

As Heaven's Citizens, Live Worthy (Phil. 1:27)

Please turn in God's Holy Word to Philippians chapter 1 and this morning our verse-by-verse study through this book we'll pick up with v. 27. There's so much here in this 1 verse, like there was so much in the verse we focused on last week, 'to live is Christ.' v. 27 shows what it means to live is Christ:

1:27 *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 ...* Or the updated NIV has '*Whatever happens, as citizens of heaven live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ...*' The Greek verb *politeuo* had to do with political citizenship in a city-state, and if you look at Phil 3:20 it uses the same root word, noun form, to say '*our citizenship is in heaven...*' Paul's writing to Roman citizens in Philippi, a local outpost of an earthly kingdom and empire, but Paul points them higher to their citizenship in a heavenly kingdom of the King of kings, the Emperor of the universe. Phil 1:27 appeals to a church as a local outpost or embassy in a land hostile to the gospel, where they're to be ambassadors living worthy of the place they represent, as foreign dignitaries live with dignity their nation's values.

If you were at Family Camp, you'll recognize this story of a U.S. dignitary visiting Uganda who saw a girl in an orphanage and wanted to adopt her. In the late 1980s Ugandan adoption law wouldn't let it happen, but in love this representative of our nation set plans in place to bring the little girl from the city-state of her birth to the United States. The government dignitary's heart was moved to do whatever was necessary to move this child to America, to move earth and heaven politically, which is about what it would take to take this girl to a home in this country and to make her a citizen of a new nation.

The visitor was President Ronald Reagan's daughter, Maureen, who had a heart for adoption first-hand growing up with an adopted brother, Michael Reagan. 1st lady Nancy Reagan was adopted, so 3 generations of Reagans were adopted. Michael Reagan wrote in *Twice Adopted*: 'near the end of Dad's presidency, [my sister] Maureen and her husband... represented the White House on a goodwill tour of Africa...where they met a 3-year-old girl ...They started giving financial support [and] ... they began the process of adopting this child, whose name was Rita Merembe. From the time Rita was 3 until she was 8 Maureen and Dennis were blocked from adopting her, due to Ugandan law. Finally, they brought Rita to the US on a student visa'¹

They were her legal guardians at that point, so Rita went to a private school in the Sacramento area, and her family lived in Granite Bay. She became a Reagan and hit it off with her grandpa. After the president had retired and in the midst of some of their family difficulties, he and the family found great joy if Rita was with them. One who knows Rita tells the story: 'She became the prize of Ronald Reagan's heart. He loved her. He took her horseback riding, he taught her to swim. They would dance together ... privately ... Nancy said when this little girl was in their home, things were the way they should be...When that little girl was there, Ronald lit up and was delighted.'²

In a Newsweek cover story in 1995, Nancy Reagan talked about how her husband's Alzheimer's disease 'brought her famously fractured family together as they marveled over Rita splashing away in the pool with her grandfather. [Nancy said to Newsweek] "As I sat there looking at everyone, I couldn't help but think this is the way it should be and the way I always longed for it to be."³ But Ronald's health declined and Rita found out her mother Maureen had cancer and would not live long. In 2001 Rita at age 16 was eligible under Ugandan law to be adopted if her parents could go to Uganda in person to complete the process, but her mom couldn't do that as she was dying of cancer. The story we heard is Rita was still 'not a citizen of the US and there was some concern about what would happen if Maureen died, what would be the status...Maureen's greatest yearning was that her daughter would become a US citizen...something very rare happened...there was a bipartisan bill introduced to the Senate that they would grant Rita ...citizenship in the US and it was unanimously approved. The US Senate gave this woman citizenship...She is a citizen of the US who went from [being abandoned, left to die in Uganda] with no one to care for her, to the house and to the affections of one of the most powerful men in the world.'⁴

It's a story of beauty amid brokenness, which is the story of many in Christ. It's hard for any adoptee to process the loss of birthparents, it must've been hard for Rita to process the additional loss of the only mother she'd known and the grandfather she loved, but I understand she wrote on Facebook this past year to her friends that God has been sanctifying her, and I understand she's a part of a gospel-preaching church in the area. That story really helps understand the grit and grace of adoption and citizenship, the privilege we must not take for granted even as it comes through pain or personal cost or loss. The gospel tells us to become a child of the King and citizen of heaven is impossible, but God in love was moved to choose to adopt us according to His good pleasure, based on the kind intention of His will, Eph 1:4-6 says

The council chambers of heaven made it happen. It was God's delight to do all that was necessary to make us citizens legally and loving, His beloved children in whom He is well-pleased, the apple of His eye and affections. Eph 2 explains we weren't just left for dead, we were dead in our sins, *'But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus [our heavenly citizenship and standing now, Phil 1:27 says that should affect how we live]*

Eph 2:12 NIV: *remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near... ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father ... you are no longer foreigners ... but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household ...*

Therefore, Paul says in Eph 4:1, live worthy of your calling (including your adoption and citizenship). That's the same word *worthy* in Phil 1:27, a life matching your standing: once excluded from citizenship, but now included, once far off foreigners, now we're fellow citizens and family brought near, once hopeless and separated, now we have special access and affection as a son or daughter of the most powerful Person in the universe! Therefore, as members of that heavenly royal family, live worthy of your citizenship, Paul says in Phil 1:27. As emissaries or dignitaries walk in dignity. As a child of the King representing His kingdom, live in a manner worthy of it.

Phil 3:20 says we're citizens of heaven living on earth, Phil 1:27 uses the same root word to call us to live as citizens consistent with who we are and what has been done for us. 1 Thess 2:12 *'walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom...'* Col 1 *'walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him ... He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son'* (v. 10, 13).

If you were a guest at a banquet in Buckingham Palace in England, there's a royal etiquette you should follow to represent your country well. The way you walk and dress and speak and eat and drink reflects either positively or poorly on the manners and conduct of your people and place. Or if you're an ambassador living in another land that's not your home, people are watching you and your manner of life. Paul says we're ambassadors of Christ, heaven.

15 years or so after the NT was completed, a pastor named Polycarp wrote to this same church in Philippi using the same Greek word Paul used in 1:27 “If we *live as citizens* worthily of him, we shall also reign with him” (5:2). In the context, Phil 1:1 addresses Philippi, which was a Roman colony full of Roman citizens with all the rights and privileges that came with that. The capitol city was far away in Italy, but they were under Roman law, pledging total allegiance to Rome and its rulers. Even when not in Rome they did as the Romans in their dress and language, and they would happily tell people of other lands passing through of their Roman citizenship. It's no accident Paul uses this term *citizenship* in Phil 3:20 and the verb form here in 1:27 to a community that prized it, to call them to live for their heavenly citizenship

He's reminding them Rome is not your home, this world is not your home, you're here temporarily and passing through, but there's a celestial city that scripture is your GPS to. And when you make wrong turns or get off course it will tell you when to take a U-turn and how to get back on track. Scripture and God's Spirit are a constant voice re-calculating, calling us back to where we're going, and telling us at times what to avoid on the road ahead. Your destination is a kingdom far away, but you live under its Law now, and your allegiance is pledged to its Ruler. You speak the language of Christianese as you walk and talk and look and live different like Christ said, you're in the world but not of it. And we should happily tell others that we're citizens of heaven, and tell them how they can be citizens by submitting to King Jesus.

GOSPEL

We've heard a lot on the news about citizenship processes for children but we need to look past politics to people and to pray for our Congress to enact good laws for the good of those contributing to the good of the country. We need Christ's heart and wisdom in our leaders we're called to pray for. And let me encourage you as you hear of citizenship remember we have a higher one by grace, our allegiance and identity isn't in our government, it's in our gospel ultimately that calls us to set thoughts or affections on things above.

What is this gospel in v. 27 we're to live as ambassadors for? Spurgeon said 'It is the "good news" of Jesus Christ, and it is "good news" emphatically, because it clears away sin...hurling it into the red sea of His atoning blood ..."good news," for it tells that the cancer at the vitals of humanity has been cured.'⁵ As heralds, ambassadors of that, how do we live as worthy citizens?

- Outline:**
1. Stand firm (v. 27b '*...that you are standing firm...*')
 2. Stay united (v. 27c '*...in one spirit, with one mind...*')
 3. Strive together (v. 27d '*...striving side by side...*')

1. Stand Firm

v. 27 turns the corner to a new section of Philippians giving commands for the church. Paul helps us see very practically what it looks like to obey the main command at the start of the verse, '*behave as citizens worthy*' (as ESV footnote says it, or NLT '*live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy*'). Paul says in v. 27 if he comes to them he wants to see it, like a leader of a nation wants to see his citizens represent well their nation. He hoped to see them standing for the values of their kingdom even as they faced opposition. I think of Nikki Haley our U.S. ambassador to the U.N. as she seeks to represent our citizens and stand firm in a difficult environment, and this week called for a firm stance against the aggression of North Korea

The verb in v. 27 translated '*standing firm*' is used again by Paul in Phil 4:1 as a command, '*stand firm in the Lord*,' or '*stand fast in the Lord*' (NKJV). This term often in the NT has the idea of standing in the face of opposition. I think of when I was leaving Congo with my son and right before I boarded the plane some men in suits came over and started hassling me and Didier in French, asking to see our papers, I think they wanted money by bribery, and I remember them ordering our bags taken off the plane. I'd seen these guys before, I had seen them derail and detain my friends, and I was hot and not in the mood for a shakedown. As Didier argued with them, they motioned to me to come back to the tarmac out of the airline's loading area, I motioned 'no, I'm staying here.' And I just stood there, they weren't police, I wasn't answerable to them, I had every right as a US citizen, with all my papers in order, to board that plane with my son whose visa also made him a citizen when he was adopted. So I stood firm refusing intimidation, I wasn't going anywhere except on that plane, and eventually I did. I have to think if one of the US embassy workers were there watching, they'd say 'good, stand firm'

Paul hoped to see that in the Philippian church, but if not in person, he says in v. 27 he hoped to hear they're living as citizens worthy of their position by withstanding opposition. He says in v. 27 '*...whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm...*' That was the desire of Paul, this general in the Lord's army, that he would hear that these soldiers for Christ in were holding their ground, standing up to the enemy, not giving up, not retreating, not going AWOL, not leaving their post, not engaging in conduct unbecoming to an officer. Paul and hoped and prayed he would see or hear them standing up for Jesus as soldiers of the cross, living in a manner worthy of spiritual marines, *semper fi*. Think a band of brothers fighting for freedom, holding fast their position, and refusing to surrender it

Paul uses this same word in Gal 5:1: *'It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again...'* and 1 Cor 16:13 *'Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong'* (NAS). Or 2 Thess 2:15: *'stand firm and hold on...'* (NET or NLT *'stand firm and keep a strong grip...'*). When we were kids we used to play a game where a team would stand and hold on to each other's hands in a long line, the team trying to keep a strong grip on each teammates hands. The team chants 'red rover, rover, send somebody _____?' Then a kid from the other team runs full speed into where hands were joined to try to break through. I don't know if kids play that anymore, we stopped playing it when a girl got hurt, but I think of that image of standing firm, holding fast as opponents charge, holding on for the sake of the team, knowing if you lose your grip they lose.

#1. Stand Firm, now #2. Stay United

Look again at the middle of v. 27: *standing firm in one spirit, with one mind*

We can't do this on our own, we have to be linked together with others who join forces that hold each other up. Just a week and a half ago in the Texas floodwaters, there was an elderly man trapped in his SUV that was about to be swept away by moving water over 4 feet deep. But the citizens of Texas there shared the same spirit and mind: 'if we do nothing, he drowns, but if one of us tries on our own, we'll get washed downstream.' And so they put their heads together and put their arms together to form a human chain from higher ground to the sinking vehicle, holding each other up to stand firm so they could rescue the elderly man. It's a beautiful image of victory by unity.

A similar thing happened in Florida a month earlier, when a riptide pulled two boys out to sea, age 8 and 11. The mom and family tried to rescue them but couldn't withstand the tide and they and others got washed out, too. But 70-80 citizens who were all strangers to each other formed a human chain that was able to reach and rescue their fellow citizens who had no way on their own to get to dry land, much less stand firm alone. That's the idea here

To stand firm spiritually we don't link arms physically, but we link spirits and minds together. This uniting of souls, this unity of purpose in our spirits is the work of God's Spirit who all believers share. It's a beautiful thing, I said before, when people who may not see everything eye-to-eye can walk arm-in-arm because of what they share in Christ. My greatest grief is when a Christian stops fellowship with our church over preferences or pet issues. My greatest joy is when there's unity despite diversity in what's secondary.

One in our endeavor, one in song forever, one in word and deed
 One in adoration...grateful exultation...one in praise: our creed
 One glorious aim, our goal the same,
 One in strength and one in striving, help from God deriving⁶

Good citizens stand firm, stay united, 3rdly finally: **Strive together**

Look at the end of v. 27: '*striving side by side for the faith of the gospel...*'

Later in chapter 4, v. 3, Paul will mention 2 '*women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel.*' They were striving together *with* each other for the gospel, now they were striving *against* each other, and it was hurting the gospel ministry, so Paul writes to correct that. We need to strive with brethren for the gospel, not have strife with them. Our battle is not against flesh-and-blood people in the world, much less people in the church, we're to strive like soldiers side-by-side or back to back against our true enemy, the satanic spiritual forces of wickedness, to stand against the devil's lies.

O church arise, put your armor on, and don't take shots at each other. Don't complain, quarrel or create church worship wars over songs, sounds, styles. Or if the preacher doesn't give what your itching ears want to hear, or elders don't change things to how you think they should be, or someone hurts you or offends you in church, they're not your enemy to leave in the battle. The real enemy of your soul wants you to think that, but stay with your regiment and work together to fight Satan together. It says in Ephesians, if you let the sun go down on your anger, you give the devil a foothold, and we need to stand firm against *him*, linking together shields of faith (4:26, 6:10-17). Or 2 Cor 2:10 adds this '*if there was anything to forgive--I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.*' Satan divides to conquer but we're not ignorant of his devices, we forgive so we can unite as more than conquerors

Phil 1:27 ends with fightin' words. Like Doc Holliday standing side-by-side with Wyatt Earp and his brothers Morgan and Virgil side-by-side at the OK Corral, standing together against the Clanton and McLaurry brothers. Or in ancient Greek games, this could refer to teams wrestling, or think gladiator games in the arena, like Maximus joining forces in the center, side-to-side, or back-to-back to fight against a common foe and to prevail together. Other translations of '*striving*' in v. 27 include 'fight side-by-side...fight together ...battle together...contend as one man,' etc. It's the Greek root word *athleo* that we get athletics from, with a prefix that makes it together, a team sport.

This is not an Olympic marathon runner by himself, running with endurance the race set before him, surrounded by a great crowd cheering for their star. This is the word for team sports striving together for a team medal: the faith of the gospel. It's not an individual event, it's an event for the country they represent. Their goal as citizens and Olympians is to see their country's flag lifted high, to hear the music of their national anthem, and to live worthy of their ambassadorial role. The teams strive together and stand together in the medal ceremony, and their conduct as citizens in a foreign land is important off the field, too (ex: swimmer at Brazil gas station's dishonorable conduct).

If we're citizens called to have a manner of life worthy of the kingdom and King we represent in heaven, we need to protect the faith of the gospel and advance it together. Think of offensive linemen in football representing the city they're from, lining up against the opposition, standing your ground as they rush at you, holding firm, striving together side-by-side to protect the quarterback and also to advance the ball down the field into enemy territory.

This is what we're called to, not for a football, but for the faith of the gospel, and for the honor of the city we represent, which is heaven. You have each other's backs, and if your teammate falls, you help him up. We huddle here then we break to get back out there, striving together for the team's good. If a fellow teammate lets us down, we talk to him to try to help him be better next time. If we think we can do things better than the coaching staff, what do we do? Most of the time, we just defer to the leaders or talk to the team captain, but if it's a big enough deal, we can talk to the staff and share our thoughts, and then the key is we submit the decision and direction to them, knowing that's not our role or responsibility. We don't try to play armchair quarterback, or try to change the play when it's underway or take the ball and go home (or go to another team). Without unity and following the lead we've lost already, but we prevail striving together for the good of the team

We keep standing firm in what we share as we strive side-by-side, set aside self, sacrifice self, die to self daily, live for Jesus. Eph 4: *walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,* ² *with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,* ³ *being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace...* ²⁶ *BE ANGRY, AND yet DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger,* ²⁷ *and do not give the devil an opportunity...* ²⁹ *Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear...*

³¹ *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.* ³² *Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.* *5:1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children;* ² *and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us ...* (NASB)

This is how citizens of heaven walk worthy of the gospel, stand firm, stay united, strive together, but do it as more than citizens, do it as sons of the King of heaven. Live in light of His adoption of you and His affection for you in giving His Son for you. O how wonderful the Father's love for us!

¹ Michael Reagan, *Twice Adopted* (B&H, 2004), p. 14.

² Rick Gregory, "Our Savior's Adoption," Grace Bible Church, Family Camp 2017, church website: www.gbco.org

³ <http://www.thedailybeast.com/the-fascinating-tale-of-ronald-reagans-ugandan-granddaughter>

⁴ Gregory, *Ibid.*

⁵ Elliot Ritzema, ed., *Spurgeon Commentary: Philippians* (Lexham Press, 2015), p. 40.

⁶ William Hendriksen, *Philippians*, p. 86.