

Philippians 1:21-30

Section 1: 1:21-26 – Living for Christ

In light of the importance of the gospel in the life of Paul we come to Philippians 1:21-26.

Philippians 1:21-24

21 For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 Now if I live on in the flesh, this means fruitful work for me; and I don't know which one I should choose. 23 I am torn between the two. I long to depart and be with Christ—which is far better— 24 but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.

Live for Christ

Paul is continuing to express his love for God and the spread of the gospel to all people. To live means honoring Christ with fruitful labor, and to die means possessing Christ in the fullest sense. He found a love greater than life itself, and this vision of being with Christ inspired him to endure.

Paul speaks of being conflicted between two possibilities...life and death. How can anyone see death as gain? What is there to gain in death? God Himself. Paul understands that being with God is our greatest treasure. A relationship with our heavenly Father is our most valuable possession. Paul's longing for death was, in reality, a longing for a more intimate, open, and total relationship with Christ Himself. Such a relationship could only occur after death.

Paul met Jesus and was changed. He was previously a religious person – an extremely religious person – but didn't know Christ. When he traded religion for the righteousness of Jesus and the new life that Jesus gives, he found life. Consequently, everything else was inferior to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ.

Everyone wants to live, and everyone will die. But there's only one way to have a life worth living and a death worth dying, and that is to look to the One who conquered death, the One Paul desired to see above all things. If you see Him as He is, you too, will say, "To be with Christ is far better."

Philippians 1:25-26

25 Since I am persuaded of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that, because of my coming to you again, your boasting in Christ Jesus may abound.

Growing in Faith

Paul had a purpose for wanting to stay here on earth; he desires for the church to "progress" with joy in the faith. The word "progress" was used earlier of the "advancement" of the gospel message (1:12). As the Philippians matured in their understanding of Christ, their joy in the faith would deepen and would be encouraged.

Paul's mission was to help other believers advance/progress in their faith. All believers should desire to see all other believers progress in the faith. How do we help other's progress in faith? Love, accountability, speaking wisdom, caring one another's burdens, reaching out, serve alongside...just to name a few ways we can help each other progress in our faith.

Discussion Questions

- ❖ Fill in the blank: "My life revolves around _____." What are you living for?
- ❖ Do you allow your trials to cause you to pout or pray?
- ❖ How could Paul view death as "far better"? Do you view death this way? Explain.

- ❖ For what purpose did Paul say he would remain on the earth?
- ❖ How can we help each other “progress” in the faith? Will you actively help someone this week?

Section 2: 1:27-30

Where do you call home? Are you building for this world or the world to come? Verses 27-30 remind us our citizenship is in heaven.

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.

Citizens of the Kingdom

The phrase “citizens of heaven” draws us back to the words of Jesus we meditated on in the sermon on the mount: “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matt. 6:33). Our focus is the kingdom of God not the kingdom of man. We see Paul embrace this truth in 1:21: “for me, to live is Christ.” Having the right focus (on the Kingdom of God) is vital in living worthy of the gospel.

Paul uses this political word (citizen) only here in Philippians. He probably uses it because of the Philippians’ pride over their Roman citizenship. If someone visited Philippi, they would have been reminded of Rome. It was a little colony of Rome. Whenever someone visits a Christian congregation and observes their way of life, they should be reminded of Christ’s Kingdom. Churches are little outposts of the kingdom of God. Our love, life, liberty, humility, and other values of the kingdom should be on display. We should seek to make known in the present what life in the future will be like.

Just as Roman citizens enjoyed certain privileges and responsibilities, so do kingdom citizens – much greater privileges and responsibilities. We have the unspeakable privilege of being part of the Kingdom of God. Paul reminds us of the gospel that brought us into the kingdom: “He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son He loves” (Col. 1:13). And we have the awesome responsibility of living out the gospel and making known the gospel. As kingdom citizens, let’s not only live in such a way as to make the King known, but let’s remember that this world isn’t our home. We can move to India and leave it all behind because we treasure Christ and because our citizenship is in heaven.

Live Worthy of the Gospel

Paul is making one very important, serious, and comprehensive point, and we should pay attention to it. What is it? He exhorts the Philippians to live “worthy of the gospel of Christ.” Believers are making a statement about the gospel not only with their lips but also with their lives.

Paul has already filled his report with references to the gospel (1:5, 12, 16, 18). Now he turns to exhort the Philippians about keeping the gospel central in their lives. The gospel should shape our lives, and it should be on our lips. This type of life flows out of our identity as kingdom citizens.

What is the basic meaning to “living a life worthy of the gospel”? We are to live in a manner that demonstrates we think the gospel of Christ is the supreme treasure. It’s the highest value. When you walk and talk as citizens of Heaven saved by grace through Christ, people should notice you are different. Our lifestyles as individuals and as a church body should be noticeably different than the world around us.

Look at the second half of verse 27. He says, “...*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,* ...” Are we to live a life worthy of the gospel alone or together? Unity is necessary. Contending side by side for the faith of the gospel together demonstrates we’re living as citizens worthy of the gospel.

This is the perfect time to note Paul is not writing to individuals; he’s writing to a local church body like ours. Essentially, there’s a direct connection between walking worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ and being unified, almost like it’s not even possible to do this by yourself. It’s like Paul is saying, “You Philippians as a whole, be unified.

What does “living a life worthy of the gospel” practically look like? In verse 27 and 28 Paul tells us three marks of living worthily of the gospel:

1. Verse 27: *standing firm in one spirit, in one accord*:
 - a. This is a battle. Standing firm carries a wartime type of imagery. Much like those that have “stood their ground” in battle, we must stand our ground maintaining unity as a body. Which means that unity will not come easy. We must take a stand and fight for unity. The unity of the church is worth the fight...it’s worth the sacrifice...it’s worth standing firm against the attacks of the enemy.
2. Verse 27: *contending together for the faith of the gospel*:
 - a. What is the “faith” of the gospel? The faith of the gospel is the truth of the gospel and the doctrine that flows from it. We are to fight for the truth of the gospel. Jesus coming as the Son of God, living and dying according to the Scriptures, being buried and He rose from the dead on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:3-4) MUST be defended. The doctrine we find throughout the New Testament MUST be defended. We must test all things and hold to that which is true (1 Thess. 5:21). We are warned by Jesus and the NT writers that wolves will try to infiltrate the church and bring false messages and false doctrine. We must **CONTENT** for the faith of the gospel.
3. Verse 28: *not being frightened in any way by our opponents*:
 - a. If God is for us, who can be against us (Rom. 8:31)? We learn in John 16:33 that Jesus has overcome the world. We learn in Romans 8:38-39 that nothing can separate us from the love of God. So, do we have reason to fear the enemy? Certainly NOT. We can stand firm and contend for the faith with great confidence, because the purpose of God cannot be stopped (Isaiah 14:24-27, Isaiah 46:9, Jeremiah 29:11, Psalm 138, Philippians 1:6).

The mark of living worthily of the gospel is a unified, fearless contending for the faith of the gospel. But how can you stand firm and contend for something you know nothing of? We must be diligent in growing and strengthening our personal relationship with our Heavenly Father through faithful, consistent Bible study, prayer and cooperate worship. These are the basics of developing a vibrant, healthy relationship with God. You cannot ignore Bible study and stand firm...you cannot not ignore prayer and stand firm...you cannot ignore cooperate worship and stand firm. As your personal relationship with your Heavenly Father deepens, your strength to stand firm will increase, your wisdom to contend for the faith will expand, and through all of this your fear of the enemy will begin to dissipate.

Discussion Question

- ❖ How does Philippians 1:27 encompass much of what follows?
- ❖ What does it mean to live as a citizen of the kingdom, not just a citizen of your country?
- ❖ What are some steps you can take to live a life worthy of the gospel?
- ❖ How important is it to you for everyone in your community to hear the gospel?
- ❖ What holds us back from boldly proclaiming the gospel to all people?
- ❖ How does this passage encourage churches to be “teammates”? (one spirit, one mind, one faith)
- ❖ How can we as a church body walk together in unity for the sake of the gospel?