

**Live as Citizens of Heaven**  
**Philippians 1:27-30**  
**Sunday, November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024**  
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## Scripture

### Philippians 1:27–30

*[27] 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, [28] 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. [29] 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, [30] engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.*

## Pray

### Introduction

I want to read you a list of activities that many of us currently do or have done in the past. This list includes:

- Voting in elections
- Supporting national sports teams (USA Basketball Team)
- Standing for the national anthem
- Flying our nations flag
- Joining the military and defending our country
- Celebrating national holidays
- Respecting national symbols
- Paying your taxes
- Buying local or American made products
- Volunteering our time

I realize that only a few people in here have probably served in the military, and if you have, we are so grateful for your service.

But most of us have probably done the rest of these, and in general, still do.

The question is why? Why do we do these things or why do we feel compelled to do them?

It's because we have a sense that it is our civic duty as Americans to do these things. We are Citizens of the United States and so we believe that we need to live out our citizenship.

To which I say, “Yes and amen!” Continue to do those things.

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However, as we work through the book of Philippians, we are given a picture of a different kind of citizenship. One that doesn’t come from being born in America, but rather comes from being born again by Christ.

**What I’m talking about is a heavenly citizenship.** Which not only comes with its own set of activities and responsibilities, but for Paul and the Philippians, is meant to supersede their Roman citizenship, and for us, is supposed to far outweigh our citizenship as Americans.

It’s a citizenship that we have already seen in action as Paul talked about their partnership in the gospel in verses 4-7, and as we have walked through Paul’s situation in Rome in verses 12-26.

But now, in 27-30, Paul, gives us our first direct reference to this heavenly citizenship, where he begins to give us, a clearer picture of what it looks like to live out this citizenship, as a church, in our world.

So this morning, we are going to begin to unpack this heavenly identity. What does it mean and what does it look like to be a citizen of heaven?

And it’s my hope that we will begin to develop a sense of **eternal patriotism**. Meaning, that we will be more excited about living and working together as heavenly citizens, than we are about our earthly heritage.

So let’s start by looking at our citizenship and what Paul says about it. The first thing that Paul says is:

**1. Above all, live a citizens of heaven...**

**Philippians 1:27a**

**[27a] Only (above all) let your manner of life be (behave as a citizen) worthy of the gospel of Christ,**

The Apostle Paul has spent the last 15 verses talking about his situation in prison. How it’s advancing the gospel, how the believers in Rome are becoming bold in their faith, how he will rejoice whether he lives or dies at the hands of Caesar, and that he believes he will come to Philippians again.

And in verses 25-26 he believes that his coming will be for their **“progress and joy in the faith, ...so that they will glory or boast in Jesus.”**

**He wants to come to the Philippians so they will grow in Christ, rejoice in Christ, and boast or glory in Christ.**

But in verse 27 he switches from what he is going to do and begins to tell them what they are supposed to do so that this progress, joy, and boasting can be a reality.

And he begins with the word “Only” which is an emphatic term that actually means **“Above all.”** This is Paul’s way of telling the Philippians what should be at the top of their list in importance.

You may have said something like this to one of your kids. You may have said, “Above all, this is the thing I need you to get done.” Or, you might say, “This is the one thing I need you to understand” and you give them what you believe is the most important lesson or direction. **This is what Paul was doing with the Philippians.**

But then there is this phrase *“let your manner of life be...”* which in Greek is one-word, *pōlitēuōmai* (*pol-it-yoo-om-ahee*), which points not just to their behavior in general, but to their behavior as a citizen.

So Paul wants them to understand that what is most important is how they are living out their citizenship.

But this isn’t Paul telling them to be good citizens within the Roman Empire. Remember, the Philippians, like Paul, are being persecuted by fellow Roman citizens because they believe that Jesus is Lord, and not Caesar.

And in the minds of an average Roman citizen these believers in Philippi are being anything but good citizens. So Paul can’t be saying behave like a good Roman citizen.

Instead, when we turn to Philippians 3:20, it becomes clear that the citizenship that Paul has in mind is our heavenly citizenship. As he writes:

***[20] But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,***

If the Philippians are to grow in Christ, rejoice in Christ, and boast in Christ, even in the midst of serious persecution then **“Above all else, they need to live as citizen of heaven.”**

Application:

Now, most of you, if you are 30 or older, remember exactly where you were on September 11, 2001. The day the twin towers were destroyed when terrorists crashed planes into them.

I remember I was a sophomore in college and all the guys on our floor packed into a room, and on this little 12 inch tv, we watched the towers fall.

But one of the things that I remember most from that time period was a renewed sense of patriotism as people talked of Freedom, being a Nation United, and joining in the fight to win the War on Terror.

A certain song from that time encapsulated those feelings this way: (trigger warning there is a little bit of a bad word) ***Hey Uncle Sam, put your name at the top of his list, And the Statue of Liberty started shakin' her fist, And the eagle will fly man, it's gonna be hell, When you hear mother freedom start ringin' her bell, And it feels like the whole wide world is raining down on you, Oh, brought to you courtesy of the red white and blue.***

You feel it, right? That sense of patriotic fever rising up in your veins and you just wanna say 'Merica!'

And I don't ever want you to think that this is wrong. Loving our nation, and what God has given to us is a good thing.

But we also need to realize that our earthly citizenship, as good as it may seem, is secondary, and it pales in comparison to the reality that we are now citizens of a perfect and vast heavenly kingdom.

A kingdom that has been freely given to us through Christ and his powerful sin-breaking and life-giving work on the cross.

Brothers and sisters, this world is not our home and eternal life was not nor will not be given to us by any earthly man or institution.

Rather, our primary calling and purpose, is to view ourselves as citizens of heaven, and to live as if that citizenship is far greater, more important, and more glorious than our earthly one.

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But how do we do that? How do we live out our heavenly citizenship as we live within the framework of our earthy one.

The answer to that question is going to be what Paul unpacks throughout the rest of this passage and book. **However, he starts by telling us live a life worthy of the gospel of Christ.**

This is our 2<sup>nd</sup> point for this morning.

## **2. Above all, live as citizens of heaven who reflect the greatness of Christ.**

**Philippians 1:27a**

***[27a] Only (above all) let your manner of life be (behave as a citizen) worthy of (in accordance with) the gospel of Christ,***

Now right away we see that the word **“worthy”** means to **“live in accordance with.”** So as heavenly citizens we are to live a life that is **“in accordance with”** or is **“in line with”** the gospel of Christ.

This definition is important because I think there is a common mistake that we make when we see that word **“worthy.”**

We can begin to believe that “worthy” means that we somehow have to live a life that is **“deserving”** of Christ.

Oh sure, Jesus saved us, by grace, but now we need to work hard to make sure that we are deserving of that grace.

In fact, I used to think this way. I remember early on in college that I was struggling with my faith. On the one hand I believed that I was saved by Jesus, but on the other hand, I also believed that I was the one who chose him, and I was the one who was continually doing the work to earn my faith.

As you can imagine, this led me down a path where I doubted my faith, and probably prayed to receive Christ like 20 times. But I also struggled to worship Christ because I really thought my salvation, or at least my continuing to be saved was up to me, and so I wondered why I need to praise Jesus when it felt like I was the one doing it.

But God, in his goodness, didn't leave me there, and brought the full weight of Ephesians 2:8-9 to bear upon my life. As Paul writes:

***[8] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast.***

God showed me that I was not saved by works, nor did my continuing in the faith depend on works. Because it was purely the grace of God that saved me from beginning to end, so that all of my boasting would be in Christ and not in myself.

So when Paul calls us to live as “heavenly citizens worthy of the gospel of Christ” he is not telling us to earn our salvation, but he is telling us to live a life **“that is in line with or agrees with” Christ.**

We need to live a life that reflects what Jesus has done in us.

And we do this, as **“citizens of heaven”** so that Jesus would be seen in us and through us and would look great. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17:

***[17] Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold (look and see), the new has come.***

He also writes in Phil 2:14-15:

***[14] Do all things without grumbling or disputing, [15] that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,***

Finally, he said in Philippians 1:20:

***[20] as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.***

**If we are heavenly citizens, then the greatness of Christ is meant to be seen in what we do and in how we live.** This is true for Philippians, even as they deal with persecution in Philippi, and it's true for us, even as we live in a world that doesn't care about Christ or the gospel.

Application:

Now there's a famous quote by the psychiatrist Carl Jung (Yun) that says, **"You are what you do, not what you say you'll do."**

Or to put it another way **"actions speak louder than words."**

I just saw a Facebook reel where a dad was at a major league baseball game and a flyball came his way. And he was so committed to catching that ball that he literally let go of his baby girl to catch the ball.

Now he was also able to catch his little girl before she hit the ground, but that is a good example of what I am talking about.

In that moment, it was clear that the dad valued catching that ball more than he did the safety of his child.

**Our actions say a lot about who we are, what we believe, and what we value.**

So what do our actions say about what we value most? Or what do our actions reflect?

Do our actions reflect a life that, above all other things, values security, reputation, money, or comfort? Or do our lives show the world that Jesus is our all-satisfying treasure?

Because at the end of the day, if we want to grow, rejoice, and boast in Christ, then we need to be citizens of his kingdom, who see Jesus as our greatest treasure, and live in our world as if that's actually true.

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So now we have what could be called a mission statement from Paul. **Above all, live as citizens of heaven who reflect the greatness of Christ.**

But now he is going to get into the *brass tacks* or *the details* of what he actually wants us to do.

### 3. Citizens of heaven must be unified in the work of the gospel.

#### Philippians 1:27-28a

***[27] 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 (pneuma: The Holy Spirit), with one mind (as one person) striving side by side (wrestle or fight) for the faith of the gospel, [28a] and not frightened in anything by your opponents.***

Now, we have already seen the importance of the gospel in this book. Paul talks about their partnership in the gospel in verse 5, their being partakers with him in his defense and confirmation of the gospel in verse 7, about his circumstances advancing the gospel in verses 12-14, his desire for Christ (the gospel) to be proclaimed no matter what in verse 18, and that we are called to live in accordance with the gospel in the first part of verse 27.

And Paul is giving it this place of prominence because he knows that it is the power of God for salvation. As we read last week in Rom. 1:16:

***[16] For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.***

It is this gospel of Christ crucified that has saved the Philippians, and it is the gospel that has made them citizens of heaven whose primary calling is to make Jesus look great.

And according to Paul, the way they are to do this is by **Standing firm in the Holy Spirit, as one person**, as they (**fight**) alongside each other for the faith of the gospel.

There are a couple of important things to note here:

First, even though your Bible's probably don't capitalize **spirit** in verse 27, a really good argument has been made by Gordon Fee and others that this Greek word *pneuma* is referring to the Holy Spirit.

Because in most instances, in the New Testament it is referring to the Holy Spirit, and 4 verses later in Philippians 2:1 he uses the same word to refer to the Holy Spirit when he talks about their "participation in the Spirit."

This is important. Because when Paul tells the Philippians to stand firm in one Spirit, with one mind (as one person) he is calling them to be **unified together**.

And unity isn't something that they can just manifest through their own strength or intelligence, but it has been bought for them by Christ, and is made possible by the Spirit living within them.

Mini Application:

Now look, I don't want to continually to bring up how hard the last year has been for us as a church, but for many of us, like the Philippians, we have experienced loss, infighting, and disunity here at LEFC.

And now that the transition is over, there is still this lingering question: How do we recover from what has happened? How do we heal? How do we move forward as a unified body of Christ?

I can tell you that I don't have all the answers at this point, but I do have the most important answer. **We need to be a people that get on our knees and pray, asking God to heal wounds and to unite us as his church.**

Because unity, can't be faked, forced, or created by us. Instead, it comes only through the power of the Spirit working it within us as he knits our minds and hearts together.

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So that's the first thing we need to see.

Secondly, I put the words "**wrestle or fight**" next to the phrase "***striving side by side.***" I did this because the Greek word is *sunathleo*, which is a military term that refers to fighting alongside one another in battle.

So Paul is giving them a very vivid picture of what they are supposed to do as heavenly citizens.

**They are supposed to be united by the Spirit of God for the singular purpose of striving or fighting alongside each other so that the gospel spreads, just like it did for Paul.**

These words were so important for the Philippians to hear and believe, because they were so prone to fighting with one another because of persecution. But Paul's words were meant to remind them that they were not each other's enemies.

Rather they are soldiers and comrades, who are united in Christ for the purpose of fighting against evil in the heavenly places, by expanding the kingdom of God through the advancement the gospel.

As Paul writes in Ephesians 6:12:



***[12] For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.***

Application:

I think this is something that the American church, as a whole, has been struggling with for a long time.

We have forgotten our primary purpose and calling: Which is to be heavenly citizens who make Jesus look great.

But with that, we have also forgotten the primary way that God has called us to do that as a church. As Jesus said in Matthew 28:19-20:

***[19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."***

We are to be a church and a people that goes and makes disciples of Christ in the world. This is the primary work that God has given to us as his people.

And the way we are to do that is through living and proclaiming the gospel. The reality of Christ crucified and what he has done to redeem a people for himself. As Paul writes in Romans 10:14-15:

***[14] How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? [15] And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"***

**This is our work church.**

To live and tell others about Christ, both in word and deed, so that they would know him, love him, follow him, and tell others about him.

To be followers of Jesus, who make more followers of Jesus, who make more followers of Jesus. **This is our great commission call as a church.**

And I believe that God is calling us to be a church that takes this seriously.

That we would see new believers coming to faith, disciples being made, and that leaders, teachers, pastors, church planters, evangelists, prayer warriors, and missionaries would be raised up from within our body and sent out to plant new churches, so that the greatness and glory of Christ would spread in our region and across the globe.

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And that we would do this work with boldness and with joy, not shrink back in fear.

Because we have the promise that no matter what happens to us, even if people hate us or hurt us, it is all part of God's kingdom building and gospel advancing plan that he will finish when he returns.

This brings us to our last point for this morning.

#### **4. As Citizens of heaven, rejoice in suffering.**

##### **Philippians 1:28b-30**

**[28b] This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. [29] For it has been granted to you (given to us as favor or grace) that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, [30] engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.**

Again, Paul is telling the Philippians that they are to stand unified in the Spirit, as one person, as they strive together in proclaiming the gospel.

And when they do this, it will keep them from being frightened by their enemies in Philippi, and it will also be a clear sign to these enemies that eternal judgement and destruction are coming.

#### **Our strong witness for Christ is a window into the eternity and judgement to come.**

But on the other side, there uncommon, Christ bought, Holy Spirit wrought unity and gospel work will be a genuine sign of their faith, even as they endure persecution at the hands of these Roman citizens.

However, this isn't just random persecution that happened to come out of nowhere. Rather, Paul is telling them that this persecution is happening because God, for their good, has given it to them.

They have received **God's favor and grace** not only to believe in Christ, but also suffer for Christ. Meaning, that suffering is apart of God's plan to help them grow, rejoice, and boast in Christ.

#### Application:

Now, we've already dealt with this in previous weeks. How God uses trials to advance the gospel, encourage other believers, how he uses it to transform our hearts, and how this will produce a joy-filled confidence in us, even in the face of life and death. **That was everything we talked about in the past two weeks.**

But I do believe that in order for this joy to become a reality for us, especially in the face of suffering, we need to see ourselves, above all other things, as citizens of heaven.

People who have been ransomed by God through Christ's death on the cross, and have been given a new and forever home.

And to see it as our duty, as heavenly citizens, to live for the purpose of making Christ look great. **This should be our singular focus in all areas of our lives.**

Which means that our greatest work, as a people and as a church, is to live and share the gospel right in the places that God has put us.

Believing that he has graciously given us the work and the trials that go with it, so that his gospel would advance.

And when this becomes our singular focus and our greatest work, we will be able to endure the greatest struggles as we experience the greatest joys. **Because, people will come to faith, disciples will be made, and the name of Christ lifted high.**

**Let's pray.**