

Series: The Fellowship of the Gospel	Reference: <i>Philippians 1:27-30</i>	Title: Good Citizens	Date: 10.11.2020
Website Writeup:			
Paul says amazing things in these few verses. For Paul, being precedes & entails doing, and only then can doing in turn confirm our being. We're called to live what we already are in Christ no matter the costs. We are citizens of heaven, therefore we live accordingly, in a manner worthy of our king.			

We increasingly live in a world in which the values & long-held beliefs surrounding Christ & His gospel are not only challenged, but maligned & considered to be antithetical to the social & political fabric in which we live. Slowly, the Christian Ethic & Worldview are being seen as not only roadblocks, but as social enemies; antiquated thinking which holds back progress. A true utopian society is thought only to be achieved when Christianity is no longer a part of the conversation. Christians are being painted as the bad citizen, simply due to their faith & biblical convictions on the human condition & how life is to be governed & lived in certain areas.

Our society has in many areas moved from reflecting a Christian ethic (not that this was ever perfect), to the exact opposite. Many Christian leaders believe persecution will come in full force for Christians in coming years. Another Christian leader said to me this week, "Our current social fabric feels like the plates of the earth shifting & separating quickly & it's shaking us to the core."

I've had opportunity recently to hear what's being taught in Zoom classes from the local High School. It's not only the exact opposite of the Christian ethic, but hostile to it. And, disagreement brings swift social pressure & sometimes worse. The new definition of gender fluidity has even been included at the level of kindergarten curriculum in local schools. One Philadelphia teacher recently said he's worried that with Zoom classes parents will hear what's being taught & undermine the progress they've made away from traditional faith-based thinking.

How far this will go is yet to be seen, but signs are there. Suffice it to say, decisions are now being made out of a humanistic worldview devoid of God's moral direction & standards. We certainly can't expect everyone else to fall in line with a Christian worldview, but should be prepared for all this shift brings.

It's quite confusing, and in the end won't work. Listening to an Ivy League speaker on human rights this week, after outlining all the differing & conflicting views on what different groups in society feel are their human rights, she identified the obvious philosophical & social quandary by simply asking, "Whose rights, are the right rights?" Simply put...divided we fall. Because there's no consensus, due to a lack of central moral standard & value for human life as in the Christian Worldview. And the church will continue to be affected greatly.

In Iran right now there's a legal case where a couple adopted a little girl. The State has deemed them unfit to raise the child due to their conversion to Christianity. Judge Muhammad Hassan Dashti acknowledged the girl will probably live the rest of her life in State care. For them, it's better this child be raised by the State rather than loving Christian parents. And America's very close in some areas of life here where the government will feel justified to intercede in families which teach certain Christian values to their children. The government's already mandated certain lessons, contrary to Christian thinking, which must be taught to children by foster & adoptive parents if the issue should come up with them.

Paul & the Philippian church experienced this same persecution & it's largely why this letter's was written. Christians were seen at the time as a detriment to society & a challenge to the values, worldview & current political structure due only to their faith & worldview.

Remembering what we said last week that seeing all of life through the vantage point of Christ as King, our lives are worthy of suffering for His glory & mission. And as a result of what he's said, Paul says in Philippians 1:27-30...*Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come & see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one 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 in 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.**

Paul's suffering for Jesus in prison with all integrity to speak to them in this way.

Two matters are discussed here in this short passage, both bending towards the end result of the gospel of Christ being preached to all peoples. In other words, whatever happens to us, as Paul says here, is for the Glory & Mission of Jesus. We can go back to Matthew 28:18-20, the Great Commission, which should be at the forefront of our minds in whatever we face - *"All authority in heaven & on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go & make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father & of the Son & of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

So whatever we face, Jesus always walks through it with us, no matter if you feel His presence or not. It's all about the furtherance of God's message going out to others. John Piper, in his book, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, said, God's mission to bring the Gospel to all nations will end when Christ returns, but worship will continue forever. In Matthew 24:14 Jesus Himself said, *"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."*

There will come a time on Christ's return when our mission will end, and we will enjoy the forever glory of Christ! A time that Revelation 7:17 tells us, *"...the Lamb at the center*

of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water.’ ‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’

All suffering will end as we’re unified forever under Christ’s complete rule. Our central purpose in the world now is to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus to all nations with little regard to personal desire. He must increase, we must decrease, as John the Baptist said.

I think it was Francis Chan who did a talk once where he had a long rope extending from the stage & out the front door of the church. That rope represented eternity, and at his end on stage there was about an inch painted red. He pointed out that we worry so much about our lives right now - that one inch of red. Our rights, bodies & desires. He noted rightly, we as citizens of the Kingdom have to look at our lives in light of eternity (the rest of the rope), what’s most important in the red zone of that rope is that we proclaim & seek Christ for others beyond our own will now.

The first matter in this passage has to do with the nature of their stand as citizens of the kingdom of God (vv27–28). And this first matter can be broken down into the **individuals** response, as well as our **corporate** response as the unified church.

It’s not easily seen here that Paul’s speaking of being a good citizen of the kingdom of God, no matter how the state or society reacts. When he says *‘conduct yourselves in a manner worthy’*, he’s using a very specific verb which only occurs one other place in his writings. It can be translated as ‘behave as citizens’, or ‘live the life of a citizen’, or ‘to live as a member of a community’. It came to be applied to the moral conduct as defined by a community. He usually would use a different verb to describe Christian conduct. So he’s speaking very clearly as to how we live, or what we do, or how we behave in the context of the Christian life & community as we live in this world. Holding to the standards, values & convictions of the Christian life as defined by Christ & the Scriptures, since as he says later in 3:20, “...our citizenship is in heaven.”

In other words, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, or conduct yourselves as citizens of heaven despite what society dictates. They’ve experienced persecution, they’ll experience more. I’d be remiss if I didn’t say the same for us. He was preparing them, and we prepare ourselves for whatever form it comes, but remembering again what we said last week, your life’s worth suffering for Jesus.

What do good citizens do? They obey the law, not just the letter of it, but the spirit of it as well. They contribute, and work as one under the shared values & morals in which the government of Christ is established. This includes our sexual ethic of marriage being between one man & one woman with the sexual act as a consummation of it & limited to the marriage covenant. It extends into the idea that we’re physically embodied spiritual beings, so what we do with our bodies has great meaning. It has to do with the value of human life extending from simply how we speak to each other, all the way to the value of unborn children. It extends to biblical justice, care & mercy being practiced among all peoples. It encompasses the Beatitudes as well as all other Scripture as Jesus indicated. It extends into how we spend our money, make decisions & the integrity of an

honest life. A call to a certain biblical ethic to be lived by all Believers. All the things the Church has agreed upon throughout its life. It's only in recent history in which these things have been undermined by a very pointed effort to dismantle the Churches influence in the world.

So we have an individual responsibility as Believers to live worthy of the Gospel of Christ, bearing in mind that the fight isn't reactionary against non-Believers as adversaries, but we contend *for* the faith - our gospel message to them.

Naturally, this extends to our corporate life. Paul sees the church as unifying under Jesus & His reign in all of life - coming under Him. There's no room for anyone to have a different view than Jesus as King concerning His directives & still to consider themselves unified. That's not unification. Unification's to come under the rule & reign of God in Christ. We can't have salvation without repentance from what God deems as sin - repentance means 'to turn away' from sin, and to 'turn to God'.

And the sad fact's stated here by Paul, those who refuse to come under Jesus, won't see the full glory of Christ upon His return. They'll be separated from Him for eternity. Those who reject Jesus, or think they can have Jesus without being unified under His reign, (Savior, but not Lord) won't participate in the forever glory of Christ - sad but true. As 1 Corinthians 1:18 says, *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

Now remember, this is all couched in the concept of grace. We're saved by grace through faith & that by God, not us (Eph 2). However, there's a difference between someone making mistakes, admitting to them & seeking repentance, even if it be an ongoing struggle, as opposed to someone saying, "Well, I can do what I want, in this area or that, and Jesus still has to accept me." As Paul alludes here, the latter's a sign they don't know Jesus. David wasn't excluded from God's family because of his sin with Bathsheba, he admitted his wrong & repented well - a sign that God had convicted his heart. He didn't argue pridefully against God that he was allowed to do as he wanted with Bathsheba.

Paul's not asserting some innate 'worthiness' of us as citizens. Instead he merely insists, having been incorporated as citizens & thereby *made* worthy, our conduct now is to be *appropriate*, in keeping with this new status & dignity (cf. Leo the Great, quoted in CCC, §1691f.).¹ For Aristotle, practice made perfect, *doing* constituted *being*: the virtuous person becomes virtuous by the practice of virtuous acts. In contrast, for Paul, *being precedes & entails doing*, and only then can *doing* in turn confirm *being*. It's to live what you already are in Christ. 'You're citizens of heaven; therefore live accordingly, in a manner worthy of your king.'²

As Paul says in Romans 6:11...*In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.* Or, Galatians 5:16...*So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not*

¹ Markus Bockmuehl, [The Epistle to the Philipppians](#), Black's New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1997), 98.

² Markus Bockmuehl, [The Epistle to the Philipppians](#), Black's New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1997), 98.

gratify the desires of the flesh. Or, Colossians 3:1–3...Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

Paul's simply reminding them who they are in Christ, who their King is, and how they're to reflect His kingdom standards to the world, no matter what suffering they may face.

Which brings us to the second thing he discusses - Christian suffering in light of their position in & their stand for Christ in vv29–30...*For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in 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.*

Paul's communicating to suffering people, what they endure now intimately ties them to Jesus. In Colossians 1:24 he states, *Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.*

What a strange verse! What's still lacking in regard to Christ's sufferings? Didn't Jesus suffer enough? Wasn't Christ's suffering which led to His death & resurrection sufficient for anyone's salvation?

Of course, but Paul knows, we live as citizens which have already tasted the beginnings of the Kingdom of God, but it's not fully realized as of yet. Hence, the future hope of Revelation 7 read earlier. Remember, Jesus said in the Great Commission, *"And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age!"* We don't fully understand how, but Jesus is embodied in the individual Believer & more so in the Church! As we suffer, He suffers along with us! We willingly take up the mantle to which we've been called by our King, to continue the work of the Gospel until He returns. As 2 Corinthians 4:10 says... *We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.*

Remember the parable of the talents when the Master went off leaving his servants in charge of his money (Mt 25:14-30)? Two of them invested & made more, but the third buried his & didn't make a thing thinking his Master to be a hard man. The Master took his bag of gold & gave it to the first, and then threw the third guy out. Since his actions were a sign the man really didn't know, or care to know, let alone work for the interest of the Master. Notice He's the Master of all of them, but those who show they actually know the Master through investment with what the Master gives enjoy His presence.

When we identify with Jesus, suffering confirms our faith, brings us into closer contact with Him, and provides a vehicle for making commitment real & tangible. Good citizens of the kingdom invest what Jesus has left us in charge of, out of connection to Him, even when things get difficult. It's one thing to accept suffering & resign oneself to it. It's

another to realize the privileges which come through it,³ as well as the intimate identification with Jesus. As Paul says in 3:10-11...*I want to know Christ - yes, to know the power of his resurrection & participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.*

Paul's suffering related directly to calling people to salvation in Jesus. The universal nature of the gospel presented a problem to Gentiles, who had their own religions & to Jews, who wanted the Gentiles to just be Jewish. The result was that Paul suffered at the hands of both groups & the church at Philippi would do so as well. Paul innately practiced a theology of suffering without becoming calloused to human need & without accepting suffering as good. The danger for Christians at any time is that, in suffering, we'd have either of those reactions.

Suffering's evil - it originates from sin. Paul stopped far short of mixing good & evil, which would make evil, or suffering, a good thing. He realized the benefits & privileges of being involved in a battle for the truth & that battle scars were inevitable. The supreme model was Christ. Similarly, Christians should remember, suffering sometimes comes because we live in a world which suffers as a result of sin. Christians are called to a unique suffering because of our identification with righteousness in an evil world. It's a divinely given privilege to be involved in this battle & the struggle becomes redemptive in our identification & work for Jesus. The Philippians were, therefore, to take heart in suffering. Their steadfastness would demonstrate the reality of their relationship to God.⁴

In conclusion, simply put...Christians, are to adopt a way of life in keeping with our corporate citizenship as constituted in Christ & the gospel. The Philippians were earthly citizens of Rome, but also heavenly citizens of Christ's Kingdom. We are citizens of America, but over & above we are heavenly subjects of our King, Jesus. So I remind you...*For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (Eph 5:8). You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ & by the Spirit of our God (1 Co 6:11).*

So...whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Stand firm in the one Spirit, strive together as one for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you....it's been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him. We're called to proclaim Jesus & it's worth the trouble for the sake of His Glory & Mission in light of eternity!

³ Richard R. Melick, [Philippians, Colossians, Philemon](#), vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 91.

⁴ Richard R. Melick, [Philippians, Colossians, Philemon](#), vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 92.