

HOW TO LIVE WORTHY OF THE GOSPEL

Philippians 1:27-30

By Andy Manning

The title of this sermon is “How to Live Worthy of the Gospel.”

Those words come straight from our text today in Philippians 1:27-30.

One of my favorite movies is “Saving Private Ryan,” with Tom Hanks and Matt Damon. It’s a movie set in World War II. Matt Damon plays the character of a paratrooper, Private First Class James Francis Ryan. He and his three brothers, four in all, were all fighting in World War II. But all three of his brothers died. When this came to the attention of army, they sent Captain John Miller, played by Tom Hanks, and a small band of soldiers on a special mission to save Private Ryan and to send him home. The army did not want Mrs. Ryan to lose all four of her sons in the war. And so somewhere toward the end of the movie (spoiler), Captain John Miller dies in the effort to save Private Ryan. **And as he is dying he tells Private Ryan, “Earn this. Earn this.”**

What do you think he meant? I think he meant, “Live your life in a way that is worthy of my sacrifice. I gave up my life to save yours, so make the most of your life; be good man; don’t waste your life. **A great sacrifice was made to save your life, so live your life greatly.**”

I think Captain John Miller was saying, “I gave my life to so you could live. Don’t make me regret it by becoming a criminal and hurting people. Don’t make me regret it by wasting your health on drugs and alcohol. Don’t make me regret it by be depressed all the time and not enjoying your life. Don’t make me regret it by not being a good man and striving to make a contribution. Live your life in a way that is appropriate for someone who was rescued by the sacrifice of another.”

I think **the apostle Paul** said something similar in Philippians 1:27 when he commanded the Philippian Christians to live worthy of the gospel.

The word “worthily” just means “appropriately.”

Live in a way that is appropriate for someone who believes the gospel.

I think Paul was saying, “Christ died for you, to save you from sin, and Satan and hell. So live like it. Live in a way that is appropriate for someone who has been rescued from sin and Satan, and hell.”

Let’s read Paul’s words in **Philippians 1:27-30** (CSB 2017).

27 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, 28 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. 29 For it has been granted to you on Christ’s behalf not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, 30 since you are engaged in the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I have.

“As citizens of heaven, live your life worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

You have been saved by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So live in a way that is worthy, in a way that is appropriate for someone who has been rescued by the sacrifice of Christ.

Live your life in a way that is appropriate for someone who has been rescued from sin, and Satan, and hell.

Notice that Paul calls them “**citizens of heaven.**”

He says the same thing in **Philippians 3:20.** “But our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly wait for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

The city of Philippi was a very important city in the ancient world.

It was in the province of Macedonia, or Greece, but it was a part of the Roman empire.

And the Romans gave Philippi the status of a Roman Colony, with all the rights and privileges of an Italian city.

This means it wasn't under the authority of the Macedonian provincial leadership; it was under the authority of Rome.

So the citizens of Philippi were automatically Roman citizens; they could purchase, own, or transfer property. They could file lawsuits in Roman courts. They were exempted from paying poll and land taxes. And they were under Roman law, rather than Macedonian law. They were very proud of their status as Roman citizens.

But here Paul was saying that they were also citizens of heaven.

And that's what we are. We are citizens of heaven.

So Christians have a **dual citizenship**. We are citizens of our earthly home – the United States of America; and we are also citizens of heaven. We are called to be both.

In **Mark 12:17** Jesus said, “Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

So we are called to be good citizens of our earthly country, the USA, and good citizens of our heavenly country – heaven.

But more than that, we need to remember that our highest allegiance is reserved for our heavenly country.

We can be patriots of the USA, but our primary goal is not to make America great again; our primary goal is to glorify God.

We will obey the laws of our land, but when the law of the land comes into conflict with the law of heaven, we will obey heaven, even if it means giving up our life.

So Paul is telling us to live in a manner that is worthy of a citizen of heaven –

live in a way that is appropriate for someone who is going to spend eternity in heaven with God.

Live in a manner that is worthy of the gospel.

Live in a way that is appropriate for someone who has been rescued by the gospel of Jesus Christ. How do we do that? Paul give us four ways to live worthy of the gospel.

4 Ways to Live Worthy of the Gospel

1. Stand firm.

Look at verse 27 again. “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....”

What does it mean to stand firm?

Merriam-Webster defines “stand firm” as “to refuse to change a decision, position, etc.”

“The judge stood firm in her ruling.”

It means don’t change your decision to be a fully devoted follower of Christ.

Don’t change your direction. Keep going in the right direction. Don’t fall away. Don’t backslide.

When I use the term “fall away,” I’m not talking about losing your salvation. Once you’re saved you’re always saved (Jn 10:27-19). You can’t fall away from salvation.

But there are three ways that you can fall as a Christian.

You can fall from holy living.

God has called us to be holy – morally blameless; to imitate God’s character.

But many Christians fall from the path of holy living into sin – things like adultery, and pornography, and pre-marital sex, and lust, and stealing, and drugs and alcohol. Don’t fall into sin. Stand firm in holiness.

1 Peter 1:15 says, “But as the one who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct.”

You can fall from sound doctrine.

I’ve seen many Christians start out on the right path, but then get pulled away by false teaching.

There was a man named **Corey** that used to be a member of our church; he played in our praise team; he was involved in Home Group. But some of his family members got pulled into a cult – an apostolic church that teaches that you can lose your salvation; you have to follow all sorts of unbiblical rules like men wearing long-sleeve shirts and pants, and women not wearing makeup and always wearing long skirts, and not cutting their hair. They teach that the Trinity is a false doctrine. And they teach that you have to be baptized in the name of Jesus only and speak in tongues in order to be saved. And I’m sure there’s more to than that. But Corey got pulled in. He ended up leaving our church, and orthodox Christianity for a cult.

Don't fall into false teaching. Stand firm in sound doctrine.

Be like elders are supposed to be, as Paul described them in **Titus 1:9**, “holding to the faithful message as taught, so that he will be able both to encourage with sound teaching and to refute those who contradict it.”

You can fall away from church.

I've also seen many Christians fall away from church participation.

In most cases it's because they convince themselves that they are busier than everybody else, and therefore they just don't have time for church.

But the truth is that they just believe it's more important to do other things than church on Sunday.

But in many cases Christians fall away from church because of a bad experience. A church leader had a moral failure. There was a church split. Someone in the church was mean to them. And so they stopped going to church. This problem is as old as the Bible.

Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “24 And let us watch out for one another to provoke love and good works, 25 not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.” Don't fall away from church. Stand firm in the church.

Standing firm is a command that is especially important for kids and students.

George Barna published a study three years ago in 2014 that found that 60 percent of 20-somethings who had been churched at one point during their teen years are now spiritually disengaged. They do not attend church, pray, or read their Bible. In other words, most kids don't stand firm after they graduate from high school. Don't let that be you. Stand firm. Stand firm in holiness, stand firm in sound doctrine, and stand firm in church.

2. Be unified in the church.

Let's look at **Philippians 1:27** again. "27 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."

Paul says to stand firm **in one spirit**. That means that we need to have the same purpose.

And he says to stand firm in one accord, **contending together**. To contend together is an athletic term. The Greek word is *synathleō*. It means "to wrestle in company with; to seek jointly; to strive together for; to strive together as a team; to struggle along with someone in an athletic contest."

So to have one spirit means we need to have the same purpose in our church.

What's our purpose? The Great Commission. Disciple making. To reach the lost and make mature disciples.

But that's not all. We need **to contend together**.

It's possible to have the same purpose but not work together.

For example, FedEx and UPS both have the same purpose – to make money. But they aren't working together; they are competing.

In the church, we need to have the same purpose, to make disciples; but we also need to work together. We need to work as a team. But that's not all.

We also need to be **in one accord**.

I like how the NIV translates this phrase. The 2011 edition says, “Contending together as one.” The 1984 edition is even better. It says, “contending as one man.”

In other words, not only do we need to have the same purpose; not only do we need to work together; but we need to be so unified that it’s like we one person, and all the different parts of the body are working together in complete and perfect harmony to accomplish a goal.

Order and organization.

Paul is commanding us to be a unified church.

That’s the appropriate way, the worthy way for Christians to behave.

Why is unity so important? Because if we can’t get along, then we can’t get things done.

The church is not a cruise ship; it’s a rescue ship; a war ship. We are on a very important mission. It’s the most important mission on earth. But if we can’t get along, then we can’t get things done. We won’t be able to accomplish the Great Commission.

The fact that Paul emphasizes unity has **two implications.**

First, we need to work together to accomplish the Great Commission. God doesn’t use individuals; He uses churches.

Second, unity is hard to maintain; otherwise there would be no need for this command.

Unity is something we need to fight for.

That’s why Paul said in **Ephesians 4:3**, “making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

What is unity? Unity really involves two things.

It involves getting along. The absence of strife, conflict, fighting, division.

But it also involves striving together for the same purpose.

Paul is not merely commanding us to avoid fighting; he's saying we also need to be working together; all hands on deck; everybody participating and working on the mission of the church.

How can we be a unified church? Let me give you **seven quick principles**.

- i. Be a raving fan in public, and an honest critic in private.
- ii. Don't push your personal convictions onto others. Don't confuse general commands with personal convictions.
- iii. Have respect for boundaries. Let us others say "No."
- iv. Have the courage to say "No." Or you will burn out and resent others.
- v. Communicate quickly.
- vi. Give others permission to be imperfect. Don't be shocked when someone sins, and be quick to forgive.
- vii. Follow the leaders. The only time God permits rebellion against authority is when a decision is illegal or sinful.

I've experienced a divided church, and it's not fun. I've lost some close friends, some friends that were very important to me, all because of disunity.

3. Evangelize the lost.

Let's look at **Philippians 1:27** again. "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."

In other words, we need to be working together to lead people to put their faith in the gospel. That's called evangelism.

Evangelism is sharing the good news (gospel) of Jesus Christ with people in a way that they can get in on it if they want to.

Now this just makes sense, right? It's only appropriate that those who have been rescued would in turn help to rescue others. That's what God has called us to. He rescued us; and now He wants us to rescue others. It's been said that those who are on their way to heaven will not be content to go there alone.

Evangelism needs to be our priority. Why? Two reasons.

First, it is more important than anything else. We are talking about eternity. Without Christ people will spend eternity in hell.

Second, it is urgent. Millions of people on earth die every day, and many of them will die tomorrow, and the next day. We don't have time to waste. We need to strive to reach as many with the gospel as quickly as possible, while there is still time.

Evangelism is something that our church needs to be working on. And it's something each of us needs to be doing individually.

Jesus said in **Luke 19:10**, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost." That's what we need to be doing.

4. Be willing to suffer persecution for Christ.

Let's read the entire passage again, starting with verse 27.

27 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, 28 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. 29 For it has been granted to you on Christ’s behalf not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, 30 since you are engaged in the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I have.

In **verse 28** Paul says that we shouldn’t be “frightened by our opponents.”

Our opponents are those who would discourage us in any way from living for Christ.

What does it mean to not be frightened by our opponents?

If you live for Christ, it’s possible that people will persecute you. They might laugh at you; they might get mad at you; they might exclude you; they might fire you; they might sue you; they might try to physically harm you; they might try to put you in jail; they might try to kill you. This has been happening to Christians since the very beginning. If you live for Christ, you might get persecuted.

Paul is saying don’t let the possibility or the threat of persecution stop you from living for Christ.

Serve Christ even if it means persecution.

Serve Christ even if it means you’ll get in trouble.

Serve Christ even if it means you might suffer.

Don’t serve Christ up until the point of suffering and sacrifice and persecution. Serve Christ in spite of suffering, sacrifice, and persecution.

Don't let the enemies of Christ keep you from honoring and serving Christ.

And Paul says when you do this it will be a sign for the enemies of Christ, and a sign for Christians.

First, when the enemies of Christ see your perseverance in the midst of persecution, they will be convicted that the gospel is true, and that they are headed for destruction.

And second, when you persevere in the midst of persecution, when you serve Christ even though it means suffering, it will be a sign to you that your faith is genuine.

Have you ever seen the movie Lone Survivor? It's about four Navy Seals who were dropped from a helicopter behind enemy lines for a high-risk mission. All was going well until some local shepherds spotted them and told on them. Before long they were surrounded by dozens of enemy soldiers, and then got into a fierce battle. With one soldier dead and two wounded, Lt. Michael Murphy knew that their only chance was to call for help. So he moved into open ground in order to make the call, knowing that it would cost him his life. As he was making the call, he was shot in the back and collapsed. But he pulled himself up, finished the call, and then kept fighting. Ultimately he was killed, but his act of sacrifice is what saved his teammate, Marcus Luttrell.

Just as Lt. Murphy was willing to be shot to save his teammates, you and I need to be willing to suffer persecution in order to save our world for Christ.

If he wouldn't have made that sacrifice, they would have all died.

And if we aren't willing to suffer persecution, there are many people for Christ that we will never reach.

CONCLUSION

Live worthy of the gospel.

You are citizens of heaven. Live in a way that is appropriate for those who have been rescued by Christ.

Stand firm.

Be unified in the church.

Evangelize the lost.

And be willing to suffer persecution for Christ.