

## Living Worthy of the Gospel

Cited ad nauseam, Stephen Covey's quote from *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, has repeatedly been referenced by some of the most well known people in leadership. Living just outside the Motor City in the late 1980's, I was first introduced to the saying by former Chrysler CEO, Lee Iacocca, who rescued and revived the corporation during that same decade. Covey's simple and memorable quip, "The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing", communicates the value of having a singular, courageous focus.

Similarly, in his letter to the Philippians, the Apostle Paul identifies the main thing the church must pursue in order to be successful in spreading the gospel. In Philippians 1:27-28, he desires to make this singular point clear, beginning with the words "Just one thing ..." (HCSB). Paul continues, "... let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ." In other words, the main thing in being a church that strides forward in the Lord's commission is living worthy of the gospel. But what does this actually mean? **How can we live "worthy of the gospel of Christ"?**

In his little book, *Worthy: Living in Light of the Gospel*, Sinclair Ferguson explains the meaning of the phrase "worthy of the gospel":

"... a life that is worthy of the gospel of Christ expresses in the form of a lifestyle what the gospel teaches in the form of a message. Such a life takes on a character that reflects the character of the Lord Jesus Christ... That is the picture the [Greek] word *axios* conveys. On the one hand, here is the gospel. And on the other hand, here is your life. And Paul's exhortation is this: Live in such a way that your life 'weighs the same' as the gospel. Live in a way that is 'in keeping with' the gospel, that 'matches' the gospel. This is what 'the balanced Christian life' looks like. **The gospel is the message of the good news of Jesus Christ, and our lives are the embodiment of that good news.**"

Of course, the text gives us some practical direction as well. As a matter of fact, everything that follows modifies the worthy life. Paul shares three "civic obligations" of the citizens of heaven that are in keeping with the gospel. First, he tells the Philippians to "stand firm in the one Spirit" (NIV). Like a well-trained troop of soldiers, they are to **be securely entrenched in the Holy Spirit's work**. The Holy Spirit regenerates (Jn 3:5-6), indwells (1 Cor 6:19-20), and seals (Eph 4:30) every believer. Furthermore, as we humbly surrender ourselves to Him, the Holy Spirit transforms, guides, and enables us to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which [we] have been called" (Eph 4:1). Second, Paul encourages the Philippians to

strive with one mind “side by side for the faith of the gospel.” Like a well-coached athletic team, they are to **strive together to accomplish a collective goal** - to “press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:14). This demands contending as one. It requires traits that Paul addresses in other parts of his epistle. The success of the church reaching its shared goal is contingent upon her increasing in love for one another (Phil 2:2), living selflessly (Phil 2:3-4), and striving with, not against one another (Phil 2:14). The third and final “civic duty” of the citizens of heaven that Paul impresses upon his readers is that they are not to be “frightened in anything by their opponents.” Believers are to live in a way that God’s authority and kingdom cannot be ignored. They are to **courageously prove their allegiance**. Paul claims that, “This is a clear sign to [their opponents] of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God” (Phil 1:28). So, courage in the face of gospel-opposition functions as a two-way-sign. A church filled with fearless believers confronts opponents of the gospel’s validity, shining its exposing light on their sin and plight. On the flip side, a church filled with fearless believers confirms God’s gifts of grace and future glory to each other. It could be said that fearlessly suffering for the sake of the gospel is a grace of God and that the courageous disciple has truly embraced the gospel to its fullest, knowing that enduring hardship with confidence advances the good news.

A life that is worthy of the gospel is lived mindful of one’s citizenship. It understands that the local church is a colony of heaven and that the true citizenship of believers is found in the kingdom to come. Yet for the time being, the life that is worthy of the gospel reflects an overwhelming affection for the beauty, wonder, glory, and power of the atonement. In turn, it is driven by humility, unity, and courage. These three traits, along with living worthy, are the themes that Paul repeatedly points his readers to throughout his epistle. Look for them as you read through his letter to the Philippians this week.

***1 Peter 2:9-12 (ESV)*** - *“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”*