he's talking about here. The division of our nationality, the things that we focus on as Americans or as Tennesseans or as Texans or whatever, mean something completely different than what it means to be a citizen of heaven.

And we have to separate the two. So we're citizens of heaven. And so he goes on, and he's talking about this aspect, this idea of citizenship, and he says to live your life worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Live your life worthy of the gospel of Christ. And this idea of living your life worthy is not unfamiliar in the New Testament. It's pretty common, actually. You see it from Paul quite a bit. In Colossians, for example, Colossians chapter 1, he says, So that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work, and growing in the knowledge of God.

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, verses 11 and 12, he says, As you know, like a father with his own children, we encouraged, comforted, and implored each one of you to walk worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

But an even more direct comparison passage that we can use here to this, what we're looking at in Philippians, is found in Ephesians chapter 4, verse 1. Now remember, Philippians and Ephesians are two of the prison epistles that Paul wrote during his time in Roman imprisonment.

[9 : 36] So these were written fairly closely together around the same time. And the way that Ephesians is structured is pretty interesting. The first three chapters of Ephesians are doctrine.

What we know about God, what we know about the Father, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And what we know about salvation, things like that. That's how Ephesians 1 through 3 kind of plays out.

The second half of the book of Ephesians is application. So he says, this is what we know about God, and this is how it matters for how you live. And so he begins the application section of Ephesians by saying, Therefore I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

And then verses 4 through 6, we have seven different ones. Okay? There is one body, one spirit, just as you were called to, one hope at your calling.

One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. That's a pretty profound statement for unity, right? He's telling the church, as they're about to understand how to apply the truths that they know about Jesus, about God, that first and foremost, unity is really important.

[11 : 03] Unity is really important. And that's what he's saying here to the church in Philippi. If you want to live worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ, then you pursue and you preserve the unity of the local church, right?

That's the idea here. Unity is essential to walking worthy. And I think about walking worthy, it's, I mean, yeah, obviously this includes things like we need to obey God's word, right?

We need to live in a way that looks like Christ. We need to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. That is walking worthy. That is living worthy lives.

But I think in another sense, walking worthy or living worthy comes as an outpouring of our gratitude and appreciation for the work that Christ has done and who God is and his plan of salvation, his mercy, his grace, his love for us.

If we understand and have a heart of gratitude and appreciation for who God is and what Christ has done, then walking worthy or living worthy will happen as a natural consequence, a natural result.

[12 : 14] I saw a video this week on Facebook, so maybe you saw it too, I don't know. But the story, it was an evangelist talking to a group of college students, the story that he shared made a lot of sense to me, and especially as it pertains to how we live worthy lives.

This guy was talking to these college students and he was asked basically, well, what would stop me from living however I want after I say I believe in Jesus? And he told this story, and I think this originated with a guy named Ray Comfort, but the story is this.

There's a father and a son who go camping, okay? So imagine that. Father and son go camping together. They set up their camp. They're out together. Father, they are grilling, having a good time, tossing the football probably, talking about the Vols, I guess.

They're having fun. And then the dad says, hey, son, I'm going to go take a rest. I'm going to go lay down for a few minutes. Here's the thing. Have fun. Do whatever you want to do, but don't go into the river.

They had a boat. They're going to go fishing. Don't go into the river. Don't take the boat into the river because there's a lot of alligators in that river, and I don't want you to get hurt. It's not safe for you to go by yourself. He says, okay, dad, sounds good. Dad goes and rests.

[13 : 19] And then the son, he's, you know, hanging out, fishing off the bank, and he gets bored, and he's like, well, I'm going to take this boat out, you know? So he does. He takes the boat out, and pretty soon he has an alligator coming up, and he's getting a little nervous, and another one,

and suddenly there's a swarm of alligators coming towards him, flips the boat over, and the kid screams out, dad, help, help.

And then he goes underwater. He closes his eyes, and when he opens his eyes, he's on the shore. His dad had swam out. He looks over. He sees his dad laying there, bite marks, bleeding, about like dying, bleeding out.

And his dad had saved him. He realizes, dad swam out, saved me, got bit by these alligators. And then here's the thing. This is what happens. This is the crazy part.

He looks at his dad, and he's like, dad, thank you so much for your sacrifice. Thank you for saving me. But that boat was more fun. I'm going to go back out in the water and swim with those alligators again.

Would that son be living worthy of the sacrifice the father made? No. No. No. He showed zero gratitude, zero appreciation. And that's what we do when we go back and we live in sin.

[14:31] Or we bring about disunity in the church. We show that we're not grateful, and we don't appreciate the work of Christ. If we could see the marred body of Jesus Christ, I promise you, unity would be the first thing on our mind.

If we could come together under anything, it's under the brutal death, the humiliating death that Christ took on our behalf. And in the case of the church at Philippi, this is what they needed a reminder of.

For the most part, this letter is very pleasant, very kind. But there are some things that were going wrong in the church that needed to be addressed. And that's what Paul is addressing here with this unity issue.

There were some people who were sowing seeds of disunity, and he needed to address it so that the church could get back to being the witness for Christ that they needed to be.

And so let's look at the three ways that unity should play out in the lives of the church. So as the proof of salvation, the three things that we should consider here. Number one is that we should stand firm in unity.

[15:41] Stand firm in unity. That's what it says in verse 27. So live worthy of the gospel of Christ, then whether I come and see you or I'm absent, I will hear about you that you are standing firm in one spirit, in one accord.

The way that that is actually written in the Greek, he says, in one spirit, in one soul. The idea is, as one body of Christ, he uses the human analogy, as one body, you're completely unified.

Standing firm. Standing firm. And the idea behind this standing firm, this concept of standing firm, is built on us as a church, a local body of believers, standing firm on the essential doctrines of the faith.

What we hold dear and what we see in Scripture as true, we have to hold those things tightly, and we have to stand firm on those. So that internal issues, if people come into this church and they try to lead us into some sort of false doctrine or false teaching, as a church, we can stand firm and root those issues out and say, no, no, no, that's not what Christ teaches.

That's not what God's word says. We don't agree with that. We don't believe that. We're going to stand firm. Unified. Right? If only one person is standing firm and everybody else isn't, that person's not going to last very long.

[16:50] We have to do this together. Stand firm as one body on the truths of the gospel. And it's a reminder, too, that as we kind of work through this passage, there's this enemy that we face, and our enemy is not flesh and blood.

It's a reminder that when people do bring in false doctrine or false teaching or false life into the church, our struggle isn't against them, right? The individual. Our struggle is against, as Ephesians says, rulers and cosmic authorities of evil, right?

The principalities of evil. And this sounds a lot like Ephesians chapter 6, if you turn your Bible back one page. Ephesians chapter 6, where Paul talks about the armor of God. Starting in verse 11, he says, So, stand.

Stand together. Stand unified. That's what we're called to do as a church. The next thing that we see as a proof of salvation is that we contend for the gospel in unity.

So, if internal issues shouldn't lead us to division, external enemies shouldn't lead us to division either. External enemies shouldn't lead us to division in the church.

[18:27] The idea here behind this word contend together is like a team going against another team. There is an opposing force, and the team has to come together to will to victory, right?

They have to fight together. They have to engage in that fight together. If standing firm is like a soldier standing ready for the battle, then contending together is actively fighting, actively persevering together as a church.

So, contend for the gospel, for the faith of the gospel, meaning we have to battle to persevere for what we believe. Not like we have to, you know, prove the legitimacy of scripture or prove that it's valid or prove that what we believe is truly from God or anything like that.

But we have to contend for the perseverance of the faith that we would continue on in this gospel faith life that we've been called to. And we have to do that, again, together.

This can't happen apart. This can't happen isolated at all. It's like Chris said again. I should have just let you preach today, man. It's like Chris said that we have to fellowship together.

[19:36] So, if you're not a member of a church, but you are a Christian, I would encourage you to join a church, preferably here. Join our church. Contend with us together for the sake of unity, for the sake of the gospel.

You know, we live in a hyper-divisive country. We live in a hyper-divisive world. If you spend five minutes on Facebook, you're probably going to have five different opinions about the same topic thrown at you, right?

That's the way that the world works these days. Everyone is seeking division and promoting division. This is exactly why we're reminded that we're citizens, not of this earth, not of America. I mean, we are. But first and foremost, we're citizens of heaven. We have to live our lives in a way that we don't let the divisiveness of the world creep its way into the church.

The passion that we have for the things of this world or the places that we live can't replace the passion that we have for the advancement of the gospel.

[20:40] And the third thing that he mentions here is to face suffering as a unified body.

You know, this passage that we've been studying through in Philippians chapter 1 mentions suffering quite a lot because it's Paul's perspective on his own imprisonment and things like that. And one of the hardest things to understand, I think, and be okay with is the fact that as we stand together, we stand firm, and as we contend together, the implication is that suffering is going to find its way here, right?

Suffering is going to happen. And that's what Paul told the church. He says that they need to contend for the faith of the gospel, not being frightened in any way by your opponents.

So stand firm, stand strong as we contend together. This is a sign of destruction for them, but of your salvation. And this is from God, for it has been granted to you on Christ's behalf not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him since you're engaged in the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I have.

You see, Paul's telling this church, you guys saw me suffer when I was in Philippi. You guys saw me suffer when I was in Berea and Thessalonica. You know I'm in prison for the gospel right now. And now you're engaging in the same struggle.

[22:00] You're in the same fight. Suffering found its way there to them as well. That's a reminder to us that if you are in Christ Jesus, then you will face suffering, persecution, for things directly, suffering directly related to your faith in Christ.

But here's the really, like, and the way that God does this is just unbelievable. But here's the amazing thing. He says, this has been granted to you on Christ's behalf. That word granted, it means it's God's gracious gift to you to experience that suffering.

Not that suffering itself is a gift from God or a good thing, but the result of experiencing suffering, the endurance of the faith, that is absolutely a gift from God that he would let us experience.

He didn't withhold suffering from his own son. Why would he withhold suffering from us? And as we suffer as a church, we can't suffer, again, isolated.

We can't suffer individually. We have to suffer together, knowing that two things happen through our suffering. And as we suffer well, two things happen. The first thing is the enemies, okay, those outside of the church who oppose the gospel of Jesus Christ, they see which side they're on, and it's a sign of destruction, meaning they know where they're headed.

[23:21] We're a light in a dark world when we suffer well. We point people to the truth of God's kingdom and his eternal reign that's going to come through Jesus Christ. And the second thing is

it's a sign of our salvation.

So as we're unified as a church, what we see is we experience suffering, we contend together, we stand together, and what we see is that this is proof of our salvation, that we're in Christ.

That's a gift. That's a gift for us. And again, I think that's why he says that's God's gracious. He's granted this to us so that we can know without a doubt that we are saved, that we're in Christ.

The second thing that we need to look at is that salvation is the foundation for unity. Salvation. So remember, unity is the proof of salvation. Now, salvation is the foundation that that unity is built on, okay?

It's the same thing. I just flipped it over. That's all it is. Same thing, okay? So this passage continues into chapter 2. It says, It says, So there's three things here we should look at.

[24 : 51] Number one, knowing God is transformative. Knowing God is transformative. So if you know Christ, act like it, right? That's what he's saying here. If you know Christ, act like it.

And if you know Christ, then you know the encouragement that is for those who are in Christ. The encouragement of knowing that you were once lost and separated from God for eternity. But you're encouraged to know that you have life in Christ Jesus.

You know the consolation of his sacrificial love. When you're stuck in your brokenness and have no hope, but are consoled by the mercy and love of Jesus Christ.

That's consolation. He's consoled you with his love. And if you know God, if you are in Christ, then you know the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. You know when you're saved, there's two things that happen.

One, your sins are forgiven. And two, the Holy Spirit dwells within you. God's Spirit takes up residence within you. So if you're in Christ, then you know the fellowship of the Spirit.

[25 : 52] And you also know the affectionate mercy of God, who could have smited us for our sin, but instead offered us grace and forgiveness and mercy.

That is a deep affection. The word there means from the guts, from the bowels, like a deep feeling of love. I brought that up in June also, so if you remember that.

You know the affectionate mercy of the one who sent his son to die for you. So if you know Christ, act like it. Knowing God is transformative. Number two, greater joy is our goal as Christ followers.

The church should absolutely be the beacon of joy in our world. And so often, that's not the case. So often, people go to church and can sense something's not right.

There's someone's fighting about something, right? You can see it. I've been a part of churches that have been going through extremely challenging circumstances and extreme division. And I just tell you, that is a joyless time.

[26 : 58] The joy of the church is not at its full measure. And Paul says, make my joy complete. He's telling this church, look, my joy isn't as full as it could be because I know you guys aren't as unified as you should be.

Our joy is made full when we are unified as a body of believers who stand together, stand firm, who contend together for the sake of the gospel, who suffer well, and who know Christ, who are in Christ.

The third thing is that unity only comes through humility. Unity only comes through humility. So how do we get there?

How do we get unity? By being humble people, right? Humble enough to accept that my way doesn't always have to be the way, right? Sometimes that's hard.

Sometimes that's hard. It's hard to give up tradition. It's hard to give up, you know, things that we really, really love. But if we consider others as more important than ourselves, then for the sake of the gospel, I think those things are possible.

[28 : 00] That's what we see is that unity only comes through humility. So he says it positively four ways. He says think the same way, right? Not that we're supposed to have the same opinions. We can have different opinions.

But that we think the same way about the essentials of the faith, that we know who Jesus Christ is, that we serve him as Lord, and that that over-prioritizes that over everything else, that we prioritize that over everything else.

Our opinions aren't going to lead us to disunity. Think the same way. Have the same love. So we have to have a love rooted in Christ Jesus, meaning share the love of Christ.

Love the things that he loves. And love well in the name of Christ, that we're united in spirit. Meaning we're one church, not factioned out with, you know, camps who think that group isn't very fun to be around, and that group is one.

No, we're one church. We're one church. And an intent on one purpose. Literally think the one thing. We think the one thing, meaning we have the same goal, which is to advance the gospel for the glory of Jesus Christ.

[29 : 07] That's the goal of this church, is to represent Christ in such a way that we reach a lost and dying world, that we can share the gospel faithfully, and that we'll see the gospel advance through the ministry and work of God's word through the church.

That's the goal, right? That we would see the lost come to faith. That's the purpose. He says it negatively. He says don't be selfish, right?

That's a hard thing. Like you don't have to teach a kid how to be selfish. We all grow up knowing selfishness, right? Don't be selfish. And it's kind of a callback too. You remember earlier when he said that there was people who preached with selfish ambitions, that they preached from wrong motives?

So that church at Philippi got this letter, and they were like, there's people who preach with selfish motives, and now he's telling this church, by the way, you guys need to stop being selfish. I think they would remember that. I think they'd remember that.

Stop being selfish. And he says don't be conceited, meaning don't seek glory that isn't yours. Quit being a glory thief. Give the glory to God. But doing these things produces unity in the body of Christ.

[30 : 18] The ultimate method to attain genuine unity in the church is through each person being humble. We have to compete to be like Moses. Now Moses wrote this himself, so you've got to wonder a little bit.

But he said that he was the most humble person who ever lived. We need to compete to be like Moses. Moses, I'm going to out-humble you. Can you do that? I think we should.

I'm going to be more humble. No, your way. No, your way, right? You have the say. We need to be humble. John MacArthur said it well. He said, The unity that produces joy in the church is only possible if you are the least important person in your life.

So humility absolutely leads to unity. And if unity is proof that we walk worthy of the gospel of Christ, then that should be our goal.

And I'm not preaching this to tell us, tell you, to tell me, to tell us that we're not unified. I think this church has great unity. I think it's a beautiful thing. I'm telling you this as a warning so that we don't fall down a path of disunity and discord.

[31 : 25] Right? That's what, we don't want that. We don't want to be divisive. We don't want to be disunified. We want to be unified together. So as I'm closing out, I just want every person here to consider where you are, your role in the church.

Are you a leader of a leadership team? Are you on a leadership team? Are you a member who's been here for a long time? Are you a new member? Are you somebody who hasn't even given their life to Christ, trying to figure this whole thing out?

We as a church have a goal, which is to preserve the unity that God has for us. It's like in John that Clint read, John chapter 17, Jesus' prayer was for the unity of his followers.

That we would be a unified people so that we can represent him well. So that we can reflect the unity that's in the Godhead. Christ, the Son, God the Father, the Holy Spirit, they're in perfect unity. And our church has the opportunity to reflect that unity. So we have to stand firm for the unity of this church. God willing, we'll meet new people and we'll bring some new people into this church.

[32 : 29] We might hear some new ideas. And guess what? Unity has to be the focus no matter what. Stand firm on the essentials of the faith. We're not going to rock one way or the other there, right?

The essentials are the essentials. But where things aren't essential, there might need to be some bend. Because unity is the goal. We have to contend together.

There's a world outside who would love to see, there's an enemy who would love to see the same division that is, you know, prominent in our country. Prominent in politics.

Prominent in whatever. The enemy would love to see that disunity in the church. And we have to stand firm and contend together for the faith of the gospel so that those disunifying ideas don't

wreck our church.

Don't wreck the church that God has led us to. We have to make unity our primary aim. So every single one of us has to do our part to protect the unity of the church.

[33 : 29] All right? And if you have not begun a relationship with Christ, the first step to preserving unity is to give your life to him who died for you. Be a part of the unity of the church.

Maybe you've been visiting and you want to join a local church. Like I said, join this church and partner with us in unity. Partner with us as we stand firm. So we're going to have a time of invitation. And as I stand down here, please come talk with me. Come join the church. Join us in the fight for unity today. Maybe you want to publicly profess your faith through believer's baptism.

Which, by the way, obedience is absolutely essential to unity. So if you would like to do that today, then please come forward. Let's schedule a time for you to be baptized. I'm going to pray for us.

We're going to stand together and we'll sing a final song. God, thank you for who you are. Thank you for your word. God, thank you that you have given us the perfect example of unity.

[34 : 33] In you, the triune God. Lord, let us be a unified body who reflects your love to a lost and dying world. We love you and praise you. It's in Jesus' name that we pray.

Amen. Amen.