

Act Your Identity

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[0 : 0 0] The Christian life is not a playground, but a battleground. We're going to be in Philippians chapter 1, verses 27 through 30 this morning.

And as we have seen in the last few weeks, we are sons and daughters in the family, verses 1 through 11. We are servants sharing in the furtherance of the gospel, verses 12 through verse 16.

But we're also soldiers defending the faith of the gospel as well. And the believer with that single mind can have the joy of the Holy Spirit, even in the midst of the battle.

And the faith of the gospel, we see that in verse number 27, that the Apostle Paul, when he is writing to the Philippian believers, he talks about the faith of the gospel, and that is, it's that body of divine truth that was given to the church.

The Apostle Jude calls it the faith which was once delivered to the saints in Jude 3. Paul warns Timothy in 1 Timothy chapter 4, verse 1.

[1 : 1 3] He said in the latter times, some will depart from the faith. And God committed this spiritual treasure to Paul, 1 Timothy 1.11.

And he in turn committed it to others in 1 Timothy 6.20, to others like Timothy, whose responsibility was in turn to commit it into the lives of others, that they would be able to teach others and deposit this body of truth, the faith of the gospel, in still others, 2 Timothy 2, and verse number 2, where we read that.

And this is why the church must engage in a teaching ministry, so that new generations of believers will know, appreciate, and be able to use this great heritage of our faith.

But there's an enemy out there whose main goal is to steal this treasure from God's people. Paul had met his enemy there in Philippi, and he was now facing this enemy, Satan, in Rome.

And if Satan could only rob believers of their Christian faith, the doctrines, the teachings that are distinctively Christ's, then he can cripple the ministry, and he can stop the ministry of the gospel.

[2 : 3 8] You know, it's sad to hear when people say, I don't care what you believe as long as you live right. Well, the issue is our beliefs determine our behavior.

And that's truly the way it works. Each generation, now this is scary, but each church is but one generation from extinction.

Because if we do not teach the gospel, if we do not teach the body of truth that we have in Scripture to our children and to the next generation, they will not know what God has done for them through our Lord and our Savior Jesus Christ.

So we're seeking to help people to understand the faith of the gospel, what it means, and it's no wonder that Satan attacks our young people and tries to get them away from the faith.

So the question is, how can a group of believers, how can a local body of believers fight this enemy? Because in 2 Corinthians 10, verse 4, he says, For our weapons of warfare are not of the flesh.

[3 : 55] You know, it's not in books. It's not in programs. It's not in arguments. But it's rather in the word of truth and in our lives.

It's what God does in our lives. Do you remember Peter? What did he do in the garden when they arrested Jesus? He took up a sword and Jesus chastised him for it.

We must depend on the Holy Spirit to give us the power. The Lord Jesus needed to go to the cross in order to die for our sins. And so it was a spiritual battle that Jesus was facing.

It was not a physical enemy that Jesus was truly facing there in the garden. But an army must fight how? Send one guy out and be like a Rambo that goes out there and just defeats the entire army all by himself?

No. An army fights together. A military, in order to win the battle and ultimately win the war, needs to strive together, needs to fight together for one unified purpose.

[5 : 03] And this is why the Apostle Paul sends these admonitions to the people in Philippi. He says, this is not a playground. The Christian life is a battleground.

We are daily fighting against principalities, against powers, against Satan, and against all of his minions that would want to derail our faith and to be able to cripple this Christian faith, this body of beliefs, the lives that we're living for him.

And Paul explains in this paragraph, verses 27 through 30, that there are three essentials for victory. If we as a church, if we as the body of Christ, are going to be able to work together to fight off Satan and taking away the truth, the faith of the gospel from us, then we need to accomplish these three things or be engaged in these three things to protect the faith.

And the first one is consistency. Consistency. Doing the same thing over and over and over and over again. That is living for Christ.

And don't let anything derail us from living for Christ. Let's look together at verse number 27. Paul says, Only let your conduct.

[6 : 27] Now, when he says only, the word that Paul used there in the Greek, only, could mean only or could mean one. So when Paul finishes up, up through verse 26, he's talking about, remember his crisis?

He said, I would much more appreciate to be able to be executed and go off to be with Jesus.

He said, Because that's my ultimate goal, is to spend eternity with Jesus. But he said, It would be more beneficial for you if I'm released and if I come back to you to continue my teaching ministry.

So that was Paul's crisis. But then, in verse number 27, he says, But just one thing. If I would leave you with anything, he says, I want to leave you with this one thing.

He says, Only let your conduct. Or some of your translations might have the word conversation. And, of course, this means walk and not talk.

[7 : 38] We don't use Old English meanings anymore. So the word conduct is the word we use today. And it's an important weapon against Satan. Our lives, the way we live, the way we live our lives following Jesus Christ.

The most important weapon is not a stirring sermon or a book. It's the lives that you and I live. It's a consistent, it's the consistent life of believers.

But here, in the King James, and in the New King James, this word is a noun. Only let your conduct. In reality, when Paul wrote this letter, in the Greek, he wrote this word as a verb.

And so, it shouldn't be a noun. We should have it as a verb. And so, what the word Paul uses is related to the word from which we get city or city-state, and even the word from which we get politics.

Politeumai is the word Paul used. And so, and this word, politeumai, means to conduct oneself with proper reference to one's obligations in relationship to others as some part of community.

[8 : 58] So, Paul says, I want you to conduct yourselves like citizens of a certain country and in your relationship to one another, to live, to conduct one's life in relation to others.

In effect, what Paul is saying in verse 27, he says just one thing. He says, behave the way citizens are supposed to behave.

He says, you are in Philippi, you are in a Roman colony. And he says, you are to behave like citizens. But what he says, and we sang about that in the song, Glorious Day, what citizens, of what country are we citizens, truly?

Heaven, we're citizens of heaven. And so, Paul literally is saying here, live as citizens. And because Philippi was a Roman colony, the Christian inhabitants of Philippi would have appreciated the way Paul used that verb.

And I've heard it said many ways from others. Dr. Warren Wiersbe said he and his wife were on vacation in England one time, and they were on a bus going around and touring some of the sites.

[10 : 23] And he said there was two or three couples in the front of the bus that were loud and were being obnoxious. And he heard multiple people in front of he and his wife that said, ah, those must be Americans.

And he said, he said, I could have crawled under the seat. He said, I was ashamed of my fellow citizens of America, of the United States. And so, when we think about it, we should live accordingly.

And I remember back, and the boys will remember this, back in our former Christian school when we were in Alabama, when the boys would go out, when we would go out and play our away basketball games, quite often we would tell them, guys, behave because when you're out there you're representing our school.

So, behave like gentlemen because when people see you in that grocery store, when we stop, because some of our wait trips were three hours away, three and four hours away, and so when we stop at that convenience store to use the restroom or buy some snacks, I said, act like gentlemen because you represent our Christian school.

So, live, act, accordingly. And so, when Paul is saying that we should live lives worthy of our calling, he says, we need to live because we live like we represent Jesus everywhere we go and not be like those loud, obnoxious Americans on that bus where everybody from all the other countries said, they must be Americans because they're obnoxious.

[12 : 12] So, we need to understand that Paul is saying here, just one thing, conduct yourselves like citizens of heaven while you're here on this earth.

And so, what Paul is suggesting is that we, as followers of Christ, are citizens of heaven on this earth and we're to behave like heaven's citizens.

He brings us up again in chapter 3, verse number 20, and he says, on later, I'm conducting, am I conducting myself in a manner worthy of the gospel, basically, is what Paul says they need to be asking.

So, ask yourself, as you go through the day, am I behaving like a citizen of heaven? Am I talking like a citizen of heaven? Am I acting worthy of the calling on my life?

So, I believe we need to be asking questions like that rather often. We should walk worthy of our calling as we see in Ephesians chapter 4, verse number 1.

[13 : 14] So, we do not behave in order to go to heaven as though we could be saved by our good works, but instead, we live and act and behave because our names are already written there and we're to act as citizens of heaven.

So, it's worthy to remember, it's worth remembering that we live in a world where a lot of people don't know Jesus Christ and they won't read the Bible.

And so, for many, their only introduction to Jesus, their only introduction to what God can do in the life of a human being is through watching our lives.

And I believe this little poem says it rather well. You are writing a gospel, a chapter each day, by the deeds that you do and the words that you say.

Men, read what you write, whether faithful or true, just what is the gospel according to you. So, what is the gospel according to you that people read?

[14 : 24] Do they get the wrong impression of what the gospel is? Or do they get the correct impression that it is by grace through faith? We're all sinners.

We don't deserve salvation, but it's because of all, it's only because of what Jesus Christ did on the cross. We're all on the same even footing apart from those who trust Christ and now we have the righteousness of Christ applied to our account.

So, the gospel is the good news that Christ died for our sins and rose again. So, the gospel in a nutshell is Jesus died for us and He lives again.

He died on the cross, paid our penalty, rose again on that third day to prove that God was satisfied with the penalty of our sin. So, the message of the gospel is the good news that sinners can become the children of God by grace through faith and to add anything to the gospel deprives it of His power.

If you say trust Christ plus, then it takes away the working part of the gospel. There were some neighbors, someone who went to his pastor one day and said, we have some neighbors who believe a false gospel.

[15 : 40] Do you have a book that I could give them to read? That's a typical way some people will do. You know what? I just want to give them something to read and that'll set them straight.

Well, the pastor opened his Bible to 2 Corinthians 3, verse 2, and says, you are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men. He said, the best literature in the world is no substitute for your own life.

He said, let them see Christ in your behavior and this will open up opportunities to share the gospel with them. Isn't that so true? Just live like Christ and when they see you, they may be wondering how in the world could this person act like this?

I mean, someone just hurt them but yet they're saying, I forgive them. Who does that? And so it may be an opportunity to share the gospel with them because if we give them a book, it may or may not change their mind but it may change their mind but it may not change their heart.

And so it's the gospel that changes hearts. The greatest weapon in the world against the devil is a godly life and a local church that practices the truth and that behaves what it believes, I believe, and consistently does it, is going to defeat the enemy.

[17 : 00] So we need to consistently live that Christian life. And then secondly, I believe what we see is cooperation. Cooperation.

So he says, only let your conduct, just one thing, let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ. He says, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs that you stand fast in one spirit with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.

The first illustration Paul used was citizenship. The second illustration the Apostle Paul uses is that of athletics. Now, I know some of you may not be into athletics.

Some of you may have been into athletics at some point in time, point in time, and you know what? We change the way we do things. And some of you may like watching football games.

Some of you may like watching basketball. Some of you may like watching, no, probably not, golf. Some of you may like all different types of athletics.

[18 : 11] And the Apostle Paul loved to use athletic terminology. And he does again here in this verse. So he changes the illustration from citizenship to athletics in the word in verse 27 where he says, with one mind striving together.

He says, we as the body of Christ need to be striving together. Not creating strife, that's a different word. But this is striving together, working in unity together for one concerted purpose.

So he's using this picture here of the church as a team. The church as a team and he reminds them that it's teamwork that wins victories.

So the word striving together is the word from which we get our English word athletics, athleo, in the Greek. So keep in mind that there were some divisions in the church at Philippi.

If you go forward and you read toward the end of Paul's letter to the Philippians, remember there were two women and they were having a little bit, there was a little bit of a tiff that was going on between them.

[19 : 28] And they weren't getting along with one another. That was in verse 2 of chapter number 4. And apparently some of the members of the fellowship were taking sides. Well you know what, I'm for Euodias, I'm for Syntyche, I'm for this.

Well who are you for? Who do you think's wrong? Who do you think's right? And so there was this division, there was strife in the church.

But Paul says in order to be the devil you've got to strive together. Don't strive against one another but strive together for the same purpose.

See the devil's always happy when he can stir up some internal turmoil. Because when we're fighting one another we're not fighting whom? We're not fighting the devil. So when there's internal fighting it takes us away from the battlefield and we are hurting ourselves.

So he says I want you to strive together. It's only as believers stand together that they can overcome Satan. So throughout this letter Paul uses an interesting device in his words.

[20 : 34] And just like the English has prefixes the Greek used prefixes as well. This little Greek prefix soon is used quite often and it means with literally it means with but it means together doing things together.

So when you take athletics and when you put together it means working as a team with everyone else on your team.

And so Paul uses a lot of together terminology in his letter to the Philippians. At least 16 times Paul uses this prefix in Philippians. We do this with one another with each other as you're working together with one another.

16 times Paul uses that little prefix in Philippians. And in verse 27 this like we said this Greek word soon athleto the word that we get our English word athletics means striving together as athletes.

So as you're on a team we need to be working together. Sometimes people rise to the top as a star and they're the ones that are in the forefront.

[21 : 58] Jerry was disgusted and he went to his coach one day and he was telling him how he felt. He said you know there's no sense coming out to practice anymore. He said because Mike is a team and he makes all the points.

you don't need the rest of us. And so the coach knew what the trouble was. He said look Jerry just because Mike gets many of the chances to shoot doesn't mean the rest of you guys aren't important.

He says somebody has to set things up under the net and somebody has to make the points. So the point he was making was everyone on the team is important.

There's offense there's defense. There are those that are better at scoring than others. There are others that are better at setting up than others.

There are some that are better at carrying the ball down the court than others. There are some that are better at blocking than others. There are some that so you get the point. We're all working together as a team and it doesn't matter who makes the basket.

[23 : 03] What matters is we're victorious at the buzzer. And so what Paul is saying is we work together as an athletic team. We're working for one goal.

We're doing our job. And isn't that interesting where the spiritual gifts come in? It's a similar illustration as athletics. You know some are forward.

Some are point guards. Some are and so the whole everybody on their team on the football team everybody has their own position and their own abilities but when you put all those together you win championships but you have to do it together as a team.

So that's what Paul is saying here. It's happened in scripture. John had to deal with a guy named Diotrefes because he loved the preeminence.

We see that in 3 John 9. Even the apostle James and John remember the apostles? What did they ask Jesus for? We want thrones.

[24 : 09] Why don't you give a special privilege so we can all sit on thrones together? We are the team and so we want to be preeminent.

We want to be the ones lording it over everyone and Jesus said it's not about that. He says we came to serve not to be served. And it wouldn't be difficult to expand this idea as we said with the spiritual gifts.

So in other words the apostle Paul is reminding us for the need of the single mind. Single purpose. One thing we're serving for is to spread the gospel. Is to make sure that the world hears about Jesus Christ and we back it up with our lives consistently living lives of faith for Jesus Christ working together or in other words Christian teamwork.

Christian teamwork. To be sure there are some people with whom we cannot cooperate. We see that in 2 Corinthians 6 14 through 18 Ephesians 5 11.

But there are many with whom we can and should cooperate. So we're citizens of heaven and therefore we should walk consistently. We're members of the same team and we should work cooperatively together.

[25 : 28] But there's a third essential as we begin to wind this down for success as we face the enemy and that is confidence. Confidence.

Consistency. Living life like Christ. And doing it together. Cooperating together. And then our confidence in verse 28 where the apostle Paul says in order to be able to consistently live the Christian life in order to be able to cooperate together he says you must not shy away from the hard stuff.

Notice what he says in verse 28. And in not in any way terrified by your adversaries. Don't be alarmed by your opponents is what Paul is saying.

The word Paul used here is it's a word that carries with it the idea a picture of a horse shying away from battle. So we have a soldier that is running towards the battle and the horse stands on its hind legs and says I am not going any further.

I don't like all that shiny stuff and all those people coming at me and the horse is shying away from the battle. Paul says don't be that way. Don't in any way be terrified by your adversaries which is to them a proof of perdition or ultimately one day they're going to end up paying for what they're doing.

[27 : 07] He says but to you of salvation and that from God. So he said don't be alarmed. Now to be sure nobody blindly runs into a fight but then no believer should run away from the enemy as well.

We should stand firm. So first these battles prove that we are saved. Look at verse 29 or that we are part of the body of Christ.

He says for to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him but also to suffer for his sake.

What did Jesus say his disciples his followers would experience? Sufferings. He said that's just going to be part and parcel of the Christian life.

We're going to have people that won't like us. He says they didn't like me they're not going to like you. And the more vocal we are for Jesus Christ the less they're going to like you and the more they're going to try to hurt you or get in your way or thwart your goals and your purposes.

[28 : 18] You know many new believers have the idea once I come to Jesus all my problems are going to go away. Once I trust Christ is going to be oh joy forever.

Well the thing is we get new battles. We face new problems. We face new issues. And that is what many and that's a wake up for many many people.

It's like oh I didn't sign up for this. Well Jesus said if you follow me this is what is going to happen. He said in John 16 33 in this world you will have tribulation.

Yes and all that live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. 2nd Timothy chapter 3 verse number 12 says but in the presence of conflict now this may sound antithetical it may sound like they don't go together but in the presence of conflict there is privilege.

And you say what in the world do you mean by that? Well look at verse 29 he says for it has been granted on behalf of Christ.

[29 : 35] Now that word granted is interesting it was an interesting word Paul chose because that word granted carries with it the idea of favor or grace. Now wait a minute Paul you're saying that God has graced us with adversity?

That's what Paul said. He says you have been granted on behalf of Christ to suffer for him. None of us like to suffer. it's not fun.

But Paul said you have been graced with sufferings. Why? Because we are partnering together with Christ in his suffering. If it was good enough for Jesus it's good enough for us.

Why should we expect to be shielded from that which Jesus was not. And so Jesus said they're going to hate you just like they hated me.

So Paul says this is a privilege. You've been granted with the opportunity to suffer just like Christ and to partner with him.

[30 : 50] Doesn't sound like a gift but that's what Paul says it is. Because if we were suffering for ourselves if we were suffering because we are like those Americans on that bus.

If we're suffering because we're obnoxious guess what? You deserve it. And it's no special privilege. But if we're suffering through no fault of our own but if we're suffering because of Jesus Christ he says wear it like a badge of honor because it means you're like me and you're privileged to suffer.

I didn't say that. Paul said it and Jesus said it as well. After all he suffered for us and a willingness to suffer for him is at the very least that we can do to show our love and our gratitude.

And a third encouragement is this. So Paul said don't shy away from the battle like a horse shies away. He said don't let your adversaries scare you.

Don't be terrified by your adversaries. Verse 28 he said because to them it's proof that they're going to suffer one day in the lake of fire. It is a proof of perdition.

[32 : 07] But he says to you because you're suffering for Jesus it shows it proves that you're part of the family. It proves that you're part of my family and he says and that from God for it has been granted on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him but also to suffer for his sake.

And in verse number 30 he says it's a privilege you've been granted this privilege to suffer for Christ so that's the first part of what we see but in verse number 30 he says but also having the same conflict which you saw in me and now here is in me.

The third encouragement is this others are experiencing the same conflict. You're not by yourself. You're not alone. We're not like or we shouldn't be like Elijah and what did he say?

Oh woe is me. I'm the only one. Nobody else trust God. Nobody else is serving God but me. Nobody else is suffering but me.

What's wrong with me? Why me? Oh poor me. Paul said you don't have to have the poor me syndrome. He says because look at me. I'm suffering for Jesus.

[33 : 24] Look around you. There are other believers that are suffering for Jesus. Satan wants to make us think we're alone in our suffering because when he can get us away from the group, when he can get us away from our support network, he can work on our mind and he can depress us and he can cause us to give up.

But when we're together, just like that, just like we see in the wild, when you see the lions circling these water buffalo or circling these other animals and they turn their backs and they put the young on the inside and they're all facing the lions that are circling them.

There's safety in numbers and that's the same thing in the Christian life. And so he says don't worry this is going to happen.

And actually going through spiritual conflict is one way that we grow. Think about it. We grow through suffering. You want to grow your muscles? You have to suffer through lifting weights.

You have to, if you want more endurance, you have to suffer through running and doing burpees and doing all those other things that you have to do to build up your endurance and your stamina.

[34 : 37] So you have to suffer in order to be able to grow. Same is true in the spiritual realm. The more that we, the more that we go through and the more that we see God providing us the ability to go through it because we're not alone.

We grow from it and we're able to become resilient and that is the way things work. So the Philippians has seen Paul go through this conflict.

This word conflict, by the way, that we see in verse number 30 is the word from which we get our English word agony. Agony. To agonize. He said, you've seen me go through this agony of existence, this experience that I'm going through.

When we face the enemy, depend on the Lord. When we face opposition, depend on the Holy Spirit because it's the Holy Spirit that will give us the power to be able to get through this.

So the single mind, like Paul had, enables us to have joy in the midst of the battle. Just like Paul when he was there in prison. Paul and Silas were able to sing.

[35 : 45] They were able to pray and sing songs about God in the midst of their pain and their trouble and their problem. Why? Because they had the single mind and they were looking to Christ rather than their circumstance.

So we experience the joy of spiritual teamwork as we strive together for the faith of the gospel. So as we conclude, let's live our lives worthy of our calling as citizens of heaven.

It's like we told our basketball team, when you're out there, behave because you represent us. When we're out there in the world, behave because we represent Jesus. Live like followers of Christ.

Secondly, let's work together as a well-practiced team to succeed in the game of life. Work together, strive together, and then thirdly, let's not shy away from the struggle of living the Christian life.

Let's pray. Father, this morning we've come together, we've looked into your word, and we've seen the apostle Paul admonish these believers who were having some difficulty, were having some strife within their midst, and he was encouraging them to work together and to fight this battle, the spiritual battle together, and not be afraid.

[37 : 15] We pray, Father, that we would live lives worthy of our calling, live like citizens of heaven, that we would work together with a single mind and a single purpose, and not shy away from the battle that's called the Christian life.

Father, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.