

## Holiness and Unity

It's wonderful to be back here with you. Kathryn, I, and our kids had a wonderful vacation in Florida. It was a very relaxing trip. As a family, we went to the beach and Disney world. Kathryn and I were able to spend some quality time together. We got to see family. All in all, it was a great trip. I'm very happy to be back, though. I can only take so much vacation. I feel like vacations are a bit like junk food. Vacation is enjoyable at first but too much of leads to you feeling bad. You just get bored and feel purposeless.

And I heard you guys had a snowstorm that cancelled church the Sunday after Christmas. So I guess that means that I get one extra week of vacation back, right? Ha-ha. Just joking. I mean this in all honesty that it is wonderful to be back in this pulpit this morning.

This morning we're jumping back into Philippians. So, let's go ahead and open to Philippians, Chapter 1. Three weeks ago, we covered the first part of Phil 1:27. Go ahead and look with me there. Paul gives us a commandment here. He says, "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ." The thought that Paul expresses here is simple. Our response to the gospel should be in accordance with the gospel's worth. Because the gospel is so worthy, Christians, then, should respond with total, complete, radical obedience to Jesus Christ. That was the idea.

To make that idea even more simple, we might summarize it with the word holiness. Holiness is the idea that refers to a Christian's response to the gospel. Christians are called to live holy lives—lives that are radically, totally, completely sold-out for Jesus Christ.

Now look back with me at 1:27. Paul says, as we read already, "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ." Now what are the next two words? "So that." Those two words are very important. What Paul is saying here is that he wants us to live radical lives for Christ, holy lives, for some purpose. The "so that" communicates to us this idea. The "so that" communicates the purpose of "living lives worthy of the gospel of Christ." The "so that" communicates the purpose of holiness.

Well what is that purpose, pastor? I'm so glad you asked. Let's keep reading.

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, and not frightened in anything by your opponents.

Taking this from a big picture perspective, this passage is about unity within the church body. Paul states that the purpose of holiness is unity. The reason why Paul wants the Philippians to live lives worthy of the gospel is so that they may be unified. Holiness within the body results in unity within the body. That's the big idea.

Here at Community Bible Church, though, we're not content to just stay with the big idea. We also want to see the small ideas that make up the big idea. Isn't that right congregation? Amen.

The Bible is of utmost importance to us here at CBC. All of it. What God says, not what we think, is our standard for life. We teach that here at CBC. Our church's middle name is Bible, after all.

Paul describes unity in this passage by providing for us two different pictures or images of unity. Paul answers for us this question, "What does unity look like?" He answers this question in two ways. These two pictures will be the two points of my sermon this morning.

### **Standing Firm**

For the first image or picture of unity, write this: "Standing Firm" For this first picture, I want you envision a soldier who absolutely refuses to forsake the mission he was given regardless of how severely the battle rages around him." We get this picture of unity from 1:27. Read with me again:

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.

#### *Context*

The context here is Paul's absence from the Philippians. As I have said on a number of occasions, Paul is in prison. Nevertheless, he longs to reunite with the Philippians. He longs to be with them, to see them. Paul implicitly references his imprisonment in this passage. See where he writes, "So that whether I come and see you or I am absent?" His referring to visiting them after his imprisonment. He wants to do that, but he's not sure that will happen. Nevertheless, what he wants to see in their corporate life as a church is that they "stand firm."

#### *Definition*

This word "stand firm" is not to be taken literally. Paul doesn't literally want them to stand erect, unmoving together as a church. This is a metaphor. What this word means here, what Paul wants the Philippians to do is that he wants them is this:

To be firmly committed in conviction or belief

To be firmly committed is to not be kinda, sorta committed. You know like kind of fair-weather Christianity commitment. Fair-weather Christian commitment is half-hearted commitment. Unity built upon fair-weather Christianity is fragile, weak, and brittle. That's weak unity. Not the type of unity Paul is talking about here. Paul wants the Philippians to be steadfast and unmovable in their unity. He wants their unity to be strong—unable to be broken by internal conflict or external persecution.

#### *In One Spirit*

This word “standing firm” is modified by a prepositional phrase. Look with back at v. 27. Paul says he wants them to stand firm “in one spirit.” As you will notice right away that word “spirit” in the ESV is not capitalized. The translators of the ESV take it as a reference to a corporate spirit or a corporate mindset within the Philippian church. They do not take this to be a reference to the Holy Spirit. The decision here is difficult.

I take it as a reference to the Holy Spirit. I take it that what Paul is saying is that he wants the Philippians to stand firm in the one Holy Spirit that is given to the church. Unity comes from the Spirit of God. He is the source of the church’s unity. We see this idea expressed elsewhere in Paul. Go ahead and turn with me to Eph 4:1. I will read through v. 6.

The passage reads,

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

What Paul is expressing in this passage is the same idea he’s expressing in our passage—the oneness of the church is built upon the oneness of the Spirit. There is one Spirit. Therefore, the body should also be one, should be unified. Turn with me back to Philippians.

Paul wants the Philippians, and by extension us, to stand firm in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit’s job is to do one thing—show us Christ. The Holy Spirit is like a spotlight. He points away from himself and puts the spotlight on Christ. The way he does this is through convicting us of our sins and imparting to us a love for Christ. He kills sin and awakens an affection for Jesus. That’s what he does.

To illustrate what the opposite of standing firm in the Spirit is, allow me to share with you a story from my church back in Dallas. Kathryn and I attended this church for about 8 years. Around about the 4-year mark, the elders decided that they wanted to remove the old church pews and replace them with more contemporary seating, like the seats we have here. There were various reasons they had for doing this. They felt it was an important step to improve our church. Well, I’ll have you know that this decision led to about 10% of the church leaving.

That is not a unity of standing firm in the Holy Spirit. Paul moves our eyes from a unity that is built upon the seats, personalities, and experiences, but rather is built upon the eternal Holy Spirit who shows us the worth and value of Christ. It is in the ministry of the Holy Spirit that we stand firm in, not in anything else.

Our as a church needs to be like that of a soldier who refuses to leave his post regardless of how tough the fight is. In the power of the Holy Spirit, we must stand unified against the forces that seek to divide us.

### **Striving Side by Side**

Now the second point, the second picture of unity. The first point was “We Stand Firm.” The second point is, “Striving Side by Side.” I want to picture two soldiers, battling in the trenches with one another, equally striving so that their side wins the war. Look at the end of v. 27 to the first part of v. 28. It reads,

With one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents.

In Greek, the English word for “striving side by side” is one word. The word means,

To contend, to struggle, to fight alongside someone else

Paul describes church unity as a battle, a war, a fight. Unity involves struggling, fighting, and waging war together. Church unity is not arrived at through ho-humness, passivity, and indifference, but through fighting alongside other believers. Now our fight is not against flesh and blood. Christianity is not a religion of coercion by the sword. Our fight is against sin, against unbelief, against the devil and his work.

*“With one mind”*

The way we engage in this fight is “with one mind.” See that reference at the end of v. 27. There is a basic unity of thought that must characterize our church unity. This unity of thought is not total and complete. We do not . We do You Unity is what we want; not uniformity.

To illustrate this, turn to Phil 4:2. I will read through v. 3. The passage states,

I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

These two women had labored together side by side. That’s the same verb that occurs in our passage where Paul talks about “striving side by side.” Nonetheless, conflict arose between them. What is Paul’s remedy for this problem? He commands them to “agree in the Lord.” The theological importance of that prepositional phrase “in the Lord” is massive. There is a massive difference between “agreeing” with someone and agreeing with a Christian in the Lord. We are called to, not necessarily agree with each other, but to agree in the Lord.

Flip back with me to 1:27. To struggle together side by side with one mind is to agree in the Lord. This means that we have the gospel at the forefront of our thought. It's all about Jesus Christ. It's all about him.

*"For the Faith of the Gospel"*

And that's what Paul says in the very next prepositional phrase. Well what do we struggle, strive, fight for? Paul provides a small prepositional phrase that modifies "striving side by side" which is theologically important. Look after what comes after "striving side by side." Paul says that he wants us to strive side by side for what? The faith of the gospel.

The way I want you to understand this phrase, "the faith of the gospel," is by simply understanding the faith and the gospel as synonymous for each other. Paul says that we should strive for the faith, or, in other words, the gospel. These two terms are functioning appositionally.

For Paul and for us it needs to be all about the gospel. It's all about Jesus. Always and only. Him, him, him. Not us. Not me. Not you. But him. His cause, his glory, his purposes.

*"Not Frightened"*

To do this is going to take some courage. It's not easy to struggle side-by-side as a church, with one mind, for the gospel. The reason why? We will experience opposition. Paul mentions this opposition in v. 28. He says,

And not frightened in anything by your opponents.

Paul is not specific regarding the identity of these opponents. Simply put. These are those people in Philippi who oppose the work of the gospel through the church in Philippi. That's about all we know.

In this world, due to sin and the work of the devil, there is opposition to the work of the gospel. There always will be. Those who engage in Christian ministry will be opposed. This opposition can come from outside or even inside the church.

When this happens, we must not shrink back. We must not become intimidated. We must not become fearful. No. We are not sissies. We're courageous. We're strong. Our Savior is risen from the dead. Church unity is one in which the church progresses against the forces of darkness in a courageous way. Church life is not for the faint of heart. Striving for church unity is not for the faint of heart. You'll be called names. And your work will be opposed. Nonetheless, this is what the Lord calls this church towards. We must strive together with one another in a bold and courageous manner, no shrinking back when opposition comes to the work of the gospel. It requires boldness and courage. We must all say with Martin Luther in his famous hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God":

The body they may kill: God's truth abideth still, His Kingdom is forever.

## Conclusion

For this sermon, I've been describing what church unity looks like. What does it look like? It looks like Christians standing firm together in the Spirit and Christians striving side-by-side with one another in a courageous way. Paul gives us no commands in the section we covered. He gives us a description. Nevertheless, within Paul's description of church unity, there are points of application that we can make. And I will conclude with these points of application.

To stand firm and to strive side by side requires for the Christian to be involved in the church. You can't stand firm or strive side by side for church unity if you're not really a part of the church. To stand firm and to strive requires commitment.

This idea of standing and striving is opposed to the idea of a consumer Christianity. I fear that here at CBC we have a strong sense of consumer Christianity. I fear that many of you approach church in this way. You come to church on Sundays but have no real involvement in the ministry going on here. You might give a few dollars in the offering plate but nothing more than that. You come and go on Sunday morning. You just kind of pass through. Check the church box off for the week.

To be a consumer Christian is not to live a life that is worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Once again, Phil 1:27, "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ." The way we know if we're obey that commandment is by whether we are standing and striving. If you're a consumer Christian, then you are not standing firm and striving side by side. And if you're not doing those things, then you're not living a life that reflects the worthiness of the gospel of Christ.

Christ wants all of you, dear friend. He wants your whole life. He doesn't want you approach this church and all of life as a consumer. He wants your sacrifice, your effort, your involvement. He wants you standing and striving. To do that you have to be all in. This body desperately needs your standing and striving. Dear friend, if you're a consumer Christian, you need to repent so that you may live a life worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ.