

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

—Philippians 1:27

## LEARNING GOALS

1. To understand what it means to live a life worthy of the gospel of Christ.
2. To view the church as living together in one spirit.
3. To understand the grace of suffering.

## REFLECTION

Paul's letter to the church in Philippi is both challenging and comforting to the church—then and now. We live in a world that emphasizes self and getting what one feels he or she is entitled to. This type of thinking can and does pour over into our churches. Christians look to the church to see what they can get rather than what they can give.

Paul wrote his letter from prison. A jail cell is a place anyone would feel lost, abandoned and scared. However, Paul was not overwhelmed by fear. He was content, bold, and joyous. Prior to this text, Paul described his suffering. In spite of his circumstances, he chose to remain faithful to Christ and to the community of Jesus-followers. In his instructions to this community (v. 27), he used the Greek word *politēnēsthai* ("live your life"), which literally meant to conduct yourselves as citizens—citizens of the kingdom (rule) of God.

Philippi was a Roman colony. The colonists enjoyed Roman citizenship, and they were a virtual extension of Rome itself. There was great freedom for the citizens of Philippi. A citizen was expected to act in accordance with Roman laws and to maintain a peaceful and decorous society. They were empowered and set apart from those who did not

live with the privilege of being united as citizens under the banner of the Roman empire.

“While Rome offered peace through victory, domination, and might,” writes Brian Peterson, “the gospel claims that peace is found in mercy, grace, and the suffering on one particular cross.” Paul’s readers understood what it meant to live as a citizen of Rome. Yet the citizenship Paul referred to was quite different than Roman citizenship. To “live as a citizen” in Philippians 1:27 meant living under the rule of Christ. The kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Rome clashed on many levels. This tension would have been felt strongly by Paul’s readers.

Paul encouraged his readers to stand firm and to be united in one spirit, just as the Roman authorities would have liked their subjects and soldiers to be unified. Paul encouraged them not to be frightened in any way by those who opposed them. Yet, Paul reminded them that this fearless unity does not lead to worldly power like that held by Rome. Instead, this unity leads to suffering.

## 1. Engage

- a. What are the challenges of living as a community in today’s culture?
- b. We live in a country and a city that, for the most part, offers a pretty easy life. Additionally, in our society, it is easy to isolate ourselves from neighbors and be superficial with our relationships. People “quit people” at the earliest of relational complications. Paul opens our eyes to community in his letter to the Philippians. He tells us that we are actually meant to live in community, and through God and this community we will be able to live a life worthy of the gospel of Christ. When we understand this calling and learn to live in this community, it will attract the lost, and God's kingdom will grow.

## 2. Involve

- a. What does it mean to conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ?
- b. Why is it difficult to stand firm in “one” spirit?
- c. How do we disagree and be “unified” at the same time?

- d. What does it look like to strive side by side with one mind for the gospel?
  - e. Is it realistic to never be frightened by those who oppose us? Explain.
  - f. When you read, "It has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but to suffer," how does that make you feel?
2. Challenge
- a. What simple steps can you take this week to strengthen this community of Christ-followers?
  - b. How can we foster unity?
  - c. "Dietrich Bonhoeffer argued in *The Cost of Discipleship* that the biblical doctrine of grace becomes 'cheap grace' that dispenses benefits for the believer without making demands. Bonhoeffer speaks of grace without discipleship. True grace 'is costly because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life.'"—James Thompson

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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