

Model Citizens

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[0 : 00] Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you, or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel, without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.

This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved, and that by God. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him. Since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now I hear that you still have. Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort in his love, if any common sharing in the spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one in mind, do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.

Rather, in humility, value of others above yourselves, not looking to your own interest, but each of you to the interests of others. Simon, thanks for reading.

My name is Martin Ayers. I'm the senior minister here at St. Silas. If you're here as a visitor, it's great to have you here. If you could keep your Bibles open for me at page 1178, Philippians chapter 1, that would be a great help to me, so that everything that we think about comes straight from there, from that portion of the Bible.

[1 : 49] And if you find it helpful, there's an outline inside the notice sheet, so you can use that just to follow where we're going as we look together at this section. But let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word.

Let me pray. Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Gracious God and loving Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are a speaking God. As we turn to your word now, we pray that you will give us heads to understand your word and hearts that are willing to change and follow you.

For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. When I worked, I used to work as a lawyer, and I went on secondment to Beijing. So I was living in Beijing for six months, and I became friends there with a guy from New Zealand, Alex, and his dad was the New Zealand ambassador.

So he lived in the embassy in Beijing, and I spent a night there just staying with him one night, and I got to see the life of a diplomat. So Alex's dad, John McKinnon, he could speak impeccable Mandarin.

He was amazing at Chinese, and he had this kind of deep, rich understanding and appreciation of Chinese culture. He loved China, and he was fully immersed in day-to-day China.

[3 : 05] So he could connect with the people around him, he could talk on their level, he knew what was going on in their society. But once you got inside the embassy, you couldn't get more like New Zealand.

We talked about rugby, we talked about cricket, we sat down in the morning after I stayed up, we sat down for a full New Zealand breakfast. If you don't know what that would be like, it's not that different to a full Scottish breakfast.

The newspapers on the rack were New Zealand newspapers. The pictures and ornaments were Maori. So John McKinnon, he's right in there in Beijing amongst the people, amongst everyone. But once you got inside the home, there was no doubt that he belonged somewhere else. Now in the passage we're looking at tonight, Paul calls on Christians to embrace that kind of identity. One where we certainly don't retreat from our city, from the colleagues and classmates and neighbours and friends who are not Christians around us, but where we show in our interactions, from our values, from our character, from our consistency, our generosity, our love, our courage, that there's something fundamentally different about us, even that we belong to another world.

[4 : 25] So our first point, I've put it on the sheets there, is live out your transnationality by striving together. These verses at the end of chapter 1 of Philippians, I don't think there are more important verses in the whole letter than these.

We get the first command in the letter, and really it's like a headline that opens the main body of the letter. So up to chapter 3, verse 20, which is kind of where the main body of the letter ends, this command in chapter 1, verse 27, flies over everything.

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. What we miss in the English translation there is that Paul uses a word here that's from the root, citizenship.

It's like saying, citizenize yourself according to the gospel. Live out your citizenship as gospel people, people who belong to the risen Christ.

He uses the same root word in chapter 3, verse 20, just over the page where he says, if you just turn over, he says in chapter 3, verse 20, but our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly await a savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[5 : 42] So this is our transnationality, citizens of heaven. If you've got a passport, you open it up, and it declares, doesn't it, your citizenship if you've got a passport.

And for lots of us, our national identity is a key part of who we are. It might be for you that it's about being Scottish, that that's quite fundamental to your identity.

You hear bagpipes, and you know where you belong. For others of us, maybe it's about being British, or that you feel more European, a European citizen. And obviously in our church family at St. Silas, we're blessed with people from all different nations, people whose nationality is completely different to that, whether it's being Chilean, or Chinese, or Ugandan, or Canadian, or something else.

But whatever your nationality, when you put your faith in Jesus Christ, you get granted this new citizenship, as though we get a new passport from God, and it's stamped, heavenly citizen.

Think of a friend of mine whose Facebook profile, where it says hometown, it says heaven. It's this transnationality, shared with people all over the world, who belong to Jesus Christ.

[6 : 57] And Paul gives this command to live lives that are consistent with that citizenship. It's wonderful, isn't it, to think that Paul doesn't have to tell us to earn our citizenship.

He assumes we already have it. Because our global news is dominated by people migrating, isn't it? And there are people who, in lots of cases, I guess would be longing for a new citizenship that would open borders for them, where they get held up, they get stuck behind walls, they're in danger, they're in poverty, they travel on small boats across the channel to get here.

But you get granted this citizenship, citizenship of heaven, as a free gift. Thanks to the gospel, the gospel being not news about what we have to do, but news about what Jesus has done for us in entering our world in love, dying a sin-bearing death, rising again.

So my Iranian barber over at Anislam, where I live, he's currently sitting exams to try and earn British citizenship. I'm always asking him how his exams are going, and when he tells me some of the questions, I wonder quite how I'd fare in these exams.

But wonderfully, here there's no exam to take, there's no language test, our citizenship is freely granted. And that's how the ethics work in Philippians, this letter, it's how Christian ethics work.

[8 : 29] It's never obey this so that you'll be accepted, so that you'll get into heaven. Rather, it's be who you are. Look at the new privileges God has bestowed upon you as a free gift, and now just be who you are, be who he's made you to be.

And the genius of Paul's language here in Philippians is that the people of Philippi, they knew exactly what he was talking about because Philippi was a Roman colony.

So Philippi was located, if you look on a map, you think of a map today of Europe, you've got Greece down in that bottom right-hand corner of Europe, and Philippi was there. It was in what's modern-day Greece.

It was 800 miles from Rome. But about 100 years before Paul's writing this, Philippi was granted the status, by the emperor of Rome, that it was a Roman colony.

And so he moved people there, Roman citizens there, army veterans who fought for the emperor, and they lived there staunchly proud that they were Roman citizens. So it was proud as a city of its status, and its people were proud of their citizenship.

[9 : 42] Their region was called Macedonia, and yet the people around them were merely Macedonians. You walked tall if you were Philippian because you were Roman, a Roman citizen.

And that's the picture Paul takes, well understood by them, to say, church, now that you're a church, now that you're Christians, you are citizens of a heavenly city, a city that's far off, just as Rome is, and gives you all these new privileges.

So why does Paul need to use that language and remind them of the new citizenship? It's because Rome has begun to make life hard for believers in Jesus Christ.

If you just look with me at verse 29, for it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now here that I still have.

It's not outwith the control of the Lord Jesus Christ, it's granted to them, but it's difficult. We saw, we know the trouble that they saw Paul have because you can read about it in Acts, Acts 16.

[10:54] Paul's there, gospeling people in Philippi, telling them about Jesus, and there's a slave girl, and she gets freed from her slavery and demon possession as well, and it costs her owners financially that she is redeemed, and so they grabbed Paul and Silas, his companion Silas, and they dragged them into the marketplace, and it's kind of mob rule where there's a sheriff there, like a magistrate, but he just does what the crowd want, the crowd are baying for blood, and the sheriffs, they don't give Paul and Silas a trial, but they have them stripped and severely flogged and then thrown into prison.

So the church has seen there, right from its birth, that the message Christians believe is radically opposed by those who don't believe it, that when you become a Christian, in a very profound sense, you don't belong to the world anymore.

Now in Philippi, as a Roman colony, the issue was, Nero is the emperor, and Nero, at the time Paul's writing, and Nero, the language that's used of him in a Roman colony is that he's the savior, and he's the lord, and the Christians are the radicals who say, no, there's another savior, and there is a lord of lords, Jesus.

So you become, you become a Christian, you're saying to the proud Roman citizens, you know, there is another king, and even the emperor will answer to him one day, and you smash that idol, there's hostility, and opposition.

So as these guys feel rootless, and increasingly alienated, Paul urges them to remember they have this wonderful new citizenship. Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

[12:50] Well what about for us? We could say, I guess, couldn't we, compared with what fellow believers will be facing around the world today, if they try and meet together, we can be really thankful in Scotland for the freedom that we enjoy, compared to brothers and sisters in North Korea, parts of Nigeria, Afghanistan, many places.

At the same time, the heat is being turned up on Christians in Scotland, Ireland. And we see that, just as the Philippians would have seen it, when the words of Jesus clash with the values around us.

In our case, secular liberal values. You think about the way the party leader of the Lib Dems, MP Tim Farron, was kind of witch hunted out of his role as party leader.

Or the treatment of Australian rugby player, Israel Folau, earlier this year, or Billy Von Ipola, the England rugby player. Or the pressure that lots of Christians face and feel in different workplaces. Just pressure to be quiet, not to mention that you're a Christian. Whether it's in the hospital or the staff room or the classroom or the office. The trouble that Christians have got into just for offering perhaps to pray with a colleague.

[14:07] It's the exclusivity, isn't it, of Jesus and his claims. The claim that he has authority, that people find so abrasive in our culture where people are so worried about offending somebody else.

So we claim that Jesus is the only way to the Father. We claim that one day he will judge the world and that every single one of us has a spiritual sickness in our hearts so that we, standing before God on our own, will be condemned.

So we, that's why God has provided a saviour, because we all need a saviour. Or that Jesus defines who we are and what that means for sex.

He sets the boundaries for sex. What it means for gender, identity, for the rights of the unborn child. Or that Jesus challenges materialistic greed.

He confronts us about our money in a culture where people think if you've earned it, you can spend it on yourself. So what does it look like when we find that our workplace or our family home or our wider family or our friendship group becomes hostile to what we believe?

[15 : 20] Well, Paul tells them what to do in Philippi in verse 27 and it's that we strive together bravely. That's what he describes in verse 27 just halfway through.

I will know that you stand firm in the one spirit striving together as one for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.

And then he tells us the effect of that if Christians don't compromise and they stay united and they strive it's this powerful witness. So halfway through verse 28 this is a sign to them that they will be destroyed but that you will be saved and that by God.

So a testimony to them an opportunity for them to see the truth of the Christian claims and we hope to turn back to God. It's a sign to them.

So at the times when we feel under pressure maybe in university mission time on campus or just when the heat's being turned up on the gospel in Scotland what we're being called to do is to strive and to strive together we strive because we have this immense new calling on our lives and the church in Philippi get that.

[16 : 35] Paul was rejoicing we saw that two weeks ago at the start of the chapter rejoicing because they've chosen to partner with him to get the gospel out the news about who Jesus is and what he did that saving news.

And then Paul talked last week about his own situation that he is in prison but he's rejoicing because the gospel is advancing more people are turning to Christ and that is so important to him it gives him joy no matter what his circumstances are.

So we strive and we strive together. That's what happens with citizenship isn't it? That you have an affinity with fellow citizens.

Citizenship is a corporate thing. That's why we can generalize about people who are citizens of the same country as each other. It's not always true for every person from a country but there are shared characteristics of nationalities.

If you think about the Germans we know don't we the Germans are very efficient people aren't they? And they love sausages and they make terrific cars.

[17 : 43] We know that the French are wonderful cooks. They're fantastic at making wine. They're sophisticated people. the Japanese. We think about the Japanese have this great sense of honor and dignity.

We think of the Italians and we think of style and fashion and being expressive and good coffee. And what about the English? We won't talk about the English.

But we have these characteristics and Paul wants the world to be able to look at Christians and see that kind of shared identity distinctiveness consistently among us.

Diverse but with a consistent Christ-like character. Not that we'll be obviously and unnecessarily out of touch. That's not what he means.

You know that we'll all wear socks and sandals and just look kind of really weird in ways that we don't have to. It's not that. But instead that we live lives that we know from Jesus' words adorn the gospel.

[18 : 44] Even when that looks very different to the people around us. And we do that together. I suppose the picture of striving side by side in one spirit with one mind.

I don't know what it reminds you of but it reminds me of the movie Gladiator where the gladiator gets put you know Maximus he's put in the arena and there's points where the emperor wants rid of this Maximus who's causing him trouble and he's in so he's thrown into the arena and the odds are against him and the other guys who've been put in as individuals and there are these chariots that are going to be hurtling towards them.

But because he's kind of been general of the army he pulls together all the other gladiators and he tells them just hold until I give the signal and they all stand together and there's all this pressure at them as these chariots hurtle towards them and he's shouting to them hold, hold and because they hold the chariots can't get at them so he marshals them together and they strive together in a frightening environment and that's the picture of the Christian life isn't that an extraordinary calling isn't that exciting this word is together striving so Sarah shares in her growth group that she's she's inviting her friends over who are not Christians to dinner and they're going to have a talk about the Christian faith and Andy in her growth group says that's amazing how can I support you in that you know can two of us come over and cook the dinner for you so that you can just be out there with your friends and not have to worry about that and

Simon in her growth group just remembers to pray for it and then asks her how it went or Dave shares on a Sunday night that he's stressed about going into school on Monday morning because there are some really difficult conversations going on in the staff room and he's terrified that someone's going to ask him what he thinks as a Christian but two of his friends on a Sunday night encourage him with a verse of scripture not to be afraid and they pray together for him and he feels spurred on to be brave to stand or Andy's got a mate who he hopes will come on the life course and he invites him and he says he doesn't want to go and he blows him out so Andy organizes for a few of his Christian mates to get together on the night of the first evening and they just pray while the course is going on for the guests who do go it's this picture of together striving we're in this together so that's our first point live out your transnationality by striving together and Paul goes on to describe how that affects our relationships with each other so our second point more briefly live out your fellowship with God by super valuing others so he starts chapter one if you look sorry chapter two if you look down verse one with an if therefore if if you have these things but he could just as easily have said since he lists things that they do have and they know they've got them extraordinary blessings from God so he's saying since you've got these things live in light of them do something empowered by what you have here and he mentions benefits of the Christian life that we would do really well to reflect on verse one if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ well does that encourage us that by putting your faith in Jesus you've been brought into a faith union with him this personal relationship this bond with him where he'll never abandon you and all the benefits of his righteousness his righteous life are shared by him with you and all of your sin and shame has been taken away by him from you and where whatever happens to him happens to you and he is ascended now and stands before the father crowned and he calls us his family Paul says if any comfort from his love is literally any comfort from love I think it might be the father's love either way it's pretty comforting but I wonder if he's talking about union with Christ love from the father and then he goes on to the spirit and he talks here about comfort doesn't he and we have to just remember that word as a stronger word than we now use it you know we think comfort and we think fabric softener don't we soft clothes okay but the word comfort is actually about strengthening about being empowered and we get empowered from knowing God loves us with such a deep love that he was moved by that love compelled by it to send his beloved son into the world to suffer to win us back a love so great he sends our sins as far from us as the east is from the west so then Paul says if any common sharing in the spirit literally partnership or fellowship with the spirit that the spirit partners with us to enable us to be the people that God's calling us to be [24 : 00] I did a wedding here a few weeks ago many of you were here for the wedding of Alex and Rebecca Rebecca's family and friends German can't speak any English or better English than I'm at German but they were here I couldn't have done that wedding without help and they had this friend Sasha and he was at the front next to me and he kept translating and explaining what was going on throughout he was my partner I had partnership with him as he enabled me to do the job and as God calls us in life to live differently for him to do things for him to attempt great things for him we partner with his spirit his spirit enables us so Paul you see he's piling these things on top of each other he says if you've got any encouragement from your union with Christ and any strengthening comfort from knowing you're loved by the father and any empowering partnership from the Holy Spirit and if these things have generated in you any tenderness and compassion for others and then he says if that's the case then would you give me what I'm lacking do you see that he says would you make my joy complete he's full of joy he's rejoiced he's almost full of joy he's rejoiced at their partnership with him chapter 1 verse 4 in the gospel advancing in verse 18 he lives for their joy in verse 25 but he wants them to fill up his joy just fill him with joy and how will he do that well he drives home the point by saying the same thing four times basically if you have a look complete my joy by being like minded having the same love being one in spirit and of one mind a profound unity I sometimes speak to ministers and church members who describe their church and it's as though they're celebrating disagreement as though they can say oh well it's so rich to be in a church where we've all got different opinions but the healthy church here is marked by a like mindedness of course a diversity but a togetherness a sense of agreement in who God is and what he's calling us to do so how do we achieve that unity well the answer is through humility Paul doesn't necessarily want us to think less of ourselves but he wants us to think more of others that's why I've called it super value others verse 3 do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit rather in humility value others above yourselves not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others

think of an elderly lady who was in a church that culturally did things in a way she liked they knew the church would see her out and she'd be happy there every week but when it was declining in number and got down to about 35 people left she called together a prayer meeting a regular prayer meeting to bring the church to pray that God would revitalize her church and speaking to her 10 years later with 200 people in the church

I could tell she really disliked the music and she missed the psalm singing that she loved and lots of the changes that had been made she found really difficult the band were too loud for her some of the formality that she'd known had gone but when you spoke to her she had this obvious sense of deep joy at what God has done in that church and she said to me I look around on a Sunday and I just think it's amazing Martin it's amazing what the Lord has done here I don't even know all these people it's amazing valuing others above herself think of guys here involved in children's ministry and youth ministry and the inspiration it is to see you know people pressed for time busy lives but investing in children and youth maybe you could picture a guy in his 20s at church who really wants to chat to mates after church but he notices and goes and sits with a 14 year old boy who otherwise has just sat on his smartphone waiting for his parents to want to go home and taking an interest in him and his life to serve him under what other examples you could think of that would require humility maybe you've got a holiday booked with friends and it's going to be great but you think to invite someone from church who's on the edges of things maybe it would be going to the Glasgow City Mission every week and just washing dishes and mopping the floor so where do we find the strength to have this kind of attitude well we're being called to show towards others the mindset that Jesus has he was comfortable in heaven

I'm sure if he'd stayed there forever he'd be very comfortable and if it was all about his interests he could have stayed there being served but he stepped into our world mindful of our interests to serve sinful people and you see that in who he served Matthew the tax collector the sinful woman at Simon's house the woman at the well who he meets the Gentiles the outcasts the lowest of the law and we see his humility not just in whom he serves but in how far he's willing to go to serve them that he would be blindfolded and beaten and mocked and then strung up on a cross and because he had that extraordinary mindset to place such an incredible value on others it's because of that that we are given our new passports we're given the status citizens of heaven it was free for us it wasn't free for him and it's because of that that in chapter 2 verse 1 we enjoy this rich communion union with God union with him comfort from his love common sharing in the spirit so as we come to the Lord's table together let's remember the humility that the Lord Jesus showed for us so that in turn we can begin to super value one another and strive to make Jesus known let's pray together almighty God and loving heavenly father thank you that you have given us the privileges of being citizens of heaven help us we pray to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of this new identity to strive side by side with one mind for the faith of your gospel and father you know our hearts you see our selfish ambitions our vanity we pray that by your spirit you will move us with the joy of the communion we now have with you father son and spirit that it would transform our hearts and that that would overflow so that our community here at St Silas will be marked by the unity and humility you call us to for we ask in Jesus name
Amen