

"Walking Worthy as One"

Philippians 1:27–2:2

February 1, 2026

These are indeed remarkable days in which we are living. The church in America is called to minister to the world from within a nation in an identity crisis at multiple levels:

- **Political identity crisis** – Our republic which has so deeply valued democracy and thrived on capitalism, has been infiltrated with voices advocating for socialism, sympathetic to communism, and promoting Marxism.
- **Moral and Ethical identity Crisis** – Criminals have been emboldened while many politicians have abandoned support for law enforcement. Fraud has run rampant to the degree that we wonder if justice will be adequately served. There is an epidemic of confusion regarding gender and sexuality to the extent that we are spending time in congress and the courts asking questions like “what is the definition of a woman or a man” and not getting clear answers that have existed from the beginning of time.
- **Religious identity crisis** – A nation born out of strong Christian influence now faces a growing resentment toward biblical values.
- **Truth crisis** – Narratives seem to carry more weight than facts. Objective investigation and true journalism has become rare. Lying in public discourse has become common. Dialogue in the public square has become nearly extinct. The percentage of people who have confidence in absolute truth has eroded.
- **Unity Crisis** – The United States of America is grievously divided on so many issues.

In recent weeks, MN has become a case study in America’s identity crisis. Our American identity-what it means to be American—may seem less stable than in the past, but our identity as citizens of the kingdom of God within our great nation, is clear and unchanging in the Scripture.

Though these are challenging days for the church in America/MN, they are also days of opportunity. Our message of truth will no longer be obscured

in a context of nominalism. Our message will be distinctive, even if dishonored by some. Our gospel of grace that reconciles man to God and each other may no longer be viewed as optional by some but rather essential and urgent by those who have ears to hear amid the noise of division and anger. These days of opportunity will require the church to stand firm in the gospel with courage, unity, and humility just as was required in the church of Philippi in the first century and in every age since. The hope of America is the hope of Christ and the health of His church which bears of the good news of the gospel.

Today’s message is **a call to unity and courage with humility**, heightened by a context of growing hostility to biblical truth. Bible commentator Dennis Johnson has this to say:

“When people find themselves surrounded and outnumbered by an unsympathetic or even hostile dominant culture, they tend to react in various ways. They might get feisty and lash out like a cornered wolf. Or they might get timid and pull back like a turtle into its shell. Then again, they might get sneaky and blend into their surroundings like a chameleon. Or they might get frustrated and turn on each other like a pack of pit bulls, venting hostility internally that they dare not show to their oppressors. To put it another way, when the whole world is against us, some of us become *bold but abrasive*, whereas others become *humble but timid*. . . . But the apostle Paul, writing from the chains of prison, calls his fellow followers of Jesus in Philippi to respond to the surrounding society’s hostility in a way that does not come naturally. [While] he does not underestimate the gravity of the opponents’ evil...[he] summons the Philippian believers and us to respond to those who despise our faith and our Savior with the distinctive blend of *boldness and humility*, neither intimidated nor belligerent, neither fearful of those outside nor frustrated with those inside the church. We must show *courage* that does not blink when opponents confront us, along with *concern* for fellow believers with whom we stand, shoulder to shoulder.”¹

¹ Dennis Johnson, *Philippians* (Reformed Expository Commentary), pg. 87-88.

In the first 26 verses of Philippians Paul has been rejoicing in his deep friendship with the Philippians, he has prayed for them, and he has been reflecting on the possibilities of his own future as he sits in a Roman prison and awaits trial. Whether he is released from prison to continue his ministry or whether he is martyred is of secondary concern to Paul. His primary aim according to vs. 20 is that Christ will be honored—that Christ will be honored in his body whether by life for death because Paul has one life purpose: “*For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain*” (21).

So, Paul writes to the Philippians not knowing whether or not he will see them again. But either way, he wants to pass along to them an essential message of encouragement and exhortation.

The first word of vs. 27 is important: “*Only...*” This is a simple translation of a Greek term that is emphatic here. It carries the sense of “do this one thing.” In our vernacular, we might say, “above all” or “make this your focus.”² As we’ve seen repeatedly in Philippians, we may have many obligations and responsibilities, but *one purpose—to live for Christ*. Now Paul is applying that same principle to the corporate life of the church: “See to it that you prioritize this one thing...”

What is that one thing? Vs. 27: “***Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ***” (Phil 1:27). What does it mean to live in a manner worthy of the gospel? Let’s break it down into two parts. The first phrase, “let your manner of life” (“conduct yourself”—NASB) is uniquely worded here. In other places Paul uses the terminology of *walking* worthy of the gospel.³ But here Paul uses a unique verb that has to do with citizenship. The literal meaning is, “*live as citizens in a manner worthy of the gospel*.”

What is Paul getting at? Two things will help us understand Paul’s message: some historical background and a critical clue later in Philippians.

- *Historical background*: The pride of Philippi is that it was a Roman colony. The city was built to mimic Rome and most of its people, though many miles from Rome, were Roman citizens which carried some elite privileges, such as legal protection. The people lived as

representatives of Rome. As a Roman colony, the people of Philippi were distinctly Roman. So Paul is making a cultural connection.

- *Textual clue*: In Philippians 3:20 reminds the believers in Philippi that though some of them may be Roman citizens, they have a superior identity: “*But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.*”

So, when Paul says, “live as citizens in a manner worthy of the gospel,” his message is this: “You may live in the Roman colony of Philippi, but live as citizens of the kingdom of God in a manner that is worthy of the gospel. You may be a long way from heaven, but as the church you are a heavenly colony that is to represent and honor Jesus, not Ceasar.”

This is a timely message for us. As believers we carry dual citizenship. We have responsibilities as citizens of the United States/Minnesota, but we have a superior allegiance to the kingdom of God—to Christ. If Paul were writing this letter to us in 2026, he might say, “Live in Minnesota as citizens of heaven, worthy of the gospel.”

So, what does it mean to live in a manner worthy of the gospel? Let’s begin with some general thoughts and then we will flesh it out more specifically from this text.

To live in a manner worthy of the gospel means:

- Reflect the worth of the gospel
- Reflect the nature and true character of the gospel

For example:

- Live *toward* (in the direction of) reconciliation with one another through Christ
- Live in unity because the gospel makes us one
- Live in the opposite direction of sin, self-centeredness
- Live in the direction of humility
- Live in the direction of sacrificial love and servanthood
- Live toward truth
- Live faithful/devoted to the gospel

² George Guthrie, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT: Philippians*, pg. 134.

³ Eph 4:1; Col 1:10; 1Thess 2:12

- Spend your life on the eternal, not just the temporal
- To live in a manner worthy of the gospel means that “to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

So the general message for us today is, *live with kingdom values (which will clash with the values of this world). More specifically, live a life uniquely shaped by the gospel (by the life, death, and resurrection hope of Jesus).*

Now as we press a little further into our passage, Paul is going to highlight 3 specific aspects of gospel-worthy living. **We must live in a manner worthy of the gospel with *unity, courage, and humility.***

Living in a manner worthy of the gospel means...

1. **Stand firm in the gospel, not forsaking your unity in Christ** (Phil 1:27).

[vs. 27] “Standing firm” is a military term which means, hold your ground! Be unwavering! Hold the line! Don’t retreat! But here it’s used in a metaphorical sense. Be firm in your conviction. Be immovable in your faith. Don’t retreat but hold out the gospel.

The image here is that of Roman Legionnaires with their long shields forming a seamless wall in front of them to protect against spears and a ‘roof’ over their heads to protect against arrows overhead.⁴ As one commentator put it, “Don’t let the opposition divide you! Instead, let the pressures from your opponents draw you together in a deeper and stronger unity!”⁵ *Stand firm!*

This is an important message to a church living in an environment that is unsympathetic and even hostile to the gospel. It’s essential that the church doesn’t get intimidated and compromise the gospel as the only way of salvation. They must not allow Caesar to overshadow their allegiance to Christ.

Today it’s not uncommon for churches to backdown on boldly defending basic biblical truths for fear of being marginalized or called bigots. For example, we believe that there are two genders—male and female—and the

difference between the two is not fluid. Our male or female organs reveal the male or female design of our DNA and that from God. It is a scientific issue, but primarily a theological issue. What does this have to do with the gospel? To reject God’s gender design is to reject God as our Creator-Designer. And to reject God is to invoke His wrath. But the gospel provides hope for all who rebel against God—for all who repent of their spiritual independence and rebellion. So rather than compromising on “controversial” matters, we humbly step forward with the truth and hope of the gospel.

Biblical views today may be unpopular. But the Philippians faced not only slander but also personal danger and imprisonment like Paul. Yet Paul modeled courage (20) and urged them to do the same. *Stand firm!* How? Vs. 27: “*in one spirit, with one mind.*”

Scholars are divided on how to interpret “spirit” here. Is it a reference to the one Holy Spirit who is the source of our union? Or is a reference to the human spirit, basically synonymous with the next phrase (“with one mind”)? Either translation fits the thrust of Paul’s message. Our standing firm in the gospel is fortified by our unity in the body of Christ which cannot be divorced from the Holy Spirit’s work in us. He is the glue that holds us together. The front lines of gospel ministry will only be as strong as our internal unity in Christ. Spiritual and relational health is critical to spiritual fruitfulness.

Notice how strong this theme and call to unity is in this passage:

- Vs. 27:
 - “In one spirit”
 - “With one mind”
 - “Side by side”
- 2:1 – terms of mutual edification
 - Encouragement
 - Comfort
 - Participation
- 2:2
 - “full accord”
 - “one mind”

⁴ Dennis Johnson, *Philippians* (Reformed Expository Commentary), pg. 92.

⁵ Dennis Johnson, *Philippians* (Reformed Expository Commentary), pg. 92.

Paul is confident that the church will stand firm with the gospel, if it stands *united* in Christ. This is what it means to live in a manner worthy of the gospel. Valuing our oneness in Christ such that it shapes the way we relate to each other with selflessness, humility, and sacrificial love (we'll unpack this further in chapter 2).

Life Principle: **Believers must strive for unity because we are inseparably bound together as one body in Christ.** Perhaps marriage can help us understand this. Two people become one through a marriage covenant. Yet everyday they must strive for unity—and all the more because they are one.

Living in a manner worthy of the gospel means...

2. **Strive together to advance the gospel, fearlessly facing our opponents** (Phil 1:27-28).

[vs. 27] "Striving side by side" is an athletic term (*athleo* → athlete). Think of team sports, like soccer or basketball—striving, laboring, contending together for a common goal. The church must function like a team if it will be fruitful in advancing the gospel.

But notice that *standing firm* and *striving together* are marked not only by *unity* (in one spirit, with one mind, side by side) but also by *courage*. Vs. 28: "*Not frightened [alarmed] in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation and that from God.*"

The hardest place to stand is alone. But when we are united with like-minded believers, courage is strengthened. Vs. 28-29 give us two reasons to be courageous/fearless in the face of those who oppose the gospel. [BTW, courage does not mean that we don't have feelings of anxiety, but that we don't give in to fear and let it paralyze us.] *Biblical courage is doing what is right in the face of fear and therefore overcoming it.*

First, **courageously holding fast to the gospel in the face of intimidation is a sign of destruction for those who oppose us and a**

sign of our salvation—all from God (Phil 1:28). God is the one who gives us the courage to stand in the face of persecution. God is the one who will exact justice against His/our enemies. God is the one who guarantees our salvation. We can be courageous because God is ultimately in control and He will exact final justice.

We will not live as though we are subject to our enemies when we remember that everyone is subject to God. John Witherspoon put it this way, "*It is only the fear of God that can deliver us from the fear of man.*"⁶

Second, **God is sovereign over the security of our salvation and the suffering we endure for Christ** (Phil 1:29). **[vs. 29]** The term "granted" in vs. 29 is significant. The Greek term is *charizomai* (the word *charis*/grace is embedded in it). So this word "*granted*" carries with it the connotation of graciously giving, gifting. God has graciously gifted you with faith to believe. You didn't just get to the point of believing in Jesus on your own. It is the gracious work of God. He is sovereign over the security of your salvation because your salvation is ultimately a work of God, not man. You play a critical role, but God is the source in every way.

Yet, in granting us faith that makes us one with Christ, God also grants us a measure of suffering for the sake of Christ. Saving faith does not merely create an association with Christ. Saving faith makes us *one* with Christ and that means that together we receive the affliction this world still hurls at Him. Yet anything we suffer for the sake of Christ is not only subject to the sovereignty of God, it is also turned, by His hand, to serve our future glory. In Rom 8:17 Paul said, "if we suffer with Him, we will also be glorified with Him as fellow heirs."

If it has been granted to us not only to believe in Christ but also to suffer for Him, then we should not be alarmed when our faith is met with fire.

1Peter 4:12-14 - "Beloved, do not be surprised [alarmed] at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, *keep on rejoicing*, so that also at the

⁶ George Guthrie, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT: Philippians*, pg. 148.

revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exaltation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests on you" (1Peter 4:12-14)

How do you know if the spirit of God/glory rests on you? You know the Spirit rests on you if you are one with Christ such that you suffer for His sake—you are opposed by the world for His sake. So, your suffering for the sake of Christ is a *sign* that you indeed belong to Christ and will be exalted with Him. Isn't this what we would expect following Christ to look like? As we will see in chapter 2, the Jesus-road descends into suffering but then emerges/ascends in glory. When we understand the Jesus-road, we can walk it fearlessly knowing God holds us securely.

Living in a manner worthy of the gospel means...

3. ***Serve one another humbly* with the mind of Christ through sacrificial love** (Phil 2:1-5).

[2:1-5] Remember where we are in the flow of thought. Paul is calling us to live as citizens of heaven in a manner worthy of the gospel. At the heart of gospel living is our unity in the body of Christ which is essential to standing firm and striving together for the gospel in the face of suffering for the sake of Christ.

So, Paul calls us now to build up the very things that bolster our unity in Christ. Basically, Paul reminds us of what we have received from God and then exhorts us to extend the same to each other. He does this with four conditional clauses in vs. 1 that assume a positive response. Perhaps it will help if I state them as questions:

- Have you received any encouragement in [your relationship] with Christ? *Yes!*
- Have you received any comfort from [God's] love? *Yes!*
- Do you have any fellowship [koinonia] in the Spirit? *Yes!*
- Have you received any affection or sympathy/compassion? *Yes!*

"Then," Paul says, "make my joy complete by doing the same for one another! These are the ingredients that grow unity. We live toward one another as God relates to us with encouragement, comfort, love,

fellowship, affection, and compassion. And all of these are the fruit of adopting the *humility* of Jesus the puts one other's interests ahead of our own (more on that next week).

Notice here that Paul's joy is optimized in the spiritual progress and unity of other believers. "Make my joy complete" is not a selfish request. His joy is *Christ-centered* and *others-focused*. His joy blossoms when Christlikeness is formed in others. **We make room for joy in our lives when we replace self-centered pride with Christ-centered and others-focused humility.**

Each of these ingredients in vs. 1 is launched from a disposition of Christlike humility. Who can you encourage or comfort this week? How can you demonstrate love? How will you make fellowship with other believers a priority? Will you be intent on showing appreciation and compassion?

Communion:

As we come to the Lord's table, we come as one body inseparably bound to Christ and to one another. As we embrace the suffering of Christ for our salvation, we also embrace any suffering incurred by living for Him. And just as He was raised to life and exaltation so we too will be raised with Him to everlasting and infinite joy on the last day. In this spirit of resurrection hope and expectation, let us confess and forsake any sin against the Lord and against one another.

Bread & Cup: As we rejoice in the Lord's life-giving death, we rejoice not only in the forgiveness of our sins, not only in our reconciliation with God, but also in our union with one another.

Bread: Christ gave His body as sacrifice for us, and in receiving Him we become His body—inseparably bound to Him and one another.

Cup: By His blood, we have been redeemed—bought back, purchased so that our final salvation is secure in Christ.