

Session 5

walking worthy

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Philippians 1:27–30

BUILDUP THEME



INTERNALIZE GODLINESS

God commands us to walk worthy of the gospel of Christ.

MEASURABLE RESPONSE

The learners will determine ways to demonstrate their citizenship in Heaven.

MEMORY VERSE

“Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27).

Teacher Preparation

- ☐ While Paul was imprisoned, he recognized his need for fellow believers. He wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon while incarcerated. In those Epistles he taught that believers need each other as they live out their beliefs and face persecution for those beliefs.
- ☐ Read Philippians 1:27–30. Culture fosters people’s disengagement from each other. They text brief messages rather than having face-to-face conversations, and many people spend more time online than in the presence of others. Even some church members become detached from the rest of the church. They isolate themselves from the strength and support of other believers by staying so busy and by becoming distracted with other pursuits. God commands believers to be connected and mutually supportive in their endeavors for Him. Paul challenges us to recognize our dependence on each other.
- ☐ Use this session to help your learners understand their need for each other. The world is attacking their faith more and more aggressively. They can’t stand their ground or fight for the gospel by themselves.

Session Summary

After reporting his situation, the progress of the gospel, and his prospect for release to the Philippians, Paul introduced the main part of his letter. He commanded the Philippian believers to let their manner of life complement the gospel of Christ. Then he cited two qualities that should characterize their lives as citizens of Heaven: unity and steadfastness.

Session Starters

Option 1—National Anthems

Gather

- Recording of the national anthem.

Steps

1. Play the national anthem and observe how your learners react.

ASK: What does our national anthem mean to you?

ASK: What have you done, or what would you be willing to do, for our country?

2. Discuss being a citizen of Heaven.

ASK: Suppose you lived in Iran or North Korea. How might you respond to the anthems of one of those countries?

ASK: How might living in Iran or North Korea help you focus on being a citizen of Heaven?

ASK: What might you include in an anthem that represents the citizens of Heaven?

3. Transition to the Bible study.

Paul challenged the Philippians to live worthy of the gospel of Christ, reminding them that their citizenship is in Heaven. The Philippian believers, like Paul, faced persecution for living for Christ in a city that emphasized loyalty to Rome and its emperor. While we don't face the persecution the Philippians face, we are still called to live as citizens of Heaven. This session challenges us to do that.

Option 2—Citizenship Testimony

Steps

1. Have a learner or guest share a testimony of what it meant to become a citizen of the United States. Have the person share how his or her life changed as a result. Also have the person share what life was like in the country from which he or she came.
2. Discuss becoming a citizen of Heaven.

ASK: How did your life change when you became a citizen of Heaven?

ASK: How often do you think about living out your heavenly citizenship?

3. Transition to the Bible lesson.

Paul challenged the Philippians to live worthy of the gospel of Christ, reminding them that their citizenship is in Heaven. The Philippian believers, like Paul, faced persecution for living for Christ in a city that emphasized loyalty to Rome and its emperor. While we don't face the persecution the Philippians face, we are still called to live as citizens of Heaven. This session challenges us to do that.

Bible Study

Gather

- Resources 48-R5 and 48-R6.

The previous section of Philippians 1 ended with Paul sharing his confidence that God would allow him to be released from prison so he might help the Philippians grow in the Lord. As they waited for his release, Paul wanted them to heed his instructions included in the rest of his letter to them. He began by challenging them to live as citizens of Heaven in their thoroughly Roman city.

I. Paul's Exhortation (Phil. 1:27)

Philippians 1:27–30, the section that opens Paul's instructions for the Philippians, provides a basis for understanding the rest of the book. Paul opens the letter's foundational section by exhorting the Philippians.

READ: Philippians 1:27. Stop after the first phrase.

Paul began his exhortation with a word translated as "only." The original word means "above all" or "at all costs." It stresses the importance of the exhortation that follows it. The Philippians got the point. "Pay attention!" Paul told them.

The opening phrase in Paul's exhortation (1:27) needs an explanation too. In Greek, it clearly means to "live as a citizen." The Philippians understood that Paul exhorted them to live as worthy citizens of the gospel of Christ. Because Philippi was a Roman colony, the Philippians enjoyed both the privileges and the responsibilities of Roman citizenship. So even though they lived in Philippi, they were expected to live as Roman citizens. Similarly, God expected the Philippian believers to live as citizens of Heaven even though they were Roman citizens.

Furthermore, Paul wanted the Philippians to live in accord with the gospel of Christ. Obviously, he meant more than salvation from sins when he mentioned the gospel of Christ is the standard for citizens of Heaven. He meant that the Philippians' behavior was supposed to correspond to the message of Christ. In that way the gospel set the

"Let your conversation be" translates a Greek word that primarily means "live as a citizen."

standard for the Philippians' conduct. As they lived by that standard, they would demonstrate the qualities of heavenly citizenship and would build a solid basis for witnessing to their neighbors.

ASK: How would you describe a person who lives in a manner worthy of the gospel? *The person thinks and acts like Christ (Rom. 12:2); the person is transformed, treating others above him- or herself.*

All believers need to conduct themselves in a manner that corresponds to the message of Jesus Christ. Such conduct reveals their heavenly citizenship and provides the world with a powerful testimony. Furthermore, believers living like citizens of Heaven will develop harmonious relationships as they serve the Lord.

Living as a citizen of Heaven doesn't mean we ignore our responsibilities as citizens of the United States. Living worthy of the gospel would make us good citizens of the U.S. so long as our earthly citizenship allows for our expression of our citizenship in Heaven.

ASK: Have you noticed any conflicts between being a United States citizen and a citizen of Heaven? What are they? What conflicts might you anticipate arising in days or years to come?

II. Paul's Expectations (Phil. 1:27)

A. Stand fast in the Spirit

Paul wanted to receive a good report that the Philippians were standing fast (Phil. 1:27). "Stand fast" means "stand firm" or "be steadfast." It signifies the kind of firmness or unflinching courage that soldiers show when they refuse to leave their posts regardless of the severity of the battle.

Paul urged the Philippians to stand firm "in one spirit." He may have been referring to standing fast in the Holy Spirit or to standing fast in one spirit, meaning with one attitude or state of mind. In reality, we can't have one without the other. To stand fast in one spirit is possible only if believers are standing fast in the Holy Spirit. Standing fast in the Holy Spirit implies unity of spirit. The Philippians needed unity in order to represent Christ well in Philippi. If they lived as citizens of Heaven, they would be unified.

ASK: Think about the broad spectrum of people in our church. What else, besides a unity of spirit through the Holy Spirit, would draw all of us together for a common cause?

B. Strive together in the struggle

Paul described the act of standing firm (Phil. 1:27) in two ways. First, it involves "striving" together, or struggling along with someone in a

joint effort against an opposing force. Second, the act of standing firm involves unity. The Philippians were supposed to strive together “with one mind.” They needed to be in one accord, presenting a united front.

The goal of the Philippians’ struggle was “the faith of the gospel” (1:27); in other words, the faith (the body of doctrine Christians believe) that is based on the gospel. Paul had previously written that the gospel was advancing despite his circumstances (1:12). In verse 27 he advised the Philippians that they needed to struggle together for the faith, that is, the content of the gospel, as it advanced. They were not to let anything distract them.

ASK: What distractions from the furtherance of the gospel does our church face today?

Implied in Paul’s teaching of struggling together is the idea that how an individual responds to his or her role in furthering the gospel will positively or negatively affect other believers. A team member who does less than his or her best won’t inspire others to give their best. In fact, a slacking believer is prone to slow down the spiritual pace of believers around him or her.

DISPLAY: Resources 48-R5 and 48-R6. **ASK:** What other illustrations come to your mind when you think of striving together in a united front against an opposing force?

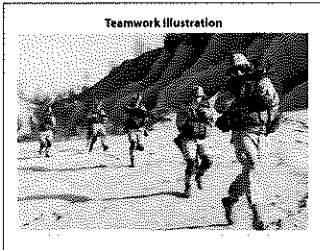
III. The Philippians’ Experiences (Phil. 1:28, 29)

A. Authenticate the gospel (1:28)

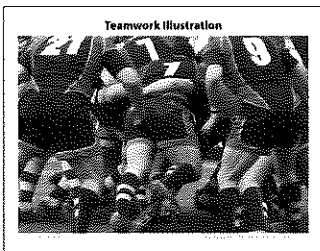
READ: Philippians 1:28.

As the Philippians stood fast, they would not be terrified by their adversaries. Paul meant they wouldn’t be startled and intimidated. The word Paul used could refer to startled horses who begin to stampede to escape whatever spooked them. Paul understood the Philippians could become intimidated by their opponents and then panic and “run.” Paul ordered them to take a firm and united stand for the gospel. They had no reason to panic, for even if they lost their lives, they would immediately enter God’s presence in Heaven.

The emperor Nero was one of the Philippians’ adversaries. Nero led in the persecution of believers. Rome charged the Christians with being unsocial and exclusive, with proselytizing, and with immorality. The last charge was obviously ludicrous. Under Nero’s direction, Rome declared Christians to be enemies of the empire. Unknown to Paul at that time, Nero’s persecution of believers would grow much more intense just a couple years later when Nero blamed the burning of Rome on the Christians.



48-R5



48-R6

The unbelieving Jews in Philippi also opposed the Philippian believers. They rejected and resented the believers and their growing church. The Jews wanted to draw the believers into Judaism. Paul later warned the Philippian church about such Jews (3:1, 2).

Satan stood as the Philippians' primary enemy. He worked to discourage the church and cause division within it (1 Pet. 5:8, 9).

As the believers endured persecution from their enemies, they would demonstrate their deep trust in God and their certainty about their future. Those persecuting them knew no such certainty; they had no such guarantees from their fickle gods. As previously mentioned, they poured vast amounts of resources into building lavish temples for their gods to try to impress them. But still, they could only cross their fingers and hope for the best. The pagans had no guarantees from their gods.

By contrast, believers' steadfastness in the face of danger authenticates their message of hope and serves as an omen of their persecutors' doom. Their stand demonstrates their deep trust in God and their willingness to suffer or even die for Him.

ASK: When have you been hated because of your testimony as a believer?

ASK: Do you think your persecutor understood your testimony was for him or her an omen of doom? Explain.

Paul exhorted the Philippian believers to live like citizens of Heaven. If they did, they would stand united against their opponents. They would not let their persecutors intimidate them. They would be victorious!

B. Appreciate God's grace (1:29)

READ: Philippians 1:29.

The fact that the Philippian believers encountered opposition and had to struggle to defend the faith tells us that the Christian life is far from easy. We, too, must struggle against opposing forces as we do the Lord's work. The Devil will never let us coast along. He will battle us every inch of our journey to Heaven. Nevertheless, the Lord is always with us, and His power is never in short supply. In His strength we will prevail.

Paul reminded the Philippians that their suffering was granted by God. It was not an accident; it was part of His sovereign purpose. It came as a gift of His grace, just as the privilege of believing on Christ was a gift of His grace.

ASK: How do most believers normally pray for those who are being persecuted for their faith?

READ: Philippians 1:29. **ASK:** How should this verse affect the way believers pray for those persecuted for their faith? *They should pray the persecuted believers will stand strong in their faith and cause their persecutors to turn to Christ.*

Why should we consider persecution a measure of God's grace in our lives? Persecution heightens our awareness of our need for God's presence and power in our lives. When we experience His enablement in troubling and frightening times, we grow in our appreciation of His loving and empowering presence. We know God far better and become better equipped to trust Him in all other areas of our lives. There is nothing more valuable and precious on earth than opportunities to grow in our understanding of God. And perhaps nothing fosters our growth and understanding of God like persecution for our faith.

ACTIVITY: Consider reading testimonies from the website for The Voice of the Martyrs. Some of the testimonies demonstrate how persecution is a gift of God. Despite difficult circumstances and frightening opposition, the persecuted believers offer praise and thanks to God for giving them courage and strength to impact the world around them.

IV. Paul's Example (Phil. 1:30)

Paul reinforced the reality of Christian suffering by referring to his own suffering. He wrote that the Philippians were experiencing the same conflict they saw in him in the past and heard he endured in the present.

READ: Philippians 1:30.

Paul emphasized the word "same" by putting it at the beginning of his Greek sentence. The Philippians and Paul endured similar struggles. They were both suffering at the hands of the Roman Empire and for the sake of Jesus Christ. Remember that Paul suffered pain in Philippi during his first visit to the city.

READ: Acts 16:20–24, 35–39.

Notice that Paul didn't appeal to his Roman citizenship until after he was beaten and imprisoned in Philippi. He likely could have avoided his beating and imprisonment by immediately revealing his Roman citizenship. Paul must have considered the benefits of his persecution better than the benefits of avoiding the persecution.

ASK: What were some of the benefits of Paul's suffering in Philippi? *He served as an example for the new Philippian believers; he proved that the cause of Christ is worth enduring personal pain; God opened doors for him to witness to the prisoners and guards.*

Paul wanted the Philippian believers to know that they were partners in the gospel. Therefore, they needed to live as citizens of Heaven and to stand firm against opposition to the gospel. To stand firm, they needed to strive together against their opponents and not be intimidated by them. This suffering was part of God's purpose for them. Paul, too, suffered for the sake of Christ.

Each one of us is a partner in the gospel, so Paul's exhortation to the Philippians applies to us. If we are going to impact the world through the gospel, it will happen through our partnership in Christ.

Session Application

Steps

1. Discuss living as a citizen of Heaven while a citizen of the United States.

ASK: In what ways might living as a good citizen of the United States begin to conflict with living as a good citizen of Heaven?

ASK: How might you prepare to live as a good citizen of Heaven in those instances?

2. Discuss making investments as a citizen of Heaven.

There are a lot of earthly things into which we can invest our time and resources. But only our investments as citizens of Heaven will ultimately last. We aren't yet facing the threat of persecution for being citizens of Heaven, so we aren't forced to choose to invest in heavenly things. Perhaps instead we see making heavenly investments as something we would like to do if we could find the time.

ASK: What opportunities do you have to demonstrate your citizenship in Heaven?

ASK: What earthly investments might you need to reduce or give up in order to have the time and resources to invest in heavenly things?