

Just One Thing

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[0 : 0 0] We're in Philippians chapter 1, and we are looking at verses 27 down through verse 30. Philippians chapter 1, 27 through 30.

Just one thing, as citizens of heaven, live your life worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come to see you or I'm absent, I will hear about you that you are standing firm in one spirit, in one accord, contending together for the faith of the gospel.

Not being frightened in any way by your opponents. This is a sign of destruction for them, but of your salvation. And this is from God, for it has been granted to you on Christ's behalf, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, since you are engaged in the same struggle that you saw I had, and now hear that I have.

Kids, do you know what a three-legged race is? Do you know what that is, Elam? You do? What is it?

Oh, you used to know. That's okay. I'll remind you. Does that sound okay? Okay. A three-legged race. Today is not the day for a three-legged race, but I hope that the metaphor still works.

[1 : 1 8] A three-legged race is like maybe at a picnic or a family reunion, something that you do at the park. And two people will strap one of their legs together to the other person, right?

And then you have one leg that's strapped to the other person, and then you have your own leg that you have to work with. And it's called a three-legged race because then you are running together to try to win this race.

But instead of four legs, you have three legs. Do you know how you win a three-legged race? You get close, right?

You're going to have to get close. You put your arms around one another. You cooperate. You keep a steady pace.

And you focus your eyes on the finish line. Because if you look down and you realize, what in the world? There's only three legs here. What is going on? You have to keep your eyes focused on the finish line.

[2 : 3 0] I wonder if this could be a helpful metaphor for us as followers of Jesus. A metaphor is like a word picture, something to help us remember.

Maybe something that you might come back to this particular text someday, and you might say, oh, I think that was when he talked about the three-legged race. How did that connect with what this text says to us?

Paul has encouraged the Philippian church with one of his most famous statements in scripture, for me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. He feels this very real tension between dying and being with Jesus, which he calls far better, and living on in the flesh, continuing in gospel ministry, which he calls more necessary.

One is far better, one is far better, one is more necessary. And even though this choice is purely hypothetical, Paul tells the Philippians that he expects to continue in gospel ministry, and he even talks about visiting them.

And then, having completed this missionary report portion of his letter, Paul transitions to what is the main body of the letter.

[3 : 55] And so that means that the very next word that Paul writes should catch our attention, because I think it caught the Philippians' attention. Most English Bibles translate this very next word in the original language as only.

But the Christian Standard Bible, which Lois read for us, gives us just one thing. Nevertheless, would also be a fine choice.

This word should catch our attention, because this is like when a preacher says, If you only remember one thing, I want you to remember this. That's what Paul's doing here.

This is Paul's one thing that he wants the Philippians to remember. Look at verse 27 again. Just one thing.

As citizens of heaven, Now, if you're reading from another translation, then you noticed that the CSB, which I'm using, adds this phrase, as citizens of heaven.

[5 : 15] And earlier this week, when I realized that this phrase is not in the original text, I was pretty annoyed. I find that pretty annoying, especially when you're going to add multiple words like this.

It's one thing if you have to add a word or two here or there, you know, to help get something connected. But in this case, I'm looking at this, and I'm like, What? Why did they do that?

Why did they insert this extra phrase, which is missing in the ESV? But I was relieved to discover that there is a good reason for inserting it, and I would like to try to explain why.

Listen to these words and see if you can hear a similar set of letters. Policy.

Politician. Politics. Police. Metropolis. Did you hear a common set of letters?

[6 : 22] What did you hear, Elam? Pol, and even, you could even say like IS, right? Like some of them even had like that P-O-L-I-S. Very good.

Good listening. Good recognition. I think you would have picked up on what the Philippians picked up on when Paul says the word live.

There's a Greek verb in verse 27, and it is connected linguistically to the noun state. And this is this little tiny group of letters called P-O-L-I-S.

It's from the Greek. It comes to us straight from the Greek. P-O-L-I-S. And so when they hear this verb for live, they understand that it has something to do with being a good citizen.

Something to do with living in this Roman colony that they are in. Now, that gets lost on us because we just have let your manner of life in the ESV, or live if we don't have this addition that the CSB gives us.

[7 : 31] But they're picking up, these translators are picking up on this idea that there's something connected to the state that the original hearers like Elam would have picked up on. And you might say it like this, when in Rome, do as the Romans do.

So, they add this extra phrase because they want us to notice this connection. So, why did the Holy Spirit then inspire Paul to choose this particular verb?

Paul just told them that he plans to see them again, and nevertheless, there is one thing that he expects of them in the meantime.

You can consider this the heading under which everything else, the heading over which everything else that Paul has to say.

Everything else comes under this heading. What is it? The pride and the responsibility that you feel as a Roman citizen of a Roman colony must be superseded by a higher and greater boasting in and responsibility to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- [8 : 50] This is what those original hearers would have heard when they hear this verb, live. They would understand that he's drawing a connection between what it means to be a Roman citizen in a Roman colony and what it means to say, I am part of something bigger than that, greater than that, and that is, I am under the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This is true for us as well. Our citizenship in the kingdom of heaven is infinitely more important than being from the Midwest or being a citizen of the United States of America.

Now, society and culture and politics and news cycles and social media, all of this, all of this that surrounds us, shapes our character and influences our decisions and affects our behavior.

But my friends, God has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved son, Colossians 1, 13 and 14.

And so, if that is true of you, that you have been delivered from the kingdom of darkness, from the domain of darkness, and transferred into the kingdom of his beloved son, then the gospel must define your character, your behavior, your speech, your attitudes, your motives, your decision-making.

- [10 : 37] If you claim citizenship in Jesus' kingdom, then you have a high calling. You have a lifelong obligation to persevere by grace in a way of life that reflects the goodness of Jesus and the power of the gospel.

Our struggle is real. But don't be afraid. Let's live for Jesus. What does living for Jesus look like?

Verse 27 again. Just one thing. As citizens of heaven, live your life worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Then, whether I come and see you or am absent, I will hear about you that you are standing firm in one spirit, in one accord, contending together for the faith of the gospel.

Let's call this tenacious integrity. Whether it is public, in public, or in private, whether your behavior is seen or seen only by God, whether you are recognized or virtually unknown, followers of Jesus must pursue a consistency in their manner of life that reflects the constancy of the work of the Holy Spirit in them.

- [12 : 16] That feels overwhelming, doesn't it? That we need to pursue a consistency in our manner of life that reflects the constancy of the work of the Holy Spirit in us, that feels overwhelming.

But you don't need to feel overwhelmed, and here's why, brothers and sisters, because we are in this together. The Holy Spirit's work cannot be reduced to an individualistic exercise.

The very real struggles that are experienced by citizens of the kingdom of Jesus are undertaken within the fellowship of the community of believers.

So we don't have to feel overwhelmed because we're in this together. We have one another. We must not abandon hope and say, every man, woman, and child for themselves.

Oh no. Oh no. We need one another. In fact, if you notice at Paul's admonitions, we can't even obey these by ourselves.

- [13 : 35] His expectations of Christians demand that they are with other Christians. You can't be in one spirit by yourself or in one accord or contend together.

Like, who am I contending with? This only makes sense within the community of Christians. I'm not sure whether you are familiar with the movie White Christmas or not, but it's a favorite at our home.

And there's a particular song that is sung partway through the movie, I don't know, maybe a quarter of the way into the movie. And a portion of it goes like this.

Lord, help the sister who comes between me and my mister. And Lord, help the sister who comes between me and my man.

That's the kind of mentality that we need to have with one another and for one another. Lord, help them.

[14 : 52] If you think you're going to come in and divide me from her, divide me from him. Oh no. Is that our mindset?

That nothing will come between us? That we won't allow our pride to rise up and come between us.

That we won't allow gossip to rise and be between us or our insecurity or our anger. That we won't allow these sinful behaviors to come between us and our brothers and sisters.

And that we won't allow other people to bring those behaviors that would then divide us from one another. What does Paul hope to see or hear about the Philippians?

He wants them to stand firm. He wants them to be committed in conviction and belief. He wants them to be in one spirit, in one accord.

[16 : 04] This means every believer walking by the spirit so that the spirit is what unifies us to one another. He wants them to contend together.

I think of this as courageous cooperation in order to advance the gospel. Our struggle is real.

But don't be afraid. Let's live for Jesus. Friends, let's stand firm because we are in this together.

And let's stand firm because we are not afraid. Now that's an interesting question. Why would the Philippians be afraid? And the answer is because they have opponents.

Now, sometimes people have opponents and that is good and right and appropriate. If our preaching of the gospel gets wonky, then we should expect to have opponents come to us and say, you're preaching of the gospel.

[17 : 23] You've lost your way. Let me show you from God's word and correct your doctrine. And we should receive that person even though it may feel like they are opposing us.

If our conduct or our character becomes out of step with the way of Jesus or the character of Jesus, we should expect to have someone come and do what might feel like opposition for us.

and we should receive them in love and humility, hoping to learn from them the ways that we are out of step. But that doesn't seem to be what Paul has in mind here.

Who are their opponents? Who are the Philippians' opponents? Well, we're going to learn more as we continue through this book. And so I'm not going to give it away just yet because I think there's good reason for us not to have it nailed down just yet.

But I'll give you a few ideas. Perhaps Paul has in mind unbelievers who blacklist the Christians and make their daily life difficult.

[18 : 37] They just make it hard to be in the community. Hard for them socially. Ostracizing them. Pushing them away. Making them uncomfortable.

Perhaps Paul has in mind legitimate persecutors who are intimidating and bullying and killing Christians. Or perhaps Paul has in mind manipulative religious leaders who destroy unity by splitting hairs over doctrine and practice and then strong-arming God's people into choosing sides.

Whoever these opponents are, whether they are trash-talking or terrorizing or threatening, Paul expects that the Philippians may be frightened. In other words, this struggle is real.

This is not merely a perceived struggle for the Philippians. So Paul encourages them to be courageous. Why? Why does he want them to be courageous?

And the answer is so interesting. It's because Christian courage in the face of opposition is a death threat to the opponents of the gospel.

[19 : 55] Look in your Bible. I'll show you what I mean. Verse 28. not being frightened in any way by your opponents.

This is a sign of destruction for them but of your salvation. Do you see that sign of destruction?

Literally, the words are a demonstration of destruction. destruction. It's a death threat. When followers of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit stick together like glue and persevere in grace in a way of life that reflects the goodness of Jesus and courageously cooperate to advance the gospel, this makes the opponents of the gospel dreadfully uncomfortable.

why was Jesus so opposed? Why was he so hated?

Why did they premeditate his murder? Who did it? Religious leaders. Why was Jesus so hated?

[21 : 21] Because of the purity of his character? because of his love for others? Because of his teaching about the kingdom? Because he challenged the religious leaders' authority?

Because he called out their hypocrisy? and so they plotted and they manipulated the crowd and they crucified him.

Why? Because he was a threat to them, to their power, to their authority, to their way of life, and they would not have it. followers of Jesus who stick together, persevere by grace, and courageously cooperate to advance the gospel make opponents of the gospel dreadfully uncomfortable.

people. this is how I imagine them thinking. Well, we can threaten them, we can arrest them, we can kill them, but every time we do one of those things, it just seems to make other Christians more bold.

But if we let them continue in their Jesus-y way of life, it's just so convicting. It makes me so uncomfortable to see them living that way, like their Jesus.

[23 : 00] And you know what's so troubling about them? They're content to die. They even say it would be far better to die and go and be with their Jesus.

But they're also willing to live for him, and they call that more necessary. This is a trap. We're doomed.

What can we do with these Christians who stick together and are courageous for the sake of the gospel? Friends, let's give opponents of the gospel something to worry about.

Should we do that? Let's give them something to worry about. I wonder if Paul realizes at this point that his words may be hanging like dark clouds of discouragement over the Philippians.

Do you ever have that type of conversation with someone where you say some words that are hard and you can tell that there is this sort of dark cloud that has settled on the conversation?

[24 : 08] perhaps Paul is concerned that some of the Christians are going to interpret this opposition to the gospel as some kind of bad omen.

Maybe this adversity is God's way of telling us to stop. Maybe he's so displeased with us that this is his discipline on us.

What if this ongoing adversity means that God is done with me? Maybe you have thought this way too.

Notice how Paul reassures the Philippians and how he would also reassure steadfast church that this type of thinking is exactly wrong. Opposition and adversity to the gospel is evidence of God's design to save them.

not abandon them. Look at verse 28, the second half of the verse. And this is from God. This is from God.

[25 : 18] That might be worth circling in your Bible or underlining whatever you like to do. This is from God. For it has been granted to you on Christ's behalf.

Not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him since you are engaged in the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I have.

Okay, everybody think of the favorite gift that you have received. Maybe a birthday gift, maybe an anniversary gift, maybe it was a wedding gift.

That seems sometimes those don't fall into that favorite category. Think, you have something in mind, this was my favorite gift ever. Imagine that it's your birthday birthday, and you receive that gift.

Maybe, kids, it's a toy or a game or a doll, or maybe it's a book. And you are so excited.

[26 : 42] And so you are celebrating this gift that you have received, but you realize there's a second gift. And so you quickly set the first gift aside, you expect this second gift to be just as good as the first one.

You tear open the paper, and you find inside that it is medicine for when you have an upset stomach. It's a bottle of Pepto-Bismol. Adults, this works for us as well.

You get two gifts, right? One is a piece of jewelry, or it's a new watch, or it's a flat screen TV, and the other is a brush for cleaning the toilet. two gifts.

One is great, wonderful, and one is awful. You open it and you're thinking, how is this even a gift?

Who thought that this would be a good gift for me? we know this. Faith in Jesus is a gracious gift from God, Ephesians chapter 2.

[27 : 51] But suffering for Jesus? How is this a gift? This seems like the worst white elephant gift ever, doesn't it?

But here it is. In plain language, Paul says, it has been granted to you both to believe in him, to have faith in Jesus, and also the second gift, to suffer for him.

It is hard to accept opposition and adversity as a gift, isn't it?

That's hard. And so, if we hope to think rightly about opposition and adversity, we need a God's eye view of it.

And we must remember this, that God's purpose in our suffering is not our destruction, but our salvation.

[29 : 03] That's what Paul said. It's a sign of destruction for them, and a sign of salvation for you.

Suffering is the Christian's path to glory. Suffering is a gift from our good father to humble us, to teach us, to make us more like Jesus, to remind us that we need one another, to give us gospel opportunities.

When our friends and family and neighbors see us suffering in some particular way, and they say, how is it that you maintain such joy and such satisfaction in your faith?

How is that even possible? It's because suffering is a gift. It is a good gift from our father. A gift equally as good as the gift of faith.

our struggle is real, but don't be afraid because Jesus is worth it all.

[30 : 23] Friends, let's stand firm because we are in this together. Let's stand firm because we are not afraid, and let's stand firm because suffering is God's gift.

How do you win a three-legged race? You get close. You put your arms around one another.

You cooperate. You keep a steady pace, and you focus your eyes on the finish.

This is how we live, worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The struggle is real, but don't be afraid.

Jesus is worth it all. Can we pray together? Father, we are again humbled and grateful to have your word.

[31 : 36] thank you for this text that helps us to correct our thinking about suffering and adversity and opposition.

Thank you for the way that this text gives us encouragement to stick together. Thank you for the way that this text reminds us that your purpose in our adversity is not our destruction but our salvation.

That you have good plans and good purposes even in adversity and opposition. blessed Holy Spirit please work in our hearts in these next few moments as we take time to reflect and to confess and to acknowledge your work in the preaching of your word.

Father for the sake of the glory of Jesus Christ would you keep us unified?

Would you help us to love one another? Would you help us to strive together and to contend together for the sake of the gospel? Would you keep us in one spirit and in one accord?

[33 : 22] Guard our hearts from the tempting things that might seek to divide us. Help us we pray to be this type of a gathering of believers.

Help us to love one another. Thank you for giving us your word in this time together. It's in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen.