

Philippians 1:27-30
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I love words. Words can be used to create images in our minds that help to define what something is. For example, if I asked you to describe a giraffe in three words to a 3-year old, what you say? Probably something along the lines of, “Long neck, tall, and brown spots.” Instantly the child would form an image in his or her mind that mimics those words. Words are important because words are descriptive and help us to know how something ought to be.

This morning we conclude the first chapter of Paul’s letter to the Philippians by looking at **v. 27-30**. In these three verses Paul packs in a lot of theological thought and descriptive language to give us three words that should describe all Christians:

1. Odd.
2. Fearless.
3. Sufferer.

Let’s begin by looking at **v. 27**...

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,

After commending the Philippian Christians to be imitators of Him by living out his mission that **“To live is Christ, to die is gain,”** Paul exhorts the Philippians to **“only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel.”** This small statement needs some explanation.

The words **“manner of life”** is the Greek word, *politeuomai*. It’s the same word that we get our word *politics* from. It can be translated to mean, “to live as citizens of.” So, we must ask: what is Paul trying to tell us? When you are a citizen of a country, you abide by their laws and live according to the governments moral grid laid out in their laws. Perhaps you don’t know this, but we have some crazy laws in Indiana. Out of curiosity, I did some research this week and found that we have the following laws that are still active today:

- It is against the law to pass a horse on the street.
- Liquor stores may not sell milk.
- No one may catch a fish with his bare hands.

Laws are intended to make us abide by a moral grid instituted by the respective country and state which is enforced through various laws. Here’s the point: Paul is saying, if you’re a Christians you are to live like citizens of another world. How are we to live like citizens? **“*27 Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.*”** The word **“worthy”** here signifies something that fits with the weight and worth of its standard of reference.¹ In other words, we are to live like citizens, acting according to what? **“the gospel of Christ”** Paul

¹ *Expository Commentary: Ephesians-Philemon* (pg. 145). Crossway.

says. In other words, Paul is saying that one of the words that should describe Christians is this...

1. Odd.

Christians live according to the gospel, not to the ways of the world. The gospel is the “gold standard” of Christian living. It is what unites all Christians and, consequently, it’s what makes Christians appear strange. Gordon Fee points this out in his commentary when he writes,

“Paul is here making a play on their ‘dual’ citizenship—of the empire by virtue of their being Philippians; of heaven by virtue of their faith in Christ and incorporation into the believing community.”²

In other words, Christians live in, as Augustine often said, two cities: the city of man and the city of God. Christians live in the city of man, but live by the city of God. And this is what makes Christians seem odd.

Pastor and speaker Russell Moore hits the nail on the head when he says the following:

“Christianity isn’t normal anymore, and that’s good news. The Book of Acts, like the Gospels before it, shows us that the Christianity thrives when it is, as Kierkegaard put it, a sign of contradiction. Only a strange gospel can differentiate itself from the culture around us. But the strange, freakish, foolish old gospel

² *Paul’s Letter the Philippians*, Gordon Fee (pg. 77).

is what God uses to save sinners and to build the Church.³

Paul is saying that Christians are to continually walk according to the ways of God and that we should expect that we will appear strange. But appearing strange is the essence of evangelism. Or as D.A. Carson put it, “Conduct worthy of the gospel is above all conduct that promotes the gospel.” One of the ways you promote the gospel is by living out what you believe. This is why Paul would later write to Titus and commend him to “**adorn the doctrine of God.**” When we wear what we believe, the world takes notice and begins to ask about the hope we have within us. Here’s what Paul is teaching:

Gospel proclamation – gospel demonstration = hypocrisy
 Gospel demonstration – gospel proclamation = cowardice
 Gospel proclamation + gospel demonstration = faithfulness

It is not enough to preach the gospel and not display the gospel through your life. It is not enough to display the gospel with your life and never preach the gospel. To be a Christian is to have both. But notice Paul keeps going...

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, Paul doesn’t desire for the Philippian Christians to simply live out the gospel when he is with them, he wants them to live

³ <https://www.russellmoore.com/2016/08/19/signposts-why-christians-must-keep-christianity-strange/>

out the gospel even when he is away from them: “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,” So, let me ask you: if your life was put side-by-side with an unbeliever, could people tell a difference? Does the way you speak, love, give, and work look different from an unbeliever? Paul says it should. So much so that the world ought to think, “Wow. It’s as if he or she is living for another world.” And indeed, we are. And this living out the gospel should produce in us, **v. 28**...

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.

Paul says that the second word that should describe Christians is this...

2. Fearless.

Because of the gospel, the Philippian Christians don’t have to fear persecution because their hearts are rooted in two realities:

1. The destruction of their enemies.

“28 and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction...” One of the truths that should bring you great hope today is the reality that one day all those opposed to the message of the gospel and to the church of Jesus Christ will be destroyed. **Psalm 37:9-10**, **“9 For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land. 10 In just a little while, the**

wicked will be no more; though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there.” When we remember the end of our suffering—**“eternal weight of glory beyond all comprehension” (2 Cor. 4:7)**—and the end of our sufferers—destruction, we are emboldened, filled with Christian courage, and faith to persevere. That is the first reality the Philippians’ hearts are rooted in. Secondly...

2. Their salvation.

“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.” This isn’t speaking of conversion—justification by faith alone in Christ alone. Paul is writing about the salvation all Christians will one day experience—glorification. Christians have been saved from the penalty of sin, we’re being saved from the power of sin, one day we will be saved from the presence of sin. J.B. Lightfoot was an English theologian that was incredible Greek scholar. He was once on a train ride when a little girl came up to him and asked him, “Sir, are you saved?” He looked at the little girl and said, “It depends. Do you mean, *are you saved?*, *are you being saved?*, or *will you be saved?* Because the answer is yes.” The Philippians aren’t shaken with fear because their hearts were fixated on the coming day of salvation.

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.

Paul says that the third word that should describe Christians is this...

3. Sufferer.

There is a lot that could be said here, but I'll boil it down to one sentence: to follow Jesus is to suffer for Jesus. And it is through suffering that Peter tells us in **1 Peter 4:7**, "But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed." Suffering is the way in which God makes us more like Jesus and brings us closer to Jesus.

Perhaps no one that I know understands this experientially as well as Joni Eareckson Tada—the paraplegic woman that ministers to thousands through her ministry Joni & Friends and countless books. I recently heard a quote shared that I think sums this last point up so well:

I sure hope I can bring this wheelchair to heaven. Now, I know that's not theologically correct. But I hope to bring it and put it in a little corner of heaven, and then in my new, perfect, glorified body, standing on grateful glorified legs, I'll stand next to my Savior, holding his nail-pierced hands. I'll say, "Thank you, Jesus," and he will know that I mean it, because he knows me. He'll recognize me from the fellowship we're now sharing in his sufferings. And I will say, ""Jesus, do you see that wheelchair? You were right when you said that in this world we would have trouble, because that thing was a lot of trouble. But the weaker I was in that thing, the harder I leaned on you. And the harder I leaned on you, the stronger I discovered you to be. It never would have happened had you not given me the bruising of the blessing of that wheelchair."" Then the

real ticker-tape parade of praise will begin. And all of earth will join in the party. And at that point Christ will open up our eyes to the great fountain of joy in his heart for us beyond all that we ever experienced on earth. And when we're able to stop laughing and crying, the Lord Jesus really will wipe away our tears. I find it so poignant that finally at the point when I do have the use of my arms to wipe away my own tears, I won't have to, because God will.

Christians don't look at their suffering, they look through their suffering to the final day where, as the popular hymn says, "Death is put to death." Until that day we will be odd, fearless, suffering Christians. All to the glory of God.