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LIVING A WORTHY LIFE (Philippians 1:27-30)

Annapolis is a place of great civic feeling. Anytime I walk the well-worn brick sidewalks or the thick carpets of the government's hallways, I get a sense of the legacy that moves forward here as we follow thousands of others who have gone before us. The only way for Maryland to thrive is for people to join together in decent citizenship.

If you and I had lived in Philippi in the first century, we would have mutually understood some things in our culture. Acts 16:12 tells us that Philippi was "a leading city in the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony..." So, as citizens, you and I would have enjoyed many of the rights citizens had in Rome. Philippi had a highly prestigious position and cities like it thought of themselves as "little Romes".

John MacArthur wrote, "Roman society was highly community-conscious. The individual was subordinate to the state, and a person's skills, talents, energy and endeavors were devoted first of all to the interests of society at large. It was not a coerced subjection but was based on a willing sense of interdependence in which citizens took great pride. A responsible citizen was careful not to do anything that would bring disrepute on his city."

So when Paul wrote to the church in Philippi to people who were following Jesus Christ, he intentionally appealed to their understanding of citizenship when he used the word "politeuomai", meaning "conduct" or a verb for good citizen. It's easy to see how our word "politics" comes from it. This is the key word in our passage for this study, describing what our conduct, or manner of life, should look like.

UNIFIED

*Philippians 1:27 – Only let your **manner of life** be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come*

*and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are **standing firm in one spirit, with one mind** striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,*

When Paul exhorts the Philippians to give priority to their conduct, he also gives them the basis for it. They are to be solid citizens, but of a city found elsewhere. Later in this letter, he says this:

*Philippians 3:20 - But **our citizenship is in heaven**, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ*

In chapter one, Paul describes this citizenship as one that is worthy, but he also adds the standard to which that worthiness is measured – the gospel of Christ.

That means that for the one who believes in Christ and has a life that is being changed by him and his Word, his conduct or manner of life will line up with what God has revealed in the Scriptures. This would include repentance, humility, love, peace, kindness and many other characteristics that we find in the Bible. Our natural hearts do not lead us to live that way, but if the gospel (or good news of Christ's love and forgiveness) is at work in us, our life will move more and more toward being worthy of that gospel.

A sharp indication that believers are living worthy lives is that there is unity among them. Paul encourages the church to stand firm in this unity in one spirit and one mind. Again, this can't be based on individuals' opinions, but on the objective standard of God's Word. Grounded on that, true unity is possible.

Former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop made this plea for citizens to strive for unity: "The American ideal is not that we all agree with each other, or even like each other, every minute of the day. It is rather that we will respect each other's rights, especially the right to be different, and that, at the end of the day, we will understand that we are one people, one country,

and one community, and that our well-being is inextricably bound up with the well-being of each and every one of our fellow citizens.”

Unity is found in community, in relationship, in care for each other. When sin, selfishness and a misunderstanding of worthy living exists, unity is impossible, so Paul includes this key teaching so we will combat those things that threaten our unity.

UNDAUNTED

Philippians 1:28 – and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.

Paul already said in this letter that his spiritual brothers had more courage because they knew that his imprisonment was for the best. The opposition could be as serious as beatings and executions or as benign as scorn and embarrassment, Paul wanted to hear the report that as they stood firm in unity, they weren't falling to intimidation from those who didn't desire Christ.

Fear is a natural response we can have when we're opposed, so the Bible gives us many great words of encouragement to keep us from fear. Jesus said:

John 16:33 – “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

And John wrote:

1 John 4:4 – Little children, you are from God and have overcome them (those against God), for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

These are great verses of hope and promise that gives courage and boldness to those who follow Christ to speak the truth to a world that's indifferent or even hostile to God's message.

UNDETERRED

*Philippians 1:29, 30 – 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.*

Why is it that there are people who come to believe in Christ, but expect their lives to be problem-free? This verse, among many others, clearly tells us that following God means suffering will occur simply because the world around us will oppose what we love and believe. So for the person whose conduct is worthy of the gospel of Christ, hardship will not deter them.

The greatness of this truth is that it is for our benefit. God uses difficulty to focus us on the things that matter. Suffering is something to be embraced and rejoiced in. Remember, Paul writes this letter while under house arrest, yet was still joyful. It's a theme seen throughout the Bible.

*James 1:2, 3 – **Count it all joy**, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.*

*Romans 5:3-5 – ...**we rejoice in our sufferings**, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given unto us.*

*Acts 5:40, 41 – and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, **rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.***

BIBLE STUDY

Legislators and Staff (During Session)
Thursdays, 8:00 a.m.
Room 153 House Office Building