



Sermon – May 3, 2020  
Phillip Bethancourt

**Verses Covered This Week**

*Philippians 1:27*

*Philippians 3:20*

*Philippians 4:1*

Well, let's open our Bibles together. We're going to spend the morning in Philippians, chapter 1. Philippians 1:27 is where we will see what the Apostle Paul has to share with us this morning. And what an encouraging first week it's been, Central family. It's been a joy to connect with many of you. We've had the opportunity to have two staff meetings this week. In addition, we've gathered the entire Central team together for a meeting. And we also had our first Deacon's meeting together as a part of this new chapter. And what's been such a refreshment to me is the encouragement that we've seen in this church. And the spirit of unity that has been present in these meetings. Under normal circumstances, if we were gathered here today, on the first Sunday that we would start together this next chapter, we would have loved to have what is often known as an installation service. Now in that type of situation, we would have invited a close connection to Central or a mentor of mine to come and preach to all of us, to you as a congregation, and to me as your new pastor, giving us a charge for the next chapter that we're beginning. A spirit of encouragement and a spirit of challenge as we embark on this together. Well, obviously, that's not available to us today. But we are going to spend our time this morning in Philippians 1:27 allowing the Apostle Paul to give us that charge this morning. So if you want to follow along with me in your Bible, here's what Paul says.

*[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,*

Let's pray together.

Father, as we come to You in this time, we acknowledge that we're not worthy of Your gospel. We are nothing more than rebel sinners who fall short of the way that You have created us. But in Christ You have made us new. You have brought us into Your kingdom and made us citizens. And we pray even now that by Your Spirit, You move among us and shape us as we begin this next chapter. And we ask this in Christ's name. Amen.

Well, have you noticed that as Coronavirus has progressed that companies around the country have changed the way that they're marketing to you? You know, they used to send you notices or coupons about great deals that they had available. But they realize that that might come across as insensitive in this time of national difficulty. And so they changed their strategy and instead of trying to sell you a service, they're now attempting to sell you a sentiment. And what I mean by that is they're trying to project a feeling of solidarity. That we're connected in the midst of this crisis. Now how do I know that? I checked this week, my inbox and I searched the phrase in there, "We're all in this together." And I found several companies that used that exact phrase. I can think of an insurance company that we don't use anymore. Or credit card we don't need anymore. Or restaurant we don't eat at anymore. Or an airline, I probably won't be flying for a long time. They want us to know that there's this connection, this sense of solidarity. But the reason for that is they just want to keep their name in front of us. They want to have an appearance of connection that seems to signal a sense of unity when there is not something actually there. It's nothing more than a slogan and a sentiment and not a true connection.

Well, when Paul speaks to us this morning in Philippians chapter 1, he is giving the church a similar warning. That as we start a new chapter like we are here at Central. And we talk about the need for unity in a congregation. That is could be nothing more than sentiment rather than substance. And I want you to see what's happening in this text here. Because Paul is writing to the church at Philippi. This is a city in Greece. In fact, I had the opportunity several years ago to lead a study trip of seminary students. And we were right there in the city. I got to see the place where tradition tells us that Lydia was baptized in Acts 16, where this church began. And He is writing to this city that is also a Roman colony. And he is speaking to them. He's been travelling through chapter 1 and just before this he talked about how the tension he feels between wanting to die and be with Christ, but desiring to live for the sake of the gospel. And he knows that to depart would be better to be with Christ, but he tells us that to live as Christ, but to die is gain. And as he comes to this text this morning, he is laying out for us what it should look like if we are going to live for the sake of the gospel. If we're going to live, what should that look like for us in the next chapter of this church? And what we're going to notice this morning is that as we look at Philippians 1:27, we're going to see that in our next chapter of the church, Paul is calling us to come together in three ways. To be of one heart, one spirit, and one mind. So look back at the passage there. You'll notice the first idea there at the beginning of this verse, Paul calls us to have one heart. He says, "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ." He starts with this word only. There's an emphasis. He is channeling our focus right here. In other words, saying, "If there's only one thing you get from me right now, this is it." And what is that thing? Well, you see what he says there.

[Let our manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.](#)

In the original language, this is speaking of how we carry ourselves. In fact, the original term was a term connected to citizenship. If you've got your Bible opened, flip over two chapters to Philippians chapter 3 in verse 20. Because Paul uses a similar form in this word there when he says this.

<sup>20</sup>[But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.](#)

There is this concept of citizenship that Paul is emphasizing. And when he says, “Let your life be lived in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ”, he is speaking of our behavior as citizens. Now this would have landed in a powerful way for the people of Philippi because as I mentioned before, this was a Roman colony. They weren’t just their own city. They were connected to a greater kingdom. And as a result of that, they were citizens of that kingdom with all of the privileges and all of the responsibilities that citizenship brought. There were expectations on how they conducted themselves in light of the kingdom that they were connected to with the Roman Empire. But when Paul speaks to the Philippian church here and gives them this admonition to live a life that is worthy of citizenship, his primary focus is not on their role as citizens of the Roman Empire. It’s on their role as citizens of the kingdom of God. As Philippians 3:20, which we already read, declares for us that our citizenship is in heaven. Philippi was not just an outpost of another kingdom of the Roman Empire. It is an outpost of the kingdom of God right there at the church of Philippi. And they should be embracing that and reflecting that reality in the way they live.

Now this call to live as citizens for the sake of the kingdom probably lands on us in a fresh way right now in the midst of Coronavirus. Because just under two months ago, our lives were turned upside down. And as citizens of this nation, we were called on to make changes to our preferences and our patterns for the sake of the greater good in order to defeat an invisible enemy. Things that we would have never done on our own; we willingly embrace because we wanted to be good citizens of the nation that we’re a part of. And isn’t that the picture that Paul is driving us to here? That we lay down our preferences, that we shift our patterns for the sake of the gospel. To be worthy of the gospel that Christ speak, that Paul speaks of right here. And he talks about that idea of being worthy of the gospel. And for those of us that are kingdom citizens, we know that none of us are worthy of that gospel, are we? We are all rebel sinners resistant to God’s work in our life; rejecting Him in our own sin. But what happens? When we’re united to Christ by faith, when we call on Jesus to be saved, He sends His Spirit among us and God takes up residence in our hearts so that we can do exactly what Paul is speaking of here to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel. Now how can we live lives that are worthy of that gospel? It’s important to notice here that when Paul is writing chapter one and verse 27, he’s not just speaking to an individual Christian. He is writing to an entire congregation. That it’s not an individual Christian whose life must be worthy, but every one of them. And as we look at this text this morning, Paul’s word is not just for that church thousands of years ago, but it is for us today as we begin this next chapter. Paul is calling Central to embrace one heart that is committed to a life that is lived in a manner worthy of the gospel.

And what does that look like for us? Even though we’re not in one location, he is telling us that we need to be of one heart. That we’re going to wake up every day asking ourselves the question, “How can I live a life that is worthy of the King that came and died for me? How can I lay down my desires for the sake of the gospel? How can I pour myself out in service to this community with one heart united with the people around us?” That’s the picture that Paul is giving the Philippian church and us today. Now one of the practical ways that this passage can be a help to us is it can be a great guide for us as we pray. You’ve probably encountered the same thing as me. You face situations in your life and you’re not exactly sure how it is that God would want you to pray in that moment. Well Paul is showing us a prayer that we can always lift up regardless of our circumstances. Even when you don’t know how to pray, we can come and pray the words of Philippians 1:27 and say what the Apostle Paul, “Lord I don’t know what

You're going to do in this situation, but please let me live in a manner worthy of the gospel." And shouldn't that be our prayer right now together as a church? Even if you're not sure what this next chapter will look like, we can all commit to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel and the pursuit of holiness. And even if we don't know when it will be that we can gather together again in this room to worship on a Sunday morning, every one of us can give our best to the Lord by the power of the Spirit. What Paul is showing us here in the beginning of this passage is that we need to unite together in this next chapter with one heart.

But notice the way it goes on. Because right after that in the middle of the verse, Paul lays out a second call for us as a congregation beginning this next chapter. He says that we need to demonstrate one spirit. Look back at the middle of the verse. He says this:

So that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit,

So Paul begins this portion of the verse by pointing out to them, he's not sure if he's going to be able to get back and see them. And do you remember why that's the case? It's because Paul is writing this letter to the Philippian church from a Roman prison. He has been imprisoned for his faith and he doesn't know what his faith will be. If he will remain there or if he will face judgement or if he will be released. He's unsure whether he will be able to come to see them or he will remain absent. But in the midst of his personal uncertainty, there is a certainty that Paul lays out for them in terms of expectations. That he will hear a good report from them and that good report will be centered on them living life standing firm in one spirit. He sets an expectation of accountability as he speaks to this idea of standing firm. What does he have in mind there when he talks about how the church should stand firm? In the original language, this was a military reference. You can imagine a situation in which an army is advancing upon your city and seeking to destroy your kingdom. And so your military would be sent out to face them in the midst of battle. And as that enemy approaches, the expectation for your army would be to stand firm. No retreats. No regrets. No relenting. You will withstand the attack of the enemy for the sake of defending your kingdom. And that's the picture Paul's is showing us here. To put it in Texas terms, my family is just closing out our chapter in Nashville and we're travelling down on the same path that Davy Crockett and Sam Houston and some of the greats that helped to settle Texas did travelling from Texas, uh from Tennessee to settle here in Texas. And we know that in Texas terms, the greatest standing firm that any army displayed was at the battle of the Alamo. That when Santa Ana sent his troops that Davy Crockett and Bowie and the others stood firm in the battle because they knew that the battle was worth the fight. That standing firm was worth the cost to see a kingdom delivered from their enemies. And how much more so is that true for us in the gospel of Christ? Paul is calling us to stand firm; to resist the evil one. And the way that we do that, he tells us here, is by doing it in one spirit. But notice what happens. The term to stand firm isn't only used here in the book of Philippians in chapter one. If you still have your Bible with you, slide over to chapter four. And what you'll notice is that in the very first verse of Philippians 4, in Philippians 4:1, Paul says this. He says:

<sup>1</sup>Stand firm in the Lord.

So in 1:27 he gives us the commandment to stand firm. And in 4:1 he gives us the capacity to stand firm. He says, "If you are going to stand firm in the Christian life, it is only because God is

standing for you on your behalf.” In other words, the reason that we can stand firm against the schemes of the devil, is Christ has already done that on the cross. The fact that we can stand firm is only possible because He is seated at the right hand of the Father. And He tells us there that we are to stand firm, not as individuals, but in one spirit. There’s a sense of unity and alignment that Paul is driving at here in the middle of the verse where he’s showing us that the Christian life is not designed to be lived on its own. And I know that seems particularly challenging in this Coronavirus season where we are separated from others in the normal patterns of life. But what Paul is showing us here is that we need to be a congregation in this next chapter that is driven by one spirit. Where unity marks our hearts. And the only way that’s possible is because of the Holy Spirit living in each one of us. That the Spirit of God works to bring about a spirit of unity in His congregation. And when we pursue that unity, it is not for the sake of unity itself. It is for the sake of mission that we can see God’s kingdom advance in us and through us as a congregation. And that should raise for us the question, “What might undermine the Spirit of unity in a church like ours in the next chapter?” Well, we don’t have to guess about that. Because when we look at Scripture, we see example after example after example of the people of God struggling with unity and wrestling with division. And you can see all the different ways that it happens. All the way back from the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve, Adam and Eve forsake unity with one another for the sake of personal preference. Or you can think about not long after that in Genesis chapter 11 that the people of God forsake unity together at the building of the Tower of Babel for the sake of selfish gain. Or you can see the way that a nostalgia for the good old days that used to be in the past undermine the unity of the people of Israel as they sojourn through the wilderness and long to go back to Egypt. Those same temptations can pull us away from unity even today. We can struggle to be a people that Paul calls us to be here of one spirit. Now the reality is, as a congregation, when we start this next chapter, I’m confident that there are not people watching this live stream today who are actively plotting, “I wonder what way I can sow division and discouragement in the life of this congregation.” That’s rarely the way that division and disunity occurs. Instead, it happens oftentimes because of a lack of intentionality. That we don’t wake up every day dying to ourselves forsaking our own preferences, crucifying the flesh and depending on the Spirit. And if we are going to be a people of one spirit in the days ahead, it’s only going to be because God is at work within us. And I have to tell you, I’ve seen glimpses of that already. I was so encouraged as we gathered around Zoom with dozens of our deacons this past Monday in order to watch them talk through the dynamics of the last few months of the search process and look ahead to this next chapter. And I saw people on that live feed who didn’t always see eye to eye about how the process played out. But they were on the same page, heart to heart, in desiring to see this church move forward in unity together. And I saw the very next day after governor Abbott gave new guidelines to churches about what it might look like to come together again, we met in our Tuesday morning staff meeting with one heart and one mind to think through what it could look like on how to begin the process of preparing our church to reopen as soon as possible and as safe as possible. And after the conclusion of the sermon today, at the end of our time together, I’ll have a brief word of update about where that stands. I have seen those glimpses of what Paul calls us to here to embrace one spirit. And I can’t wait to see the way God continues to work in our hearts in the days ahead.

But I want you to notice with me one other admonition that Paul gives to us this morning as we start this next chapter. He tells us that we also need to be of one mind. Do you see it there at the end of the verse? He says, “With one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.” So

Paul's not saying you just need to have one heart or one spirit. You must also embrace one mind. And when he uses that term there in the original language he is not speaking of the brain; he is talking about the entire life. Everything about you: your mind, your soul, all that it is. That it needs to be one with one another. Now we can think about the way that the New Testament talks about the life of the mind. I can think, for example, in James 1 where we're warned about not being double-minded people that are cast about through doubts that are caused by the waves of life. And if that's true for us as individuals, how much more so is that true for us as a church? That we not be double-minded, doubting the goodness of God, or questioning the plans of God, or wondering if we should be united together. Instead, we need to be single-minded, resolute, committed to the call that Paul is laying out for us here. That we should strive together for the sake of the gospel. Now the Philippians would have known as soon as they read this word, striving, that the Apostle Paul wrote to them. That he is using athletic imagery. And it's kind of cruel for us to be hearing Paul talk about athletic competition when we are in a sports desert right now. We've been nearly two months with almost no live sports. In fact, maybe you noticed this yesterday, things have gotten so desperate on ESPN that they did a day worth of programming including things like showing the World Tetris Championship and a rock skipping competition and marble races and perhaps the most interesting, lawn mower racing. And I'm there's some of you that think, "Hey, I'd like to get in on that." We know what it's like to be experiencing this lack of competition because we all understand that sports and competition is a part of God's good gift to humanity. And that would have been true right there for the Philippians as well. They would have seen athletic competition all around them. And they would have known that when someone talks about striving side by side it's a picture of a team suffering on behalf of each other for the sake of each other in order to accomplish a common mission. In order to pursue a victory that they have set out to obtain. There is that same picture right here that Paul was calling the church to work together as a team, to be of one mind, to be united in its mission so that we can strive side by side for the sake of what God has called us to. One of the challenges as we start this new chapter is we can't be face to face. And it's challenging to pursue unity together when we can't see each other eye to eye. But what Paul is showing here is that even if we can't be together face to face, we can lock arms together side by side in order to pursue the call of the gospel through one mind. And oftentimes there's a way in which coming together for the sake of a common mission can bring about unity. In other words, unity doesn't happen when you focus on unity. Unity happens when you focus on the mission you've been called to and are willing to do whatever it takes to get there. That's the picture that Paul is calling us to. That we might work, that we might push, that we might serve, and that we might be faithful in doing the next thing now so that in the future we'll pick our head up from the task that God has called us to and see us striving together in the faith of the gospel.

Now when Paul speaks of this, this is not just an abstract issue for the Philippian church. Because I want you to turn back over to Philippians 4. You'll see that this was an actual problem in the Philippian church right then. They were not of one mind. Look back at chapter 4 in verses 2 and 3. And here's what Paul says to us.

<sup>2</sup>I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. <sup>3</sup>Yes, I also ask you, 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 written in the book of life.

And so Paul speaks about these two women in the church who it seems clear at one time were striving together with Paul, but now are striving against one another in rivalry and division. In fact, when he says there in verse 3 that they have labored side by side with me, it is the exact same term in our text this morning in Philippians 1:27. They were doing it right for a season, but now there's division. And what does he call upon them to do? He calls them to agree in the Lord. Do you see it there in verse 2? What does it mean to agree in the Lord? Well, I don't think that what Paul is saying here is that they need to lay down their differences or that they might need to paper over their concerns. But what it means to agree in the Lord is to say, "Despite our differences, we will commit to seek unity for the sake of the mission we've been called to. That we will set down and set aside our personal preferences for the sake of the gospel." He calls the Philippian church to do that. And the challenge for us today is to embrace that same pathway. Paul was honest about the challenges that the Philippian church faced. And we want to do the same thing as we begin this next chapter together. A pastoral transition is always hard for a church. And that's especially true in one like Central that has been so faithfully led by a pastor for an entire generation. And then you compound that with the challenges of the search process and the Coronavirus and the delays that that created. And this could be a season in which we could be pulled toward division and disunity. But what Paul is calling us all to here this morning is to agree in the Lord. To stand firm and to strive together shoulder by shoulder for the sake of the gospel. There's a sense in which bringing in a new pastor is a bit like an organ transplant. If you're familiar with the process, if you need a replacement for a body part, a doctor just can't go and grab any body part from any person. He has to find the right part from the right source so that it's the right match for the host body. And if you talk to a medical professional, what they will tell you is that the most challenging part of any transplant is in the moments immediately following when the transplant occurs. Because that's the time at which it is most difficult for the host body to embrace what has been brought to them that is new. And there's a sense in which a pastor transition just like this is like an organ transplant. Where there is someone new coming in that is being grafted into the host body of this congregation. And the danger could be, in these early days especially when we cannot be together in person, that we could be pulled apart in division instead of brought together as one mind the way the Apostle Paul calls us to here.

And here's what that means for us. Paul was giving us a warning this morning. Because there are some of you that voted for me this past Sunday and there could be a temptation that you might harden your heart to the point where you think, as the new pastor I can't make any sort of mistake and you fail to hold me accountable. And on the other side of things, there may be some of you who chose not to vote for me last week. And there's a danger that Paul is giving us here that you might harden your heart towards me wondering if I'll ever be able to get it right. And there's a warning to both sides right now that we need to have soft hearts towards what God is doing so that He can bring us together in one mind to strive side by side for the faith of the gospel that He lays out there. And you see the irony in this text. Because right after Paul tells us to stand, he tells us to strive. Right after he calls us to a pattern of resistance against our enemies, He calls us towards a persistence in our mission. And he gives us a reason why. We have a gospel goal. He tells us here at the end of the verse that it is for the faith of the gospel. Now this is the only time that term is used in the New Testament. And there's this picture here that Paul is painting that there must have been resistance to the gospel. If we have to strive for the faith of the gospel, that's because we are meeting resistance from the outside world. And we all know in 21<sup>st</sup> century America as it's secularizes all around us, we still face that challenge as

we seek to spread the faith of the gospel to those around us. And I can't help but wonder this morning, have you experienced the faith of the gospel? Have you ever come to know what it looks like to follow after Christ? Because what the Bible shows us is that there is only one person in the world who took on flesh that is worthy of God. And it's not you and me. It's Jesus who came to live a sinless life. And there is only one person in the history of the world who could stand before God because of His sufferings on the cross and set us free from our sin through His death and resurrection. And now if when you put your faith in Jesus, God sends His Spirit to you so that you can join on the mission with our congregation to live in a manner worthy of the gospel and to strive side by side with us for the mission that God has laid out to us. And as we face this next chapter together, our church has a choice in front of us. Will we strive against one another or side by side with one another? Will we agree in the Lord or experience division? And the call of the gospel that we have from Paul this morning is to be a people who embrace one heart, one spirit, and one mind.

There will come a day not long from now when those corporations sending you sentimental e-mails about how we're all in this together will change their marketing strategy. They'll conclude they've reached a point where they can start trying to sell you products and services again and you'll see in that moment that they feel like they can move on from the call to unity. And the same danger faces a church like ours in the next chapter. That we can start this time together with a call towards unity that we might forget about and move on from in the future. But Paul gives us a different picture here. And as we close this morning, the challenge he is laying out for us is to pursue a pattern of true unity as a church. Where we portray the gospel with one heart. That we protect the gospel with one spirit. And we proclaim the gospel with one mind.

Let's pray together. And as we pray, I'm going to ask you to do something a bit unusual, if you're able to, right there in your living room, wherever you may be watching the live stream this morning. I want to invite you, if you're able, to take a knee with me right now. Because I want to start our first Sunday together as a congregation, just coming to the Lord and telling Him, "Apart from You, we can do nothing." So if you'll bow your head with me and pray.

Father, we are grateful for this journey that You've called us together as a congregation. Lord, we know that we, on our own strength, are not worthy of the gospel mission You've called us to. We know that apart from You, we can do nothing, Lord. And we're coming to You in this time, Father, we're pouring out our hearts to You as a congregation asking You to help us overcome any division, any distraction, any disunity. And that we might follow You as a church all the days of our life on the mission that You've called us to for the sake of the gospel. Lord, help us be a people in the days ahead who are gripped by one heart longing to live in a manner worthy of the gospel. Who are united in one spirit living in solidarity in the way that You've called us to; standing firm against the evil one. And gripped by a commitment to being of one mind unified for the task that we have ahead. And we ask these things in Christ's name. Amen.