

# Philippians 1:12-30

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Date: 22 January 2023

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] This past Monday was Martin Luther King Day in the United States. Martin Luther King Day was established under Ronald Reagan's presidency. But one of the things when I discovered this, one of the things that it did was remind me of a film called Selma that was out a number of years ago.

Selma tells the story of the protest marches in 1965 that were led by King demanding voting rights for black people in the United States. Martin Luther King decided to pursue a strategy of non-violent protest and he thought that applying pressure to the state and to the president in particular would be the best way to achieve their goals as they sought to bring these voting rights in. And the march was from Selma to Montgomery in Alabama in the south. And the film portrays the political and the physical opposition that the protesters had to go through. But really the story of the film is about what was going on behind the scenes. So as the hostility on the outside was growing, it created confusion and doubt and fear and anxiety amongst King's followers, those that were involved with the protests. And that made them think about whether or not this strategy, this non-violent strategy was the best.

Was that the best way forward? They were seeing their friends being attacked. They were seeing others being maligned in all kinds of different ways. And they became skeptical about whether this was the right approach. And there was another leader at the time, Malcolm X. He was trying to get people to return violence with violence.

So what was the best approach? Anger, confusion, fear, different ideas. People were confused. And the film depicts this disagreement and the confusion and the division that was going on. In fact, there was so much division that some just wanted to give up altogether. What was happening was that pressure from the outside created this confusion and fear and anger that threatened unity on the inside. And the film would have us believe in actual fact that the biggest obstacle to the success of the whole project wasn't the opposition from the outside. It was in fact this internal disunity. Something very similar is going on in the church in Philippi. And if you can turn back to chapter one, the passage that was read for us.

We're going to spend our time there this morning. The church is facing opposition from the outside. Look at verse 28. Chapter one, verse 28. He speaks of opponents. And those opponents, we get to chapter three, we discover what those opponents are doing. And the apostle Paul describes them as dogs. These opponents are doing all kinds of things that we'll discover later on in the book. But as well as that, you saw last time that the apostle is in prison. He's writing to them from prison.

[ 3 : 1 4 ] Now you can imagine that some in Philippi are asking the question, how on earth does that fit with this guy being God's messenger? How can you be God's apostle? The one that God has set his blessing on to be a voice for God in the world? How can that person be in prison? Is he really God's man? Is he really the right voice that we should be listening to? So this external pressure, the opponents, the internal confusion, it's all beginning to develop. And doubts have begun to take hold. And later when we get to chapter four, we see that divisions have begun to grow in the life of the church. Famously, Euodia and Syntyche have fallen out.

These were foundational women in the life of the church, Acts 16 tells us, or alludes to. And it's clear that there's all kinds of problems beginning to bubble up inside. So Paul has started the letter, last few weeks we've seen, on an encouraging note. The apostle Paul and Paul Levy, the preacher, an encouraging note. But he turns this morning, the apostle turns this morning to give his first exhortation, his first instruction to the church. Verse 27, he says, only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or I'm 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, and not frightened in anything by your opponents.

Paul's writing to strengthen the church. He's writing to encourage them and to make sure that they stay on track. And in the face of this opposition, he calls the Philippians back to what they should be all about. What is it that the church should be all about? And he says, let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ. Now, if you look down to the footnote in the church Bible, you'll see that the phrase here translated manner of life is a translation of the Greek word that's used for citizenship. So, Paul is saying, live as worthy citizens of the gospel.

In fact, he reinforces this idea in chapter 3, verse 20, which is a kind of bookend of this broader section when he tells the Philippians, you remember, but our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. I was talking to the children this morning. I brought my passport with me, and I was showing them the passport to make this point. There it is.

A bit out of date now because it says European Union on the top, but if you look at your passport, wherever you're from, what that little booklet says is that you have the status of a citizen, and you possess all the rights and privileges of that nation. In this case, it's the United Kingdom of Northern Ireland and the associated provinces, and the crest that is on the front of this defines your citizenship. This identifies you with a particular kingdom. Now, not only do you have those privileges, those rights, but you're also expected to live in line with the laws of the land.

[ 6 : 26 ] Citizenship was a big deal in the Roman Empire, and history tells us that Philippi had become a Roman colony. What that meant was that citizens of the city, Philippi had become Romans, and in lots of areas, Philippi had adopted Roman customs. So, the Philippians took great pride in this.

Citizenship was an important thing for them, and they took great pride in the fact that they were Roman citizens. They were identifying as Romans, but however proud they were of that earthly citizenship, the Apostle Paul is making it clear. Chapter 1, verse 4, they belong to God's kingdom because of their faith in Jesus Christ. There is a citizenship that transcends their earthly citizenship, that is much more important, that binds them in ways that transcend all other responsibilities and loyalties. There is a higher citizenship that these people to whom Paul writes should cherish and honor, both cherish and honor more dearly. That is how it is for the Christian.

Wherever we come from on the map, wherever our earthly citizenship, and of course that's complicated in all kinds of ways in our current global situation, but we are at root, first of all, citizens of God's heavenly kingdom. And we are to live, therefore, in a manner that is worthy of that citizenship.

That's the controlling idea this morning that the Apostle has here. Live in a manner worthy of your heavenly citizenship. You are a citizen of heaven, and he says that requires three commitments. If you're going to live in a manner worthy of, verse 27, worthy of the gospel of Christ, three commitments. Number one, you will be tenacious for the gospel. Tenacious for the gospel, verse 27. Gold diggers, I said, committed to the gospel. The word tenacious really means brave.

[ 8 : 34 ] Okay, so committed to, brave for, tenacious. Whether Paul sees them or just hears reports, he wants to know that the Philippians are standing firm in one spirit with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, verse 27.

So as they give themselves as a church to the spread and growth of the Christian faith where they are, Paul is calling them to be tenacious. They'll show this tenacity in two ways. First of all, standing firm. You see that? Stand firm, he says. That has the sense of steadfastness about it.

Immovability. In the face of the opposition, he says, don't give in. Don't take a backward step. Stand your ground on matters of truth and gospel integrity. That's what it means to live as a citizen of the gospel. You stand firm. In our current culture, it means you say, I'm sorry, I can't endorse something that denies the truth about God or humanity or the world.

I'm a Christian. You stand firm. They say, well, look, this is in the workplace. They say, well, as an organization, I'm afraid we're committed to diversity, and if you're not prepared to budge on this, it's going to cost you your job. You say, I appreciate this is a sensitive issue, but I can't say yes where God says no, and vice versa. I can't say no where God says yes.

And by the way, how wide is your commitment to diversity? Does that commitment include Christians? Just by the way. Let me encourage you young people at school, stand firm. Don't be ashamed of your Christian faith. People criticize you. Don't be shy about the fact that you belong. Verse 28, when people oppose you, don't be frightened. Very easy, isn't it, to be frightened by those that oppose your Christian faith, mock you for it, tease you for it. Stand firm. Don't be frightened.

[ 10 : 45 ] It isn't just a defensive thing. It's not just that we stand firm. The church doesn't stand still. She strives forward as well. Do you see that? Stand firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel. Striving or contending. That word in the original comes from the gladiators arena. It is a word that would describe some kind of physical effort, some kind of combat perhaps even. James Montgomery Boyce, the one-time minister of 10th Presbyterian in Philadelphia, on this verse he says that Paul's expectation is for an aggressive, quote, aggressive front foot Christianity. He says this, quote, the Christians at Philippi knew the obligation that was theirs to advance Roman rule in the face of barbarism. In the same way, Paul would have them united for an aggressive advancement of the faith. How we need to recover an aggressive faith today. I don't misunderstand.

Paul is not saying here that we're to be personally aggressive or to be rude. Kindness and gentleness, those are fruit of the Spirit. Those are to mark us as Christians. In all of our engagement, we are to be kind and gentle. What I think he's talking about here is that we don't allow our faith to be shut away in the corner. We don't marginalize it, put it off to one side. Our gospel is about Jesus Christ, the Lord, the King, the ruler of every square inch of creation. That means that our faith is inescapably public. When you say that Jesus Christ is Lord and that you're submitting yourself to Him, that has implications that reach to the very edges of your life. It is inescapably public.

Many of the problems, many of the problems that face the wider church in our moment today exist because for too long we have thought that we could adapt our faith to the prevailing culture. That we could privatize it or personalize it in some way that it didn't encroach on other people. But that's a mistake. And we're beginning to reap the consequences of that. Your Christian faith should inform every aspect of your life. The way that you define goodness, the way that you define beauty, the way that those things, those categories are determined by God, not the culture. The way that you raise your family, the way that you do your job, the way that you spend your time and money, your Christianity should inform all of those things. And every choice that you make along the way as well. And if we're going to do this in the face of opposition, it means being tenacious, standing firm and striving side by side for the faith of the gospel. It means doing it every day.

[ 13 : 54 ] That'll mean speaking up on ethical issues in our culture. It will mean defending the rights of the most vulnerable in society, the unborn whose lives are taken as a matter of convenience. It'll mean being unashamed to stand up for truth and goodness, even when to do that is really uncool and will cost you personally to do so. So, the citizen of heaven is first of all tenacious for the gospel. And in Philippi, just like today, such tenacity would be tough.

It's not easy to go against the flow. Paul is calling us here to stand out, be under no illusions. That's what he is saying is required of the citizen of heaven, that we stand out, we're prepared to suffer, which is why we need to read on. Because tenacity relies on confidence in God. So, secondly, citizens of heaven will be confident in God's plans. Tenacious for the gospel, secondly, confident in God's plans. Look at verse 28. Striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, but of your salvation, and that from God. 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, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have. Back in Acts chapter 16, when Paul was in Philippi, he was charged with advocating practices that were unlawful. The state surrounded, kind of closed in on him and went after him for doing what he was called to do as a Christian. They said it was behavior that wasn't fitting of a citizen of Rome. And the Philippians are engaged in the same conflict, he says here.

Because, as I said a moment ago, Jesus Christ and not the emperor is Lord. They are submitting themselves to a different authority, to a different king. And in doing that, they're going to stand out. Things are going to be difficult. Local culture, just the things of everyday life would have been hard. People withdraw from friendships. People blank you on the street. People that you care about blank you on the street. Maybe even they say that they don't want their children mixing with the kids that belong to that group down the road. Business would have been hard. If you refuse to do certain things in order to get contracts, well, people take their business elsewhere.

[ 16 : 44 ] Perhaps even being seen, if you're a business owner, being seen to trade with one of those people who is viewed as an agitator, who's difficult, who's creating problems in our culture.

Seen to do business with them makes it difficult. It would be risky. You just don't bother. Don't do business with them.

You see how it gets difficult. Some of you probably experience something like this even now. When you're marginalized or mocked or made to pay because you follow Christ, precisely because you follow Christ obediently, and that opposition seems so big and impressive, so impossible to penetrate, and you look around and the people that are on your team just seem a bit ordinary, you feel very weak, what Paul says here is so important. He says, don't worry about that. Don't worry. This is part of God's plan.

When he says, verse 28, this is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation and that from God, he doesn't just mean that the salvation is all of God's doing, which of course it is. What he's saying here is that the whole thing, the whole, the salvation that he's talking about here is the whole Christian faith, the journey of someone coming to faith in the Lord Jesus and finishing the race. That whole thing, he's saying, is under the sovereign guidance of God. And in fact, verse 29, the suffering, the suffering, he says, has been granted to you. It has been permitted by God in his strange, often difficult, but infinitely wise purposes. God has given this situation to the Philippians, this struggle to the Philippians, and he has done it in order to bring about his good and perfect ends. This seems so counterintuitive, but the suffering that the Philippians have been granted, the struggles that God has permitted into their lives are one of the ways that they demonstrate, their persistence in and through this is one of the ways that they demonstrate their heavenly citizenship, but it is part of the means that God uses to get them to glory.

Some ways, and particularly when you're in the middle of it, it's very hard to grasp. But here's the thing, as God enables you to faithfully persevere through the opposition, that is evidence that you belong to Christ. Why have you kept going in your hardships as you face opposition, despite the whispering in the staff room, despite the disciplinary case, despite being uninvited to the family wedding or whatever it might be. Why do you keep going despite the pain of all of that, the struggle?

[ 20 : 00 ] It's because God has you in his grasp. And as alongside that, the faithful conduct that you demonstrate when you do that is a signpost to those opponents, even though they might not realize it.

It is a signpost to those opponents that their behavior will lead to their destruction. Apart from repentance, that is the sort of thing that will lead those people to destruction. When we are opposed for being a Christian, the temptation is always, always, always to think that something's wrong. To think that there's some sort of problem in the system, especially if we're seeking to live obediently, especially if the opposition comes to us because we are being faithful to Christ. There's no obvious reason why this is the case. In that situation, it's tempting to us to feel that God has made a mistake, or he's forgotten us for some reason.

We're the exception. We believe the truth that God has all of us under his control, except in this situation, he's kind of dropped the ball with me. Or he's taken his eye off things down here in Ealing, where things are tough. That's not the case at all. Because we know, don't we, that walking, following Christ means walking the same path that he walked. If anyone will come after me, Jesus says, he must take up his cross and follow.

The church and Christ are linked, head and body. He is the head, we are the body. And as it was for the head, so it is for the body. The missionary Amy Carmichael captures this beautifully in a poem, *Hast thou no scar?* It's a poem she wrote about suffering as a Christian. And in the last verse, she says this, No wound, no scar, yet as the master shall the servant be, and pierced are the feet that follow me. But thine are whole. Can he have followed far who has no wound nor scar? My friends, I don't know your situation this morning. But I do know this, suffering for the faith of the gospel is not a mistake. The way to glory is only possible along the road of suffering. As I said, in his infinite wisdom, it is the means by which God gets us there. If you're suffering this morning because you are tenacious for the faith of the gospel, take heart. It is a sign that you're a citizen of heaven, which means that you can face the hostility that you're enduring, confident that God is at work in you and he's at work in this situation.

[ 23 : 24 ] These circumstances are from him and they will work out for your salvation. So trust him. Trust him. Trust him. but you can't do that on your own, which is why Paul goes where he does next.

Citizens of heaven, tenacious for the gospel, confident in God's plan. Number three, united in the task. United in the task.

Chapter two, have a look, verse one. And Paul has already made this point in verse 27, chapter one, when he spoke about standing firm in one spirit, one mind, striving side by side.

But he picks it up. He picks up what he means by that and develops it here. So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, he's using that rhetorically.

There is encouragement in Christ, obviously. There is comfort from love and so on. He says, do this, complete my joy. By being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind, do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

[ 24 : 39 ] Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Paul wants Philippi to be a tenacious, confident church, but this requires them to be a united church.

The one Holy Spirit who brought these people together in the gospel to experience the comfort of knowing Christ and being united to him and who participate together in the partnership that he creates.

We talked over the last couple of weeks about the partnership language that Paul uses here to describe the church. This church is to be united. And what he's saying here as he uses this rhetorical language, if there is any encouragement, what he's doing here is saying, listen, since these things are true of you theologically, you're encouraged in Christ, comforted by his love. You participate in the Spirit. They should be the case in practice as well. When Paul talks about one mind in verse 27, repeats it in 2 verse 2, the mind here isn't just the intellect.

The word carries the sense of the inner being or your soul. He's saying at the level of the soul, the church should be on the same page when it comes to striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

[ 26 : 14 ] We should share the same concerns. The church's hearts should beat together for what is most important in life, namely the priorities of Christ's kingdom, of which they are citizens.

This wasn't the case in Philippi, and that's why Paul wants them to restore his joy by putting this right. If the church will be tenacious in the face of opposition, we need to be united.

Few churches close. My experience, few churches close or become ineffective because of external opposition. They close because of infighting. Saw this during the pandemic.

Congregations were torn apart, not by the impositions of the state, actually, but by disagreements about meetings and masks and vaccines and things like that. A bit like the Selma march.

The pressure from the outside created confusion and fear and anger that splintered church unity. And that is tragic. And it's tragic because if the church will be confident in God's sovereign plans, when the culture turns up the heat against us, we need one another side by side, linking arms.

[ 27 : 24 ] We can't do this on our own. This is true across gospel-believing churches. If our nation will be reached, there needs to be more striving side by side across churches that are committed and word and deed to the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

Yes. But that kind of unity grows out of local church congregations that are united. When we think about this, the biggest enemy of unity is the self.

Me getting in the way of us. When I make church about my preferences, my gifts, my opinions.

That's why Paul goes on to say what he says.

Verse 3, he says, Get yourself out of the way. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Let each of you look not only to his own interests. It's not that you ignore your own interests, but you don't just stop there. Also to the interests of others. There are hints throughout the letter, I think, of Philippians that this lies, this issue lies at the heart of the internal strife in Philippi.

[ 28 : 45 ] Because when things get hard, when the pressure comes on, people think they have the answer. What you need to do is what I think. My opinions need to be heard.

I've read this book or listened to this podcast. Or actually, the problem we're having at the minute is because of those people over there. Actually, they need to get sorted out. They do X or they don't do X, and that's the problem.

Paul says no. No rivalry. No conceit. No self-promotion. Put your ego aside. Put your ego aside.

Realize I'm fairly new to this church, and we're loving it here as part of this congregation, and it feels

like a very united church.

I praise God for that. When we think about the temptations that exist when cultural pressure comes on, how many difficulties, how much of that pressure would be relieved if we adopted this stance? No rivalry. No conceit. Not needing our voice to be heard. Not positioning ourselves to look good or make others look bad. Going out of our way for the sake of others.

[ 30 : 00 ] Even being prepared to be wronged for the sake of unity. Our culture prefers phrases like, make them pay.

I have a right to this. I'm going to get that. Imagine if you're not a Christian, you're with us this morning, I imagine the idea of letting some wrong or other go in a situation sounds crazy. But actually, being able to be wronged in a certain matter is one of the great liberties that comes through the Christian gospel. Do you know that? You can let stuff go and be okay with that. See, Paul has reminded this church that they have received God's grace. It's taken all this time in chapter 1 to do that. They have been forgiven for their sins. They have been given salvation not by their own efforts, but through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

There is no other salvation, and it comes to us as a gift. And that is a gift that the Philippians have received. Now, when that happens, when you really grasp what that means, and you repent of your sin, and you put your faith in Jesus Christ, what you realize is that you have received an infinitely precious gift.

[ 31 : 20 ] And when we grasp that the extent of the grace that we have received, despite the way that we have wronged God so outrageously in His world, we are freed to extend a much lesser grace to others.

When you realize the extent of forgiveness and grace that you have received, the magnitude of that from God, you can pass up and extend that grace to others again and again.

When you know that you're secure in Christ, that God is always good to you, always, and that future glory will be wonderful for all eternity, you're able to give up all kinds of things in the here and now.

You can give up pleasures. You can give up even rights. You can even give up your reputation.

Can you see how liberating this salvation really is?

Think about how controlled people are by these things. How things outside of us control us. Having, wanting, needing certain things.

[ 32 : 32 ] In the gospel, you can let them go. You can hold them with an open hand. If you're not a Christian this morning, this is what Christianity offers you.

It offers you forgiveness that liberates you from the control of all these other things. And for us as Christians, it is out of this liberty that we can put unity in the body of Christ ahead of our own interests.

And we must do this. Not just because this unity threatens our mission to advance the gospel, because this unity in the body of Christ in the end is a denial of the gospel.

You simply cannot say you believe a gospel that unites across social and cultural divides. Every social and cultural divide. You can't profess, verse 1, to participate in the Holy Spirit who is the spirit of peace and unity when you persist in conflict with someone who loves the same gospel and is full of the same Holy Spirit.

Worthy citizens of the gospel seek to put right differences and restore disunity rather than the opposite. So, when the church faces opposition from the culture, when evangelism is slow, when we are persecuted because we're tenacious for the faith of the gospel, we must stick together.

[ 33 : 57 ] If the film is to be believed, the Selma protest march was a success because people pulled together around the cause. People from far and near overlooked their differences for the sake of a greater uniting cause.

How much more should that be true of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ? Citizens of heaven, united in Christ by the Holy Spirit, we have a far greater cause than any other, standing firm, contending for the faith of the gospel.

Let's resolve to do this.