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Philippians 1:27-1:30

Discipleship 101: Counter-Cultural Disciples

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What **word** would you use to describe our world right now? **Chaotic**? **Angry**? A **mess**? It seems like every week there's a new story covering the strife in Washington and filling our globe. North Korea. Russia. Healthcare. The President. NFL. It seems like no matter the topic, our world is bitterly divided.

But the great news is that Christians are in agreement! We are **unified**. We are at **peace**. We offer a **safe-haven** to those who want to get away from the chaos... Unfortunately, that's not true. As Christians, we get caught up in the same chaos. As the church, I believe we can be a **counter-cultural** safe-haven, offering **peace** and **unity** where the world offers unrest. In our passage today, the Apostle Paul tells disciples how we can live differently, and it **starts** with the gospel.

Live worthy of the gospel. (Phil 1:27a)

“Whatever happens, *conduct yourselves* in a manner worth of the *gospel* of Christ.” The words “**conduct yourselves**” is the Greek word **politeuomai**. Does anyone know the Greek word for “**city**”? It's **polis**. Like our English word for “large city” is **metropolis**. So the Greek word **politeuomai** has to do with cities, specifically **citizens**. **Politeuomai** (“conduct”) actually means “to be a citizen.” Paul is saying, “Live like you're a citizen of a different country.” Have you ever met someone from a different country, like **France**, or **Germany** or **Louisiana**? They just act differently. *What country are we citizens of? The kingdom of God.*

The gospel is the good news that God's heavenly kingdom is breaking into this world (Dan 2:34-35; Mark 1:14-15). Jesus in his ministry preached the arrival of God's kingdom.

Matthew 4:23 Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. (NIV®)

Jesus preached all about the kingdom of God breaking into our world (Luke 4:43). Now Paul encourages us to act differently because we know we're **citizens** this **kingdom** that is going to change everything about our world for the better, beginning with our **hearts** and moving outward into **society**, even healing disease and sickness. So when we speak of the gospel, we should talk of both its **message** and its **impact**.

First, the **gospel message**—the **gospel message** begins on the inside. I recognize that I am born in sin and choose to sin. I choose to disobey and not trust God. I have a sinful heart, and I **personally** am in need of forgiveness and healing, which God **offers** us through Jesus Christ. If we repent of our sin and put our faith in Christ, we are given the righteousness of Christ. *The gospel message saves me personally.*

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (NIV®)

Second, the **gospel impact**—the **gospel impact** recognizes that sin doesn't just hurt me. I have a **leaky heart**. Sin seeps out into our world negatively impacting our friendships, marriages, culture, social systems, and government, producing oppressive systems and institutions warped by greed, racism, and bitterness. But the good news is that Jesus came to **redeem** (to fix) this too. *The gospel message produces gospel impact, which is about saving all of creation.*

Romans 8:20-21 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. (NIV®)

The **gospel message** and **gospel impact** is going to change everything, both **people** and **creation**. When we realize how life-changing and world-changing this whole gospel is, it changes how we live.

I recently purchased a new **gas grill**. It has three burners, a drip tray, and that **new grill smell**. It's like I'm living in a whole new world full of new possibilities. Because it's so great, I'm working really hard to keep it that way by cleaning the grill inside and out. I'm living differently because I know how valuable it is. Have you ever purchased a **new car** and you're really careful to vacuum it and take it to the carwash and spray it down with that new car smell because you want to make it last? Or maybe you purchased some **new clothes** and you're careful not to shrink them in the dryer for at least the first month? *We live differently when we understand something's value.*

*How much more valuable is the life-transforming world-changing gospel of Jesus Christ? So **how**, according to Paul, can we **conduct ourselves** in a way that shows the value of the gospel and its impact?*

Live worthy of the gospel through unity. (Phil 1:27b-30)

The rest of verse 27 says, “Then, whether I come and 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.” The Philippians are supposed to live as “**one**” and today as **Christians** and as the **church**, we're to live as “one.” *We're supposed to act like we're all citizens of the **same kingdom** preaching the **same life-transforming world-changing gospel**, but we have a hard time doing this.*

There has been a tendency over the last 150 years for personal spirituality to be the concern of evangelicals and social justice to be the domain of liberals. You go to an evangelical church to hear sermons on faith, repentance, prayer, love, joy, service, giving, evangelism, healthy relationships, personal integrity, God's grace, God's power, and God's providence. You go to a liberal church to hear sermons on family violence, the victims of AIDS, oppression of the poor, environmental issues, and the concerns of the marginalized. - *The Heart is the Target* by Murray Capill (page 181)

As Christians we're called to preach both the **gospel message** and the **gospel impact**. We're not supposed to live in a **gospel bubble**, but a gospel **fire hydrant** that drenches the world. We can only do this **together**. Paul calls us to “stand firm” and “strive together” for this gospel. The commentaries say Paul is using the image of **athletic games**. **Lawson** writes, “The main root of the word translated ‘striving’ (**sunathleo**) gives the English language words such as ‘athlete’ and ‘athletic.’ The idea pictures someone competing with maximum effort in an athletic contest such as running or wrestling [or Crossfit].”¹ I added that last one.

One of the girls at my Crossfit gym plays Rugby. When I think of Paul's call for us to strive together as a team, I think of a **Rugby huddle**, which is actually called a **Rugby scrum**. In a Rugby scrum, a team interlocks their heads together with the heads of the other team, and they push and press each other forward and backward till one of their teammates throws the rugby ball into the tunnel between them and one team recovers it. Being in that scrum is hard, and it really hurts. *Paul is calling us to strive together as a team, locking our arms and straining forward for “the faith of the gospel”—first for the **gospel message**, but as we realize we're citizens of God's **kingdom**, for the **gospel impact** too.*

¹ Lawson, Steven. *Philippians For You: Shine with joy as you live by faith* (God's Word For You Book 18) (p. 81). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

As a church, we can be a place that strives together to live lives worthy of the gospel? We can only do this if we work hard to be unified in our **love** for and **understanding** of the full gospel. I believe this is our **vision** as a church: “A gospel-centered church that changes lives through sharing the message of Jesus Christ in word and deed”. Our vision tells me we want to both **hear** the gospel, and **see it** make a real difference in lives. *We unify as a church when every person and ministry takes personal responsibility for believing the gospel and see it lived out in our lives, ministries, and world.*

This is intimidating, isn't it? That's why Paul gives us **two encouragements**. First, he says...

1. We don't need to be afraid. (v. 28)

Verse 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.” **Who is opposing** the Philippians? We don't know for sure. It could be the **Judaizers**, who claimed to be Christians but then said that in order to follow Christ, the Jewish Messiah, you had to obey the Jewish law. For non-Jews this was very difficult, especially since if you were male, that meant you had to get **circumcised**. You can see how this would be a giant hurdle to become a Christian. Paul writes this later in Philippians.

Philippians 3:2-3 Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh— (NIV®)

It could be the Judaizers or the city of **Philippi** itself. Philippi was very **nationalistic**. It was loyal to the **emperor** who held the title “**Lord and Savior**.”² You know how we begin our sports games by singing the **national anthem**? In ancient cities like Philippi, they would have started all their public events by declaring the emperor is “Lord and Savior.” What if you were required to call the **President** “Lord and Savior” at every **baseball game**? We couldn't do that and neither could the Philippians. So when Paul came preaching Jesus is Lord and Savior, the culture attacked him. He was **harassed, beaten**, thrown in **prison** (Acts 16:16-24). When he founded a **church** in Philippi, they were persecuted too.

1 Thessalonians 2:1-2 You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results. We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition. (NIV®)

But Paul is saying, “Don't be afraid! Don't be frightened by the Judaizers or by the citizens of Philippi. When you are unafraid, you tell their **hearts** what they already know—their truth is **no truth at all**, and one day they will be condemned by God because of it.”

When we preach the gospel, especially a gospel that impacts both the heart and the world, the world doesn't like it. *See they either want the **gospel message** without the **gospel impact** or the **gospel impact** without the **gospel message**. Why? Because when people hear the words of truth and see it lived out in a way that's changing the world, it's awfully hard to resist.*

On his podcast this week, Phil Visher read a Washington Post article that talks about Tim Tebow. *He seems to be preaching the **gospel message** that saves from **personal sin** without fear.*

Tebow was home-schooled by his Christian parents, and spent his summers in the Philippines, helping with his father's orphanage and missionary work.

² Fee, Gordon D. *Philippians* (The Ivp New Testament Commentary Series) (p. 30). Intervarsity Press - A. Kindle Edition.

During his college football career, the Heisman Trophy winner frequently wore references to Bible verses on his eye black, including the ubiquitous John 3:16 during the 2009 BCS Championship Game.

He has been outspoken about his pro-life stance, and his commitment to abstinence from sex before marriage. [...]

He has preached in churches, prisons, schools, youth groups and a welter of evangelical conferences.

And he is well known for his signature move — dropping to one knee on the field, his head bowed in prayer, his arm resting on his bent knee — known throughout the world as Tebowing.

Tim Tebow is famous for his **faith** and **football**. Although I don't know a lot about his **career**, I think it's fair to say he has faced a lot of criticism and **ridicule** for his faith in Christ. As believers, I want a little bit of Tebow's fearlessness, being willing to take a knee before Christ anywhere. *We don't need to be afraid. Live worthy of the gospel through unity.* Paul's second encouragement is...

2. Suffering is a sign we're doing it right. (v. 29-30)

Verse 29 says, "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him." The **word** for suffer is the same kind of suffering used to describe what **Jesus** went through at his **crucifixion** and what the **early church** experienced because of **persecution**. In fact, Peter, when he wrote to the church potentially under **Nero**, said suffering is to be expected.

1 Peter 2:21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. (NIV®)

This is the same church whose members will be wrongly accused by **Nero** and martyred by him in the most horrible ways imaginable—**burned alive** to light his gardens and **fed to animals** for entertainment. *Part of living worthy of the gospel is experiencing suffering together for the sake of the gospel in this world. Suffering is a sign we're doing it right.*

The Washington Post article goes on to describe another famous football player who is suffering for the gospel. But the gospel he is suffering for is not just the one that addresses personal sin, but **social sin**. **Colin Kaepernick** started **protesting the national anthem** at NFL games by sitting then **kneeling** because he has experienced the effects of sin in this world's systems, resulting in racism and death.

[Colin Kaepernick] was baptized Methodist, confirmed Lutheran, and attended a Baptist church during college.

His body is festooned with religious tattoos, including depictions of scrolls, a cross, praying hands, angels defeating demons, terms like "To God be the Glory," "Heaven Sent," "God will guide me," Psalm 18:39 and Psalm 27:3.

He has said, "My faith is the basis from where my game comes from. I've been very blessed to have the talent to play the game that I do and be successful at it. I think God guides me through every day and helps me take the right steps and has helped me to get to where I'm at. When I step on the field, I always say a prayer, say I am thankful to be able to wake up that morning and go out there and try to glorify the Lord with what I do on the field. I think if you go out and try to do that, no matter what you do on the field, you can be happy about what you did."

And Kaepernick's faith isn't just about making him feel happy. It's turned him into an activist and philanthropist. During the offseason Kaepernick launched a GoFundMe page to fly food and water into suffering Somalia. It surpassed its \$2 million goal in just four days. In March, the plane loaded with essential supplies landed in Mogadishu.

He had already pledged to donate \$1 million, along with the proceeds of his jersey sales from the 2016 season, to charitable work. [...]

He joined with the charitable organization 100 Suits, to pass out free suits in front of the New York State Parole office for people who have been released from prison and are looking for jobs.

Kaepernick protests because black people are dying from **systemic racism** and **police brutality**. As a result of Kaepernick's desire to see the whole world, even the unjust and sin-filled systems, fixed, he's being attacked. Kaepernick is currently not playing football, and some think it's because of his protests.

I'm not here to pass judgment on whether or not Kaepernick should be protesting during the national anthem. But it's interesting that both Tim Tebow and Colin Kaepernick are Christian believers who are facing gospel-centered suffering, and doing so fearlessly, but so far it seems like the Christian culture I'm most familiar with is far more supportive of Tim Tebow than Colin Kaepernick. We're not very united, are we?

I can't preach an **honest message** on church unity if I don't address at least one area where we as a church and believers might not be unified. *I know we as a church love and value the **gospel that changes my heart**, but do we love and value the **gospel that changes our world**?*

The gospel came to **transform** both the **individual** and **culture**. *I'm not suggesting we become a church known for **political activism**, but we should be a church that's known for the gospel, both for **personal redemption** and **social redemption**, for the gospel of Tim Tebow and Colin Kaepernick.*

Live worthy of the gospel through gospel unity.

I was supposed to preach all the way through **Philippians 2:11** today, but I felt like the **Holy Spirit** gave me this message. But I do want to give you a **preview** of next week. The only way we can live in unity is through **humility**. Humility is the second way to **live worthy** of the gospel. Next week's text shows how Christ humbled himself for us.

Jesus left the glories and praise of heaven so that he could step down into our **chaos**, our **anger**, our **mess**. **Philippians 2:8** says, "he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!" Jesus was **perfectly unified** with his heavenly Father. He obeyed him, loved him, trusted him, and his reward was receiving the punishment for our sin. Jesus was **forsaken** by the Father. Somehow the **unity** Jesus had known for all eternity was **disrupted** at the cross so that you and I can experience unity with God forever. Jesus took our **dis-unity** and gave us his **perfect unity**.

If your life is in chaos right now, and you need a little bit of this unity I'm talking about, you can have it because of Jesus. **Repent** of your sins and put your **faith** in him, and your whole world will change.

At the end of our passage next week, it says "every knee should bow." One day, just like **Tim Tebow** and **Colin Kaepernick**, every knee will bow to **King Jesus**. The king and his kingdom will arrive in its fullness and bring perfect unity into our world through **healing** us **personally** and **socially**. Until that day... *Live worthy of the gospel through gospel unity.*

Pastor Jonathan Romig wrote and preached this message for the people of Cornerstone Congregational Church. [Click here to listen to more sermons](#) or [click here to read our story](#).