

Living Lives Worthy of the Gospel

Phil 1:27–2:11 (text: 1:27-2:4)

12 January 2020, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:30 am

(Put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

I was twenty-eight going on twenty-nine.

Annette & I were already married, but still without children, and, for a period of ten months, we were living in a student hostel of the university in Tübingen, Germany, where I was doing some postgraduate studies. (Tübingen is about ¾ hour by car southwest of Stuttgart).

Well, it was there that Annette & I were sharing a kitchen and bathroom with eight undergraduate students who lived in the same wing of that hostel.

Now, it was especially after dinner on Friday or Saturday nights, that, in that kitchen, we used to socialise over a cuppa with some of those students.

And it usually did not take long before our discussions would go in the direction of creation, life on earth, God, and Jesus Christ!

But there was one feisty young man by the name of Thomas (or ['Tʊəmas], as they pronounced it in German)! He was a student in History and International Politics. He was also a member of the Communist Party of Germany.

When Thomas heard that we believed in Christ, he instantly reacted very sharply, saying, “I don’t believe in Christ!” “What good thing has Christ ever done for mankind?”

When we asked why he was so adamantly against Christ, he replied, “Well, look at all the wars that have been fought in Europe – wars between followers of Christ; yes, wars fought in the Name of Christ!”

Well, it turned out that Thomas was referring to the wars between Protestants and Roman Catholics!

And, no matter how much we explained to him that not *Christ*, but *human beings*, are to blame for those wars, Thomas just would not believe!

My brother & sister, why have I shared this with you?

Well, to show to you how absolutely destructive it is for the spreading of the Gospel-message if those who call themselves “Christian” don’t live lives worthy of the Gospel!

You ask, “But what does *living-lives-worthy-of-the-Gospel* look like?”

Well, according to our text, Christians who live such lives...

- will know that they’re in a spiritual (not physical) battle
- will use *spiritual* weapons
- will heed the call to take up those spiritual weapons!

So, these three parts form the three points of our sermon...

- Spiritual Battle
- Spiritual Weapons
- Summons to Take Up Spiritual Arms

Spiritual Battle

My brother & sister, every Christian, whether we like it or not, is by default engaged in a spiritual battle!

Why so?

Well, because of the Fall – the fall into sin – away from a loving obedience to our Maker. Since then, there is a spiritual battle between Good and evil (God and Satan) – a battle for human hearts! After all, human beings are not just *bodies*! No, they have *hearts* (control centres) which direct the whole person’s mind, will and actions! Look, is that not why Prov. 4:23 says, “***Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life***”?¹

See? Your *heart* is the target for the evil one who would do his best to have it!

Perhaps you ask, “But why did God who knows all things in advance – why did He not create man in such a way that we were unable to ever sin?”

My brother & sister, for our first parents to be able to love God with true love (love *from the heart*), God *had* to create them with the possibility to sin, or else their love for Him would be no love at all, but sheer hard-wired (computerised or pre-programmed) cold obedience!

And so, when God put our first parents to the test so that love for God could in their lives be seen as pure heartfelt love, they failed the test!

Since then, the spiritual battle (the battle for human hearts and souls) has been raging – yes, a *spiritual* battle, yet not without *physical* consequences!

And so, for you & me, *believing-in-Jesus-Christ* does not just bring nice things (blessings etc.); no, it also means that we’re by default enlisted in a spiritual battle – indeed a battle which means that we will, at least at times, suffer for the sake of our Lord Jesus!

Look, the Apostle Paul was constantly engaged in this battle! In fact, the very thing he was doing while writing the words of our text, was that he was serving jail sentence for his love for Jesus Christ!

But Paul was not the only Christian at the time who suffered for his faith. No, in verse 30 of our text he reminds the Philippian Christians that they, too, have been granted to suffer for Christ!

My brother & sister, what about you & me!? Has it also been granted to you & me to suffer for Christ?

Of course!

Yes, you & I are not openly persecuted, but look, don’t we live in a post-Christian and post-modern society here in New Zealand!? And is it not so that, already several generations ago, many of our fellow Kiwis have rejected Jesus and the Gospel? So, they’re literally post-Christ – done with Him!

And so, where is *your* and *my* battle for Christ?

Well, is it not everywhere we rub close shoulders with people of a totally different worldview? And are such encounters, at times, not painful & gobsmacking?

I mean is it not so that, at times, our Christian convictions get ridiculed in the workplace?

And is it not so that our Christian beliefs are trivialised by politicians when e.g. parliament have their select committees that suggest changes to the laws of abortion, end-of-life, and gay marriages? I mean, is it not *then* that Christian views are labelled as “unprogressive” – as hindrances in the way of progress? And is it not so that the same subtle words (*unprogressive* or *fundamentalist* or *outdated*) are, at times, used in academic circles and in the news and entertainment media – all against the values of our Lord?

And how about you who are sending your children, at great cost, to a Christian school rather than to a state school to avoid them from (in their forming years) getting influenced

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New International Version*](#). (1984). (Pr 4:23). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan (Emphasis mine).

by the typical secular, humanist, post-Christian, post-modern worldview? Is not that how you, too, are *suffering* for Christ!?

And is it not so that, from the first minute the Dutchies set foot in New Zealand (in the 1950's), their spiritual battle for Christ was against Liberalism in the Presbyterian Churches? So, therefore (to your & my blessing) they started the RCNZ!?

See the *spiritual* battle?

Lastly – and on a more personal level – is it not so that you & I fight our daily spiritual battles for the Lord against sin in our own lives? Yes, in the affluent West, is it not so that we Christians fight an ongoing battle against materialism and greed?

See?

Although not persecuted, you & I too are suffering for the Christ while we're in the thick of a spiritual battle!

But look at this beauty! You see, v.29 uses the word “granted!” It says, “***For to you it has been granted ... also to suffer for His sake...***”²

Why *granted*?

Because there's a *blessing* in suffering for Christ! Yes, remember Mt 5:11-12, “***Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great...***”³

And remember Rm 8:17, which says that “***...we are ... co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.***”⁴

My brother & sister, for Paul and the Philippians, but also for you and me it has been granted to not only *believe* in Jesus, but to also *suffer* for His sake – to suffer in the battle for the Gospel!

You ask, “But how do we fight this battle?”

Well, that brings us to point 2...

Spiritual Weapons

We all know what kind of weapons are used in a *physical* battle – guns, bombs, fighter jets...!

But that's not how our Lord's battle is fought!

After all, as we have said, the battle we're engaged in is a *spiritual* battle – so, it's all about a battle for people's *hearts*!

And so, no wonder Rm 12:20 says, “***if your enemy is hungry, feed him...***”

Look, is that not also why v.27 of our text literally says to all Christians, “***Only live out your citizenship⁵ in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ!?***”

² [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Php 1:29). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

³ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Mt 5:11–12). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Ro 8:17). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan (Emphasis mine).

⁵ With Gordon Fee, I reckon this to be the best way of translating the Greek word, *politeusthe*, in this verse: “At issue is how the Philippians *conduct* themselves, meaning live out the gospel in Philippi. Pivotal to the present appeal is that instead of the ordinary Jewish metaphor “to walk [in the ways of the Lord],” Paul uses a political metaphor, which will appear again in 3:20–21. The people of Philippi took due pride in their having been made a Roman colony by Caesar Augustus, which brought the privileges and prestige of Roman

Philippians, while you have two citizenships – one in this Roman city of Philippi, and the other in the Kingdom of God), *live out your citizenship* in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ!

My brother & sister, imagine, instead of explaining patiently *with words and actions* the Gospel of Christ to your atheist colleague at work (or to your agnostic or Muslim or Hindu or Sikh colleague), you become aggressive – or even use violence! Well, that’s the very moment that you have lost the battle for Christ, for look, our Lord uses spiritual weapons – not the sword!

See, *behaviour speaks loudest!* And that’s your & my best weapon in this spiritual battle! You ask, “But what kind of behaviour does our text prescribe as best weapon?” “What kind of living is worthy of the Gospel?”

Well, Christian *unity & fearlessness*⁶ in the face of the opponents of Christ!

Let’s first look at the spiritual weapon of *unity* – i.e. Christians who stand firm in one Spirit (the Holy Spirit working in their spirits)⁷...

My brother & sister, long ago in another place there was a church – a church that had gone through a period of great strife and disunity among its members. Years later, in that same place, I made friends with a fellow-dog-walker – an atheist who, at times used to share his views about God and church with me. Do you know what he remembered best about that church? Their terrible fighting/disunity, which, he hinted, was another reason why he would not believe in Christ!

See?

citizenship. Paul now urges them to live out their citizenship (*conduct yourselves*) in a manner—and the sentence begins with these emphatic words—*worthy of the gospel of Christ*. What is intended by this wordplay is something like “Live in the Roman colony of Philippi as worthy citizens of your heavenly homeland.” That, after all, is precisely the contrast made in 3:17–20, where “our citizenship is in heaven,” in contrast to those whose minds are set on “earthly things.”

The use of this metaphor is a brilliant stroke. Not only does it appeal to their own historic pride as Philippians, but now applied to their present setting, it urges concern both for the mission of the gospel in Philippi and especially for the welfare of the state, meaning in this case that they take seriously their “civic” responsibilities within the believing community” (cf. Fee, G. D. (1999). [Philippians](#) (Vol. 11, pp. 77–89). Westmont, IL: IVP Academic).

The Greek word used here is *politeuesthe*

(πολιτεύεσθε) a Present Active Imperative 2nd Person Plural of **πολιτεύομαι**: to conduct oneself with proper reference to one’s obligations in relationship to others, as part of some community—‘to live, to conduct one’s life, to live in relation to others.’ ἐγὼ πάσῃ συνειδήσει ἀγαθῆ πεπολιτευμαι τῷ θεῷ ‘I have lived my life with a clear conscience before God’ Ac 23:1” (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 507). New York: United Bible Societies).

⁶ Greek *ptyromenoi* (πτυρόμενοι), a Present Deponent Participle Masculine Plural Nominative of **πύρομαι**: to be fearful as the result of being intimidated—‘to be afraid, to be scared, to be intimidated.’ μὴ πτυρόμενοι ἐν μηδενὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ἀντικειμένων ‘don’t be intimidated in anything by your enemies’ Php 1:28. The expression ‘don’t be intimidated’ may be rendered in some languages as ‘don’t let yourself be frightened’ or ‘don’t let anyone cause you to be afraid’ (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 316). New York: United Bible Societies).

⁷ “Despite the frequency of its appearance in English translations, this phrase can scarcely mean *in one spirit* (NIV), as though it meant to have a common mind about something. Such an idiom with the word *spirit* is unknown in all of Greek literature. Paul himself uses this phrase elsewhere to refer to the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:9, 13; Eph 2:18), precisely in places, as here, where Christian unity is at stake” (Cf. Fee, G. D. (1999). [Philippians](#) (Vol. 11, pp. 77–89). Westmont, IL: IVP Academic).

See how, through their disunity, that church had lost a vital spiritual weapon in the battle for the Gospel?

That's the spiritual weapon called "Unity" (v.27)!

How about the second spiritual weapon – the one mentioned by v.28, i.e. *fearlessness (not alarmed* [NASB]) in the face of Christ's opponents (v.28)?⁸ What could the Christian's fearlessness (undaunted spirit) achieve?

Two things: it will be a sign for the *Christian*, and a sign for his *opponents*.

Here is what fearlessness will signify for the *Christian*...

It will boost his assurance of salvation!

You see, is it not so that *the testing of the believer's fortitude/resilience in the fires of persecution/battle produces assurance of salvation in his heart and it shows the world who the real/true followers of Christ are.*⁹

Look, is this not what Rm 5 says (Rm 5:3b-5), "... *we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us*"?¹⁰

See how the God-worked fearlessness among Christians is a blessing, because it becomes a sign which points to their salvation – so that they have assurance of salvation!?

But what sign does the Christian's fearlessness hold out to his *opponents*?

Well, your & my fearlessness amidst great suffering for the Gospel will tell Christ's opponents, "Look, unless you receive Christ in faith, my fearlessness as I suffer for my Lord will remain to you a sign pointing to your doom!"¹¹

Of course, Christians will pray that even their harshest persecutor will be so compelled by their fearlessness that he will, like Saul the persecutor, turn to Christ while there's still time!

So, there we have unity and fearlessness – two *powerful spiritual weapons by which Christians will live lives worthy of the Gospel so that when they (unbelievers) speak*

⁸ Well, for the Philippians it meant e.g. that they should not be daunted when, before every major sport event, the unbelievers shouted, "Caesar is lord!" After all, the Christians knew, "Christ is Lord!"

⁹ My adaptation of the words of Thielman, "In other words, the testing of the believer's mettle in the fires of persecution produces assurance of salvation and reduces the visible church to something more like its true, invisible number. The confidence and fellowship that result are gifts from the God so powerful that he can even make evil do his bidding" (Thielman, F. (1995). *Philippians* (pp. 90–133). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House).

¹⁰ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. (1984). (Ro 5:3–5). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹¹ "Such "Spiritual" boldness on their part will serve as a *sign* (perhaps "omen") *to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved*" (Fee, G. D. (1999). *Philippians* (Vol. 11, pp. 77–89). Westmont, IL: IVP Academic).

"Our great care must be to keep close to our profession, and be constant to it: whatever oppositions we meet with, we must not be frightened at them, considering that the condition of the persecuted is much better and more desirable than the condition of the persecutors; for persecuting is an *evident token of perdition*. Those who oppose the gospel of Christ, and injure the professors of it, are marked out for ruin" (Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume* (pp. 2323–2324). Peabody: Hendrickson).

*against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.*¹²

This brings us to the last point...

Summons to Take Up Spiritual Arms

My Brother & sister, as Paul is sitting in that Roman prison – and writing this letter to the Philippians – he reflects upon the first ten years of this young congregation’s existence! And what comes to Paul’s mind is the wealth of blessings which this congregation has already experienced from *God Triune* and from the mutual love & care between *them & him* (Paul)!

And now Paul starts appealing to all these past positive experiences!

And so, he starts his sentence (in 2:1) with the words, “**Therefore, if...**”

Now, that word “if” might as well have been “since,” for that’s exactly what it means here!¹³

Thus, Paul says, “Dear Philippian Church (dear Wainui Church) ...

- since you have already experienced such an enormous amount of encouragement from being in Christ,
- and since you have so richly experienced God’s love,
- and since you have tasted such blessed fellowship with the Holy Spirit,¹⁴
- and since you and I (Paul) have tasted such great mutual affection and compassion in these first past ten years...

then make my joy complete – my joy here where I sit in prison, as well as the joy which I will have in you on the Day of Christ! Yes, make my joy complete by taking up your spiritual weapon for the Gospel; the weapon of unity – unity of mind, unity in the Holy Spirit (with your spirits), and unity in purpose!

This way, you will live a life worthy of the Gospel!

This is a summons from me, Paul, to you to take up your spiritual weapon of unity!

And in light of this summons, I appeal especially to two godly women in your church – women who, together with me (Paul), have served the Lord well in your midst; yet two women who have been showing signs of not pulling together in unity! Look, I will even mention these women by name in this letter to the whole congregation! They are Euodia & Syntyche (4:2)! I plead with them to live in unity!”

My brother & sister, apart from fearlessness, what is the greatest spiritual weapon for the Gospel?

¹² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (1 Pe 2:12). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

¹³ I fully agree with Thielman (ibid) on this: “The word “if” does not mean that the Philippians’ possession of the qualities that Paul lists is hypothetical. The Greek word for “if” used here (*ei*) can sometimes mean “since.” Because Paul does not doubt that the Philippians have experienced, for example, the “encouragement” and “comfort” of Christ, the word clearly has this meaning here. Paul’s appeal, then, is based both on his friendship with them and on the blessings that belong to them because they belong to Christ.”

¹⁴ What Gordon Fee says regarding 2:1 (that it contains reference to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit) makes good sense. Says Fee, “Verse 1 offers the basis of the appeal, which has to do (apparently) with their own trinitarian experience of God: Christ’s comfort, God’s love and their common sharing in the Spirit. But it is also based on their long-standing relationship with Paul, who has shared both the suffering (1:30) and these same graces with them, and now looks for tenderness and compassion from them” (Cf. Fee, ibid).

Unity in Christ – unity by which we live lives worthy of the Gospel!

Do we have unity in our congregation?

Perhaps you say, “Ah pastor, that’s easy, for, you see, I don’t see all my fellow congregation members every day. So, those with whom I don’t click so easily – well, I don’t have to worry about trying to live in close unity with them!”

My brother & sister, sadly this might be true to some degree (for that’s how, in our busy lifestyles, things might play out).

But, you know, there’s another family in which you cannot escape working hard for unity – i.e. your own household (family under one roof)! There you can’t escape rubbing shoulders every day!

So, where does unity of Christian brothers & sisters start?

In the home!

What are the main ingredients in unity?

Our text says: Love & humility¹⁵ – yes, a humility by which each member does not think more of himself than what he should (Rm 12:3);¹⁶ a humility freed from groundless pride;¹⁷ a humility of mind/heart by which each one regards the other as more important than himself; a humility by which each member will not merely look out for his own personal interests, but also for the interests of others!¹⁸

See?

It’s such humility that creates & grows the spiritual weapon of unity among those who say they love Jesus Christ!

You ask, “But how do I *get* such a unity-working humility?”

Well, I know of only one way – a sure & non-failing way: i.e. that each family member (each one of you & me) will live so closely with our Lord Jesus Christ – will be so awestruck by the humility He displayed – that humility by which He did not *consider*

¹⁵ Cf. verses 2-4, and also Fee (ibid), “The content of the appeal (vv. 3–4) describes, first, those expressions of our human fallenness that altogether militate against unity within the household of faith, *selfish ambition* and *vain conceit*; and, second, those virtues necessary for it to happen, *love and humility*, which find concrete expression as God’s people learn to live as Christ, to care for the needs of others as the matter of first priority—all of which will be gloriously displayed in the Christ narrative that follows” (Underscoring mine).

Also cf. Henry (ibid), “...Here we may observe,

I. The great gospel precept passed upon us; that is, to love one another. This is the law of Christ’s kingdom, the lesson of his school, the livery of his family. This he represents (v. 2) by being *like-minded*, *having the same love*, *being of one accord*, *of one mind*. We are of a like mind when we have the same love...” (Underscoring mine).

¹⁶ Rm 12:3, ***For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.***

¹⁷ Cf. verse 3 for *kenodoxia* (κενοδοξία), which refers to: “a state of pride which is without basis or justification—‘empty pride, cheap pride, vain pride.’ μηδὲν κατ’ ἐριθείαν μηδὲ κατὰ κενοδοξίαν ‘(do) nothing from selfish ambition or from empty pride’ Php 2:3” (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, pp. 764–765). New York: United Bible Societies).

¹⁸ Phil 2:3-4, ***Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others*** ([New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Php 2:3–4). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation).

*equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing...*¹⁹ for whom?

Well, for you & me!

See? In this manner, you & I will not just *mechanically follow the example of our Lord*, but, since we will have Him living in our hearts, we will be moved (from the inside out) to such true unity-working humility!

And you know what?

It's *such* a unity against which my German friend of 38 years ago, if he could be here, would have nothing to say, for by it we live lives worthy of the Gospel!

It's such a unity for which our Lord prayed when He said (Jn 17:20-21), "***I pray also for those who will believe in me..., ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.***"²⁰

Dear Wainui church family (Dear visitor), do you really have a personal relationship with Christ?

If so, then you have what it takes to give birth to unity – Christ-like humility!

AMEN (2859 words excluding footnotes)

¹⁹ [*The Holy Bible: New International Version*](#). (1984). (Php 2:6–7). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

²⁰ [*The Holy Bible: New International Version*](#). (1984). (Jn 17:20–21). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.