

Gospel Citizenship

Humble Unity Part 1
Philippians 1:27 2-21-2016

Summary: The word “live” in verse 27 means to live as a citizen. We must live out our heavenly citizenship in a manner that lives up to the gospel. Then we will have oneness of purpose and heart (same goals, and no unreconciled relationships). And we will fight for the faith with great effort.

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Philippians 1:27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel 28 without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. 29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, 30 since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

Introduction

Have you performed your civic duty this week? Or would I be right in guessing that the phrase “civic duty” never even crossed your mind last week. In our culture, you usually only hear the words “civic duty” when people are trying to get you to vote (which is ironic, because voting is not actually a civic duty. You are not obligated to vote.) So what are you obligated to do as a citizen of the United States? What does it mean to be a good citizen?

Right now there is a lot of political debate about whether to grant citizenship to people who are here illegally. Citizenship is a very big deal to immigrants, but those of us who were born here probably never even think about our citizenship. I can tell you one time I did think about it. I was a trumpet player with a music group called the Continentals back in 1985, before the Berlin wall came down, and we went into communist East Berlin and did a concert in an underground church. We entered East Berlin at checkpoint Charlie, and the United States Marines who were stationed there told us to make sure we were back by midnight. They said if we weren’t, they would come in after us. This was during the cold war, and my dad had a job that gave him access to a lot of classified information regarding our nuclear capabilities, and so he was not allowed by the State Department to ever enter a communist country. At first they weren’t

going to let me go either, but finally changed their mind. But before I went, they gave me all kinds of instructions on what to do if I was detained by the Communists. So after that, I was a little intimidated crossing through all the barbed wire and guards with their machine guns, and all the rest. So when those Marines said that they would come in after us, I have to say, I was glad to be a United States citizen at that point.

We have been studying verse by verse through the book of Philippians, and we come this morning to the beginning of a whole new section. Paul's goal in this book is to improve their church unity by increasing their joy. That's his goal, and his first strategy was to teach them how to have joy in the midst of suffering through his example. So the whole first chapter, all the way through verse 26, is all about Paul's example of how to have joy even while you are suffering. And now, starting in verse 27, he is going to move to another tactic. Now that we have seen his example, he is going to give us some direct commands and instruction on how to be unified as a church. So you will notice a major shift. You are going to start seeing a lot of commands now. Up to this point, he has been talking about himself. Now, he is going to start telling us what to do. And it begins with citizenship.

Be a Gospel Citizen

Philippians 1:27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Conduct (Be a Good Citizen)

That word **conduct** (your Bible might say **manner of living**) is an interesting word. Normally in a context like this, when Paul wants to describe day-to-day conduct, he uses the word "walk." (Walk in a manner worthy...) He likes to describe life as a walk, and so when I looked up this word, I fully expected it to be the Greek word for walk. But here Paul chooses an unusual term - this is the only place in all of Paul's epistles where he uses this word. It literally means *to live as a citizen*. It is the Greek word *polituo*. We get our words *politics* from it.¹

So instead of saying walk, like he usually does, he uses a word that means *live as a citizen*. Instead of "walk in a manner worthy of the gospel," it's "carry out your citizenship in a manner worthy of the gospel." And it's not at all difficult to figure out why Paul used that term when talking to the Philippians. The city of Philippi was a Roman colony, which was a very, very big deal. Being a Roman colony meant Roman citizenship – for all the people, and their children. It was just a tiny little city, but it was the most important city in all of Macedonia because of their status as a Roman colony.

Acts 16:12 From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia.

History tells us that the people of Philippi at that time were extremely proud of their Roman citizenship. Just as United States citizenship really means a lot to immigrants, so Roman citizenship really meant a lot to the people of this little city. They didn't think of themselves as Philippians; they thought of themselves as Romans.

Acts 16:19 ... they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. 20 They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar 21 by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice."

They called themselves Romans, not Philippians. That was the mentality of the people who lived there. So when Paul uses a word related to citizenship, that's going to get their attention. This is the noun form of the same word in chapter 3 when he talks about our citizenship being in heaven. Just as Philippi was a colony of Rome, so the church is to be a colony of heaven. Philippi was not located in Rome - it

¹ It is related to the word *polis*, which is the Greek word for *city*. We get our words Metropolis or Minneapolis from that root.

was 800 miles away. But it was like a little mini-Rome there in the region of Macedonia. And that is what the church is. We are not located in heaven right now, but we are like a little mini-heaven off-site.

A Single Standard

Paul is calling us to behave as good citizens of heaven, and to carry out our civic duty. Which is what? A minute ago I asked you what your civic duty as a United States citizen is. At the very least, we would have to say it would involve obeying all the laws. And that's really saying something, because there are a lot of laws to obey. Do you know how many laws there are on the books in the United States? Currently there are about 20,000 laws in the United States — just related to gun ownership. If you're working on your taxes, be careful because the tax code has more than 3.4 million words. If you printed it out, and each volume had 300 pages, it would be a library of 50 volumes. And that's just federal taxes. Nobody knows how many millions of laws there are in the United States, but just at the federal level, Congress adds over 100 new ones every single year. Want to be a good citizen? Just obey all those laws.

What about heavenly citizenship? It's not nearly so complicated. Paul makes it very simple for us.

27 ... Live as citizens in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Don't you love it when Scripture does this — just sums up everything you are supposed to do in one, simple concept? What should you do in all the countless different situations you find yourself in as you live your life? Just strive to live up to the message that brought you life. Instead of burdening us with 1000 regulations, he motivates us with a single, inspiring principle. And doing it that way wipes out all loopholes. The Congress has to pass countless new tax laws every single year just to try to close the loopholes that still exist even though we have tens of thousands of rules. But when God says, "Just live up to the gospel" there are no loopholes in that. It's a comprehensive standard — it covers everything in life.

And not only is comprehensive; it is also supreme. By its very nature, it trumps every other standard or law or rule. If someone else wants you to behave a certain way — whether it be the United States government or popular opinion or your family or friends or spouse, whoever it is, you are free to go along with whatever they want you to do right up to the point where it would conflict with living up to the gospel. The moment it conflicts with that, it's out the window. Any behavior that would fall short of living up to the gospel is out of the question. Any behavior that falls in line with living up to the gospel is a great thing to do. It is a principle for living that is both comprehensive and supreme.

Don't Depend Too Much on Personalities

It's great to have a standard like that, because it means every Christian understands how to live life. Every Christian has enough of an understanding of the gospel to be a Christian, obviously. And so they have a good understanding of how we are to live the Christian life, because living the Christian life is simply a matter of living in line with the gospel.

And that's important, because it keeps us from becoming overly dependent on our leaders or certain personalities. There are many churches where, if the preaching pastor leaves, whole place falls apart. A church like that is too dependent on one personality. And it's important to Paul that the Philippian church not be like that.

27 ... Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit...

I want to know that you are living right whether I come there or not. Paul had a great balance between understanding the value of his gifts and what he had offer on the one hand, while at the same time realizing that success or failure wasn't riding totally on him. He had a sense of great urgency —

wanting to go there to help them with their progress and joy in the faith. But he also understood that if they kept this standard of just living up to the gospel in mind, they would be okay, even without him.²

Worthy of the Gospel

So what does living up to the gospel look like? What does it mean to live in a manner worthy of the gospel? Be careful not to misread that. It does not mean living a life that makes you worthy of being saved or of going to heaven. It is not telling you to try to earn anything. He is talking to people who are already saved. And they are saved, not because of how they lived, but in spite of how they lived. They didn't become saved by living a certain way, but simply by believing the gospel and having the Lord Jesus Christ as the great treasure of their life. That is how you get saved, but then once you are saved (you become a citizen of heaven), your civic duty at that point is to live in a manner worthy of the message that brought you to salvation.

Your life should match the gospel. You can substitute the word *suitable* or *appropriate* for the word **worthy**. The way you conduct yourself should be suitable given the truth of the gospel. If you go to a wedding or funeral, you don't wear shorts and a T-shirt because that kind of clothing is not suitable for that kind of occasion. It's not worthy. It doesn't match up with the importance of the occasion. And if you're at a funeral, you don't laugh really loud or cheer like you would at a football game. That kind of behavior is suitable and fitting at a football game – it's agreeable, it matches the occasion, but it's not suitable or fitting at a funeral. What Paul is saying here is to make sure our lives are suitable and fitting with the gospel. The way we act matches what we claim to believe. So everything we do is governed by gospel truth. Everything we do, we do it because we are believing gospel promises and obeying gospel commands.

And that makes sense, doesn't it? For God to just tell us, "Act in a way that fits what you claim you believe"? Because what is the alternative? Hypocrisy. It is not at all unreasonable for God to tell us, "Live in integrity, not hypocrisy."

Hypocrisy is incredibly damaging to both the church and to unbelievers. It destroys our credibility. Any time I do something that is out of step with the gospel, and some unbelievers see that, I not only damage my reputation, I have just damaged the reputation of every single Christian those unbelievers will ever meet in the future. They will take my sin and pin it right on the chest of everyone who claims to be a Christian. And now it's that much harder for them to ever be saved. But if I confess my sin and repent of it,³ then I am living in a manner worthy of the gospel. That is my civic duty as a citizen of heaven.

² Paul makes a similar comment in 2:12.

³ None of us have to be hypocrites. We are all going to sin, but that doesn't mean we have to be hypocrites. The way to avoid hypocrisy is very simple – confess your sins and repent of them. Then you're not being a hypocrite, because that is exactly what the gospel calls for.

If someone said, "I don't want to join the church – the church is full of hypocrites," what should we say? We all love the smart Alec answer "Come on in – there's room for one more!" But if we said that, that would just make their point. It would be an example of us behaving in a way that doesn't match what we claim to believe. If someone brings up an objection to becoming a Christian, and I respond with some kind of snarky accusation or put down, I'm not behaving Christianly. How should we respond? If someone tells me he doesn't want to join the church because it's full of hypocrites, I think what I need to say is, "I have to confess, it is shameful that I am as hypocritical as I am at times. My goal is to live my life in a way that makes Jesus Christ attractive, so that when you see my life, it would be that much easier to believe the gospel that I preach. So I need to ask you, please forgive me for the things I've done that have contradicted the message I proclaim." If I do that, then I'm living out what I claim to believe, because what I claim to believe is not that a true Christian never sins, but rather that a true Christian repents when he sins. That bumper sticker that says, "Christians aren't perfect – just forgiven" – that's close, but it would be a little more accurate to say, "Christians aren't perfect, but they do walk in the light."

1 John 1:6 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

Walking in the light means every time we sin – every time we step off into the darkness, instead of staying in the darkness, we turn around and step back into the light. Instead of hiding our sin or pretending it didn't happen or covering it up or excusing it, we confess it. We bring it right out into the light and confess the truth about it, and turn from it. So if someone accuses me of being a hypocrite, the best thing I can do is show him that I'm a person who confesses his sin and turns from it.

So that is the standard for how God is calling us to behave. And Paul is going to describe exactly what that looks like in practical terms starting in this verse, all the way through 2:18. That entire section shows us what gospel citizenship looks like. But for today we will just focus on verse 27. Paul is going to give us two characteristics of gospel citizenship, and then he will give us a couple more next week in verses 28-30.

Gospel Citizenship is Unified

The first one is going to take most of our time today because it is one of the keys to understanding the entire book. The first thing you need to know about gospel citizenship is that it is characterized by unity. Please notice the word **then** in verse 27 (your Bible might say **so that**).

27 Whatever happens, live as citizens in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then (as a result of your gospel citizenship), whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel

So one of the outcomes of living a life worthy of the gospel is unity. In the Greek it is in what they call a chiasmic structure.

**Standing firm
in one spirit
in one soul
contending**

In oneness of spirit⁴ and soul, we stand firm and contend for the faith. I like the way the NIV puts it – **contending as one man**.

Citizenship Is Corporate

Citizenship is a corporate concept. I think this is another reason why Paul picked this word instead of his normal word “to walk.” If he said, “Walk in a manner worthy of the gospel,” you could picture doing that as an individual. When you think of your walk through life, you think of your own, personal, individual walk. But when he says to behave as a citizen in a manner worthy of the gospel, that forces us to think in a corporate way. The concept of citizenship is meaningless apart from the rest of the community. This command is not something you can do on your own. It is something *we* must do as a community.

Oneness of Purpose

If we live up to the gospel, we will have oneness – both oneness of heart and oneness of purpose. Oneness of purpose means we cooperate and join forces to accomplish a shared goal. We all have to

If you are groaning with regret over the damage done by some recent episode when you behaved in a sinful way in front of unbelievers, don't worry - you can undo the damage. Just confess your sin to them. That will show them what the gospel is really all about. The gospel is an invitation to sinful people to step out of the darkness into the light and to be forgiven and washed cleaned by God on the basis of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. So it's not too late to live up to the gospel in that situation.

⁴ Fee takes this to refer to the Holy Spirit for four reasons:

- 1) In other Greek literature, “one soul” was often used to describe unity or oneness between multiple people, but the word “spirit” was never used that way. Sometimes it is used to describe a common attitude, but never by Paul.
- 2) Whenever Paul talks about standing firm in something, the “in” is invariably locative, not a dative of manner.
- 3) When Paul continues the appeal at the beginning of chapter 2 he uses the same two words. In verse one it's clearly the Holy Spirit, and in verse 2 they are to be soul brothers and sisters.
- 4) Paul uses the same phrase, in one spirit, in Ephesians 2:18 and 1 Corinthians 12:13 (see also Ephesians 4:4) to describe the Holy Spirit precisely in passages where the emphasis is on a common experience of the Spirit as the basis for unity.

Those are strong arguments, but I still take spirit in this verse to be used more as a synonym for soul, given the structure of the verse. Either way, however, it is important to emphasize that the unity does indeed come from the Holy Spirit.

know what our goal is. If some of us are pulling off to the right, and others are pulling off to the left, and some are trying to move forward, and others are dragging their heels, guess where we go – nowhere.

I hope you all have a clear understanding of what our purpose is at Agape. We are devoted to three basic things: spiritual growth, evangelism, and worship. We exist to express, spread, and deepen delight in Christ. Deepening delight – that’s spiritual growth; spreading – that’s evangelism; and expressing delight in Christ – that’s worship.

So we function as his household, where brothers and sisters love one another and love and submit to the Father; as his banquet table, where we invite all those in the highways and byways to come in and feast; and as his temple and priesthood, offering acceptable worship. That’s what we do.

And our method is to apply the Word of God to the hearts of men and women. Inside the household of God we carry out the one another commands, to the world we proclaim the gospel, and in worship we fix our attention on what God is like and then express what is in our hearts in response to that. Those are our methods. We don’t try to accomplish our goals through entertainment, or by community service, or by giveaways, or through politics, or meeting felt needs, or by trying to make the people like us. We present the gospel, we carry out the one anothers, we apply the Word of God to the hearts of men, and we bow the knee to the Lord Jesus Christ in humble awe and reverent, joyful worship. That’s what we are all about. That’s what we do and how we do it. If you are on board with that, great! If you’re not, the train is leaving the station – maybe you can find another church that fits your goals. But if we are going to be effective, we have to know what we are trying to do, and then we all need to join forces and put our backs into it, all pushing together in the same direction.

Oneness of Heart

That is what I mean by oneness of purpose. We need that, but we also need oneness of heart. We can’t be at odds with one another. This is one of the great passages in all of Scripture on church unity.

Ephesians 4:1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called—5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

We all believe in the same God, the same Lord, we have the same faith, same hope, same baptism, same Holy Spirit - one body, so why would we be divided? And yet, division is a constant threat, so much so that look what he says at the beginning of verse 3 – **make every effort to keep the unity...** We have to make every possible effort; otherwise we *will* lose our unity. And what kind of effort is he talking about? What kind of bonds will hold our unity together? End of verse 3 – **the bond of peace**. That is how we maintain our unity, by making every effort to have peaceful relationships. And how is that done? Verse 2 – by being **completely humble and gentle, patient, bearing with one another in love**. In order to have organizational unity we need to have relational unity. In order to have oneness of purpose, we have to have oneness of heart. We have to deeply love one another. And we have to reconcile broken relationships.

And so that is where Satan constantly attacks. John MacArthur: “There isn’t a day that goes by when the leadership isn’t dealing with some relational conflict – “We need to get these people together. We need to reconcile this broken relationship...” It is a constant onslaught. He went on to say, “I’ve been here 20 years, I’ve never seen such an all-out attack on the unity of this church ... We don’t even understand it. We don’t even know why it comes or where it comes from. ... There is no human rational reason for it. ... Nobody has run off with the money, nobody is into adultery, nobody is willfully violating what we know to be biblical principle and yet there’s all this upheaval. ... People criticizing unjustly other people, blaming people, holding grudges against people, bitternesses against people, terrible distrust and mistrust floating all over that can’t even be identified or reasonably explained. All of it deadly to the church. I have seen it from the elder level down where you even have elders who resign and leave the church, and we’ve

had that. And it's inexplicable to me.” There doesn't have to be a particular crisis to create disunity in the church. There is an enemy who works at that. And the natural, sinful impulses of the flesh push us into disunity whenever anything difficult happens.

But we must make every effort to resist those impulses and to restore broken relationships. Because Paul is clear here – we need unity in order to stand firm. We are not going to stand if we lose our unity. We are in a war, and if we become a scattered force, we will fall. Jesus was very clear – a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand. A house divided against itself cannot stand. If we lose our unity at Agape we *will* fall to the enemy. He will win, and we will lose. Jesus promised that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church in general, but the gates of hell very often prevail against individual fellowships. And that will definitely happen to us if we are not one.

This is why we have been making such a big deal about peacemaking principles. The enemy is constantly attacking our unity. And if we just do what comes naturally, we will either fight each other until we destroy ourselves or we will go in the other direction and just pretend there's peace when there isn't. That is what the inclusive, ecumenical churches do. The pastor preaches a lot of feel-good sermons and never says anything that anyone could possibly disagree with so everyone walks away with their own beliefs being affirmed. There are all kinds of disunity, but it's all under the rug. They are like a team that has more team spirit than any other team in the league, but if you talk to the players you find out that they don't even agree on what sport they're playing. They look great in team pictures, but that's about it. There is no way they could ever win an actual game. That's the peace-faking church.

On the other extreme is the peace-breaking church, where we pick at each other and bite and devour each other – gossip, complain, grumble against each other – backbiting, faultfinding, blaming, criticizing, assuming bad motives, arguing, bickering, grudges, unforgiveness. No matter how much we agree on doctrine and direction, if that kind of stuff is going on unchecked, there is no unity.

And when there is no unity, we are not living in a manner worthy of the gospel. That's why, as the elders spent 2015 seeking God and asking him to show us what the most important priorities are for us right now, we landed on four things. One is the culture of encouragement. The second one I announced to you last week – joyful servanthood. And the third one is this – unity.

When someone in the church does something that bothers you, be very, very careful how you respond. Realize what's at stake. There are no relationships in the church that you can afford to throw away. You can't say, “Oh, I don't like him – I'll just stay on the other side of the church and avoid him.” These are your brothers and sisters forever, and the Father of this household has called you to love them deeply, from the heart. And the success or failure of your purpose in life is very much connected to how well you are able to cooperate and work with the rest of the body, because if you are a Christian, your purpose in life happens to be a team sport. So when somebody does something you don't like, think long and hard about how you respond because going forward you are going to need two things:

- 1) Closeness with that person

You are going to have to reconcile with that person, and the more hostility you show, the more painful and difficult that's going to be.

- 2) That person's joy intact

If your teammates start losing their joy, that is going to affect the whole team. So we always ask, “Okay, I was just offended, I was just hurt, how can I address the problem in a way that will cultivate the greatest possible intimacy with that person, and the greatest possible joy in their Lord in their heart?”

And the rule of thumb is this: Ask yourself, “Is the way I'm about to respond worthy of the gospel? Is my attitude toward him worthy of the gospel of Christ?” The way you respond when one of us disappoints you, or hurts you, insults you, or hinders your ministry, or ignores you, or belittles you – your response (inside and out) must be fitting and appropriate for a gospel setting.

That is why Jesus told us, if you are worshiping and suddenly realize your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar first, go and be reconciled your brother, and then come back and finish worshiping. It's *that* urgent. And if you have something against your brother, go

and be reconciled. Our standard for living is to live in a way that is fitting for the gospel. And what is the gospel? It is a message of reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

The gospel is all about reconciliation, and so unreconciled people don't advertise it well. We can't invite people into the household of God and then say, "Join our family – oh, and here's a bullet-proof vest. You're going to need that." Jesus said they will know we are his disciples by the way we love one another. Atheists love people who are nice to them. Our love for one another has to be something far greater than that.

So what does it mean to live out our citizenship in a manner worthy of the gospel? What does gospel citizenship look like? Gospel citizenship is unified. Secondly, gospel citizenship is forceful.

Gospel Citizenship is Forceful

**Standing firm
in one spirit
in one soul
contending**

Effort

Standing firm is a warfare term. **Contending** is a sports term. Paul puts both terms together here to underscore the kind of energetic, forceful effort that must go into gospel citizenship. Then down in verse 30 he calls it a **struggle**. Gospel citizenship is not a passive, relaxed walk in the park.

Never fall for that false teaching that pits grace against effort. There are many preachers today who are saying that hard work is of the flesh. They say, "Stop striving. Stop struggling. Stop trying so hard to serve God. Just let go and let God. Just relax, and let the Holy Spirit take control of you." You can always spot these people because they never have anything good to say about God's law. For them, "law" is a dirty word. They think it is the opposite of grace. They say any time you are making an effort to obey God's law, you are operating in the flesh, not the spirit.

I don't understand how someone could read anything Paul wrote and still buy into that garbage. The effort that we need to put into our gospel citizenship is like the effort of a soldier in hand-to-hand combat, or an athlete trying to win the gold medal. Can you even think of any imagery that would convey more effort than that? Elsewhere Paul compares it to a woman in labor. A little later in chapter 3 he says:

Philippians 3:12 ... I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 ...Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize

There is no conflict or tension between grace and effort. They go together – grace is what causes effort.

1 Corinthians 15:10 ...his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them

The effect of grace is hard work. If the Christian life seems really hard to you, and it's tiring and exhausting and just really difficult – that's the way it's supposed to be. Now, if you find it burdensome, that's a different story. If ministry is burdensome, either you're doing something God didn't call you to do, or you have the wrong attitude about what he did call you to do. We should not feel burdened by ministry, but it is appropriate for ministry to push someone to the extremes of his endurance – like an athletic contest.

Unified Effort - Struggle Together

And when you think of an athletic contest, I hope you aren't picturing some individual sport. The Greek word for an athletic struggle is *athleo*. You can hear that's where we get our word athletic. But this word that Paul uses here is *sun-athleo*. *Sun* means *together with*. So the word here is to struggle alongside a teammate. I heard from one source that in ancient Roman wrestling they actually had teams – a whole group of guys wrestling an opposing group all at once.

I wasn't able to verify that anywhere, so I don't know if it's true, but it does seem like kind of a cool idea to me. That would be interesting – you get your guy on the ground, then you step over and help your buddy get out of some hold, but then his buddy grabs you from behind... I don't know if that's what they did back then, but it definitely gives you the idea behind this word. Paul wants us to think of a team sport. If you're off fighting this war alone, you're losing. Lone rangers are dead rangers.

And not only are you losing, but you're also hurting the team. I heard about a high school student recently who was by far the best player in the team, probably the best player in history of that school. And halfway through the season he got cut from the team. The coach cut him because they couldn't win with him on the team – he just didn't know how to play as a teammate. So in spite of all his amazing skills, he was a detriment. How many Christians are like that? Incredible giftedness, and yet a detriment to the team because they just want to go at it alone.

The more gifted a person is, the more prone he will tend to be towards this. No one can do it like you can do it, so you just want to do it all. If other people get involved, you don't have the quality control, so you would just as soon do it yourself. That cripples the body. We need to function like a team – like a well-oiled machine. A person who has body parts that act independently from the body is spastic. And nothing good comes from spasms. For a fighter to win a fight, all the parts of his body have to be working together, with precise unity and harmony. And that's what the body of Christ needs in order to win this fight.

Faith of the gospel

What fight? What is it that we are fighting for exactly?

27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel

That's what we are fighting for – the Christian faith.⁵ And the Christian faith is defined by the gospel.⁶ Just as everything that happened to Paul was seen in reference to the gospel, that is how Paul wants it to be with the Philippians. The only thing that matters in life is the progress of the gospel. Churches exist for the progress of the gospel. That's what we are fighting for. We defend the gospel from those who would attack it or pervert it. And we fight and struggle and strain and push for the progress of the gospel in reaching the lost, and in the lives of every Christian we have any influence with.

Conclusion

So, have you done your civic duty this past week? Have you lived as a citizen of heaven in a manner worthy of the gospel that saved you? Let's just close our time by reminding ourselves what this gospel is that we are obligated to live up to? What are the characteristics of the gospel? Well, the gospel is good news, right? That's what the word "gospel" means. The gospel is the good news about how a sinful person who is under the wrath of God and on his way to hell can be forgiven and reconciled to God and become his beloved child. Let's live up to that. I want to live a life that has "good news for the sinner"

⁵ I believe **for the faith** is a dative of advantage – we fight for the progress of the faith.

⁶ I believe **of the gospel** is a genitive of description. Another possibility is that it is an objective genitive – faith in the gospel (like "faith of Jesus Christ" in Ro.3:22 means faith in Jesus Christ).

written all over it. I want to live my life in a way that shows people that no sin is too great to be forgiven through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

What is another characteristic of the gospel? It's true. It tells the sinner, with 100% accuracy, what God is like and what his situation is before a holy God. So let's live in a manner worthy of that. Let's live our lives in a way that tells the truth about God and about us and about the world. Let's live lives that don't give people the wrong idea about what God is like.

The gospel is a message of grace (Acts 20:24). Let's live in a way that showcases God's grace, so that people will look at us and say, "Wow, that person believes in a God who is incredibly kind and gracious and generous."

The gospel is 100% centered on Christ, so let's live our lives with Christ at the very center. The gospel is a message of reconciliation, so let's reconcile broken relationships. The gospel is a message of forgiveness, so let's forgive one another as God in Christ Jesus has forgiven us. The gospel is a message of God's love, so let's love one another deeply, from the heart. That is our civic duty as citizens of heaven. And if we lived that way we will stand firm in one spirit, and in one soul we will contend together for the faith of the gospel.

Benediction: 2 Corinthians 13:11 Finally, brothers ... be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. 12 Greet one another with a holy kiss...14 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

- 1) Which aspect of the gospel do you most desire to live up to at this time (reconciliation, forgiveness, love, truth, holiness, trust in God, pleasing God, grace, imputation, etc.)?
- 2) Has there ever been a time when another brother or sister in Christ "had your back" or came to your rescue at a time when you were in spiritual peril? Share the story with the group.
- 3) What are the biggest challenges in your heart that threaten to prevent you from having closeness and unity and "team effort" with the rest of the body?
- 4) Is there any specific change you want to commit to make in your life in response to this passage of Scripture?