

Living Like a Christian

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[0 : 00] How does the thought of studying the Bible strike you? It's the idea. I'm going to study the Bible.

Some church members, and I hope not in this room right now, but some church members would say, I think I'll study the Bible, I think I'll study the Bible, I think boring, irrelevant to life.

And if a person thinks like that, they rarely, if ever, read it at home. And they don't really get too excited about coming to church and hearing somebody teach it or preach it.

Now, on the other hand, there are church members, and maybe some in here who think in terms of studying the Bible in a positive way, like studying their favorite subject in school, like history.

Some people think of studying the Bible as learning new facts about God, about people, about other things that you consider to be interesting in the Bible.

[1 : 12] Now, I hope you understand that these are two extreme and wrong ways to look at the Bible. The Bible is the Word of God, and so it is not boring.

And we who preach and teach, we need to make sure we don't make our teaching and preaching boring. It's not irrelevant to our lives.

It's very spot on to how we live in this world. But we also need to understand, the Bible is not an encyclopedia of religious knowledge.

It's not a book we should read just to acquire more information. The Bible really is the Word of God that He has given to us to make a practical difference in our lives.

The Bible is God's story. It's a story about creation, about human beings' rebellion against God. And then God's gigantic, from Genesis to Revelation, rescue plan.

[2 : 27] His way of calling men and women and boys and girls to faith in Jesus, salvation. Now, when we open the Bible with that idea, we're going to find that God reveals what we should believe, what is right to believe, and what we shouldn't believe.

Everything that people talk about of a religious or spiritual nature is not true. It's not valid. It's not going to do anything but lead us astray. And if we come to the Bible with the right attitude, we'll find that the Bible not only teaches us what to believe, but how to live, how not to live in this world in order to please God and make the most, the best of our own lives.

We come to the Bible the right way, with a teachable attitude. The Spirit of God, you'll see it on the screen, will inform our minds, stir our emotions, and move us to action.

That's what, maybe not every time, sometimes we come to the Bible, even in church, the Bible study, personally in the mornings, whenever you read, sometimes we're tired, we're sleepy, we just don't have it.

But on a regular basis, we come to the Bible with the right attitude, a teachable attitude. The Spirit of God should inform our minds, stir our emotions, and move us to do it.

[4 : 01] To believe what God says to believe, and to do what God says to do. The result will be that we will do what Paul talks about in Philippians chapter 1, verse 27. We'll live a life worthy of the gospel.

We'll actually live like Christians, is what he's talking about. Turn with me, if you would, to Philippians chapter 1, where we've been now for several weeks. We're moving on today, in verses 27 through 30.

He actually tells us, calls us, live a life worthy of the gospel. He's saying, live like a Christian. Live like the Christian you are, who has been changed by God.

Let's read it. Philippians 1, 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, and not frightened in anything by your opponents.

This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ, you should not only believe in Him, but also suffer for His sake.

[5 : 20] Engage in the same conflict that you saw I had. Read Acts chapter 16, and you'll read how Paul, when he first went to the city of Philippi, some things happened.

A mob turned against him, beat him, threw him in jail, and for all practical purposes, ran him out of town. That's what he's taught.

They knew that. Engage in the same conflict that you saw I had, and now hear that I have. Now he's in prison in Rome, waiting to be tried before Caesar.

They know that. I want you to look at these verses and see what it means to live a life worthy of the gospel and how that will affect our relationships here in the church and even relationships outside the church with people who do not believe like we believe or even oppose us.

So let's think. We live worthy of the gospel. Number one, we will demonstrate how Christ has made a difference in our lives. If we really live like Christians, we will demonstrate by the way that we live in this world and interact with people, we'll demonstrate that the Lord has made a difference in us when He saved us, when He put His Spirit in us.

[6 : 48] I want you to look at the first part of verse 27. He says, Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ. Most commentators talk about how this is a difficult phrase to translate and show us just how strongly Paul is calling us to live a faithful Christian life.

Here's the problem. He is writing to people who live in the city of Philippi. Philippi had been made years earlier a Roman colony.

The people who lived in that place were made Roman citizens with many privileges that people around them did not have. After that, everyone born into that city was a Roman citizen.

It was a privileged status. And the people who lived there, they knew, we are something. And I'm not talking about just terrible pride, kind of arrogance, condescension, but they just knew, we are citizens of Philippi.

That does make us special. And they took pride in living like a citizen of Philippi. Well, what Paul is trying to do, he's got that in his mind.

[8 : 08] And so he's telling these Philippian Christians who understand the privilege they have of being citizens, he's saying now, you live like a citizen of heaven.

He even uses that phrase specifically later on in chapter 3. You live like a citizen of heaven. You go all out to live up to who you are as a Christian.

A New Testament commentator by the name of Moises Silva tries to point this out in his translation of that phrase in verse 27. He says, What really matters is that you behave as citizens of heaven in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Now, the idea of living in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ or worthy of our salvation, Paul's not saying you make yourself worthy.

Everything about our salvation is due to God's grace. It has nothing to do with what we have done or with our own good works or anything like that. One of the best verses that describes how we owe everything about our salvation to God is the verse we read earlier from Ephesians chapter 2.

[9 : 22] Look at it. For by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not your own doing. Grace is a gift from God. Your salvation is a work of God.

Faith itself is a gift from God. This is not your own doing, none of it. It is the gift of God not a result of works so that no one may boast.

Paul is calling us to demonstrate the change that God has brought about in our lives as a result of us believing the gospel. And when we put our faith in Jesus for our salvation, the Spirit of God comes to live within us and brings about from that moment on change as He makes us more and more like Jesus.

And we've talked about this before in terms of character especially. Now, in this passage Paul talks about some of the ways that God changes us. So let's look at some of the ways that we ought to demonstrate that we're Christians.

Number one, we will be united. Paul says that he wants to hear, look at this, verse 27, that you are standing firm in one spirit with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

[10 : 36] The gospel has a way of uniting us when we believe we're regenerated. We're united to God in a special relationship.

But we're also united to one another in a very special relationship. brothers and sisters in Christ. What he's telling us here is as members of the family of God we've got to put forth effort.

As he says here we've got to put forth effort to stand firm in one spirit. He's referring to the power of the Holy Spirit here and strive together to proclaim the gospel.

I want you to think with me in light of what he's saying here. churches should be the most common and best examples in this country of how different people diverse people come together join together to live and work as one.

But I guess at least most of us in this room we know that churches are not like that. churches are not models of diversity where people from all different kinds of backgrounds come together as one.

[12 : 04] Throughout this country as they meet today most not all but most churches will be made up of people who are very very similar of the same race of the same social class and other sameness.

That's just about who most American churches are what they are. But you know there is a very popular diverse group found all over this country who stand firm and strive together for a common cause.

College football teams NFL teams any sports team you could say but college football teams I want you to think and let's be more local as we think and let's have a little bit of diversity let's think about both Clemson and South Carolina.

The Clemson and South Carolina football teams are made up of young men from very diverse backgrounds black and white high middle and low social classes conservative and liberal and I'm sure there are several other categories of differences that we could use here to describe this.

These young men though despite their differences they choose to focus on the one thing that has brought them together that has united them that's playing football.

[13 : 51] They focus on playing football we're one team and they let the things that divide them be secondary.

They're not primary. They're not going to be the emphasis of the team. I want you to think a lot of you keep up with year round your favorite football team you know they choose to support each other to play for each other and in more recent times more and more college football players are talking about how much they love one another.

They love their brothers on that team and the result is most let's just say successful college football teams they become like brothers in a family.

It's a football family but it truly is a family made up of people from all different walks of life. Now if athletes can come together like that Christians should absolutely be able to come together as one family the family of God because we have a unifying supernatural power to help us the power of the Holy Spirit who indwells us as individual Christians who will help us come together and see what we have in common and focus on what we have in common more than just our differences.

Now I'm not emphasizing this because of a problem of disunity in our church that I'm aware of but we do need to work on maintaining or building close relationships with our church family members right now in light of the situation we find ourselves in.

[15 : 58] The coronavirus pandemic has hurt the fellowship of most churches because it has prevented us from being together from doing things together.

You see how these seats are all spread out. We're supposed to try to stay six feet away from people outside of our immediate family. I don't say it every week but we've encouraged don't shake hands.

By all means don't hug anybody. We went through a period of time where we didn't meet at all. We're not meeting in Sunday school now in small groups.

We're discouraging that. There is a pandemic. The coronavirus is real. I don't care who thinks what in this room.

In this room there are people who have had it and been very sick. There are members of our church whose parent or sibling has died from the coronavirus.

[17 : 07] It is real. And we need to do some of the things that we've done to try to avoid spreading it if somebody comes and they've got it.

So we need to acknowledge there is a problem. There is a pandemic. We can't be together like we once were, like we want to be for right now.

But what we can do is work on maintaining fellowship the best way that we can under these circumstances. You know, this is one of the things we've got to really work on when this whole thing's over.

When they declare an end to the pandemic, when it's okay to just do life like we used to do life, we as a church, every church, not just our church, every church, we've got to really do some things to build unity, get back together, rekindle some relationships, rediscover how much we really do need one another.

But in the meantime, probably all of us in this room, we need to make more phone calls, send more cards, emails, text messages, and whatever else we can do to maintain fellowship.

[18 : 34] Not just to stay in touch, but to have real meaningful relationships. If we live a life worthy of the gospel, if we truly live out our Christian faith, unity and fellowship will be something that we enjoy.

Nobody will have to tell us we need that. We know that. We enjoy that. And we need to work at it. We need to work at it the best we can now under difficult circumstances, but in the days to come, we'll have to make it a priority.

As a united family of God, we will advance the gospel. He says striving side by side for the faith of the gospel. The church exists to make disciples, to do the great commission.

You know that. Part of that is doing evangelism, proclaiming the gospel, sharing the gospel, as well as helping people understand the truth of God's word and grow and mature in their own faith.

Evangelism, witnessing, sharing the gospel, that is every Christian's responsibility. There's nothing in the Bible that says it is for a select few in the church.

[19 : 52] You know, over the years, I've put this on the screen many times. I've had a handout just like this many times on Sunday morning.

We've done things on Sunday night. Wednesday night. As Christians, we need to understand that we have circles of influence in which some of the people that we know, we love, we work with, maybe in your family, they're not Christians.

And God expects us, as people who know the Lord, as people who believe what the Bible says, that the only way to be right with God through faith in Jesus, God expects us to build the kind of relationships with these people that we can talk to them about things that matter.

And at the top of that list should be their relationship with the Lord, be able to share the gospel with them. Over the past couple of years, Southern Baptists have had a sort of what you might call a denominational emphasis, where we as Christians are being asked, just share the gospel with one person this year.

You remember, who is your one? I've preached on it, I think Jeff has, we've done things in Sunday school, but in the newsletter, tried to emphasize, as individuals, we need to think, who is one person in my life that's not a Christian, that I could zero in on to pray for, to develop my relationship with them, and to look for an opportunity to share the gospel with them.

[21 : 33] Who is your one? And have you shared the gospel with that person? If you have it, are you still working on it? Trying to develop your relationship in such a way that it'll just be natural for you to talk with them about things that are serious, like, their relationship with the Lord.

Now, I want to go back to the idea of the church being a diverse group of people. What I do not mean is this. We should not, as a church, target different kinds of people, and make it our goal to go after them, so that we'll be a more diverse church.

We do not need to target the black community, the Hispanic community, a rich community, a poor community, and try to reach people from outside our white middle class group, and just make our church more diverse.

That's not the way to do it. that is not going to work. I had a black pastor I heard one time, Votie Bauckham, really a nationally known pastor, who has said, that's not what the church needs to do today.

Here's two ways we need to approach the idea of diversity, in terms of being a church that includes everybody. Number one, we must do our best to be a church that welcomes every single person that walks through our doors, regardless of their race, social class, or any other difference.

[23 : 32] We need to be, as individuals and collectively as a church family, we need to have the mindset that anyone who walks in that door, if they're a Christian, they're our brother or sister in Christ, and we embrace them.

We need to have the mindset, anybody that walks in that door, and if they're not a Christian, they are a human being for whom Jesus died, and if they don't come to know the Lord, they're going to spend eternity in hell.

And we should care enough about them, regardless of what they look like, sound like, that we want to embrace them, welcome them, make them feel at home, and share our lives with them, and most important is to share the gospel with them so that they'll be saved.

We need to be a church that welcomes everyone, and I mean genuinely. Whoever walks in that door, regardless of how different they are than me, I'm glad they're here.

I smile. I welcome them, and I mean it. Number two, we must start inviting our friends and acquaintances from work, from school, or the neighborhood or wherever to come to church with us, regardless of their race, social class, or any difference.

[25 : 00] In this room, a lot of people in here, you who go to school with, you work with, or in your neighborhood are people who are very different than the majority of members of this church.

We need to have the mindset, if we're going to be witnesses, if we're going to take seriously the people in our circles of influence who are not Christians, we need to look at them, build relationships with them, no matter how different they are, invite them to come with us to this church, church.

And all of us who are here, we're going to embrace them. That's the most logical way that our church would become more diverse.

We're open, we're receptive, we're wanting whoever God brings, and we'll welcome them to open arms. But also, we're going to share the gospel with whoever God puts in our life.

Friends that are very different. We're going to at least invite them, bring them with us. And some of them very well may become a real active part of our church family.

[26 : 19] It might make us uncomfortable. So what? There's a lot of things in life that make us uncomfortable. That doesn't matter. Now, I want to make this statement since we're on this subject.

I do not have any person in mind. I have not heard anything. I've not heard anything implied. Nobody's said anything to me about anything like this. This is just an appropriate time to do it. I've done it in the past, but I've never done it lately.

So I think it's very important. If there is one person who I'd have a problem, I want to say it this way. We cannot be a church of Jesus Christ and not welcome every human being who walks in that door.

And if anybody in this church has a problem with welcoming everyone, you leave. You're not going to be a stumbling block.

We are going to be the family of God called Pickens First Baptist Church who welcomes everybody. And I know for a fact 99% of our church family feels that way.

[27 : 30] But if there's one or two that do not, you got the problem. And you will not make us have a problem over that. I have no target.

But if I hit the bull's eye somewhere this morning, I mean it. But I want you to know if you're a visitor, you're not a part of our church family. We've never had issues over this. Our church would not tolerate something like this.

But I do think it's good from time to time knowing human nature to bring it up. And just clarify things. And from the past, when I've said some things like this, I've had a lot of affirmation in saying things like this.

Because this is who our church as a whole, 99%, if not 100%, wants us to be. Now, another change the gospel brings means we will stand unafraid against our enemies.

Look at verse 28. And not frightened in anything by your opponents. People of the world who do not believe, who don't care about God, who hate God even, they oppose the gospel for many reasons.

[28 : 51] One reason is contrary to their self-centered way of living. And for some of them, the things that the Bible teaches, it declares them to be immoral.

And they don't like that. And so, they oppose the truth of God's word. And for us, most of us in this room know, in this world today, people do not embrace the idea that there's only one way to be right with God, that's through faith in Jesus Christ.

That's what the Bible says. Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. But when we really believe that and witness, share the gospel, and tell people because, you know, we love them, that's not the way they can be right with God, we're called intolerant.

And we're out of step with the way things are in this world today, to be so inclusive and to never say there's just one way of anything. In today's world, many people are quick to condemn Christianity and to hatefully attack Christians.

And it's happening more and more. But we are called as God's people to stand firm in our faith no matter what.

[30 : 16] Now, as we show the world the difference Christ has made, as we do stand firm, we will influence others. Look at this. Our stand for Christ will be a sign of judgment to unbelievers. He says in verse 28, this is a clear sign to them of their destruction.

I want you to think. When we stand firm in our faith, I mean graciously, appropriately. Not being mean-spirited jerks, but graciously and appropriately.

We stand firm. God will use that to cause some people to think there may be something to this.

Why else would that person be ridiculed? Why else would that person be ostracized by standing for what they believe? There must be something to it.

And they may be convicted or at least become open to inquiring about the truth. So standing firm on biblical convictions, on biblical convictions the right way, is one of the ways that God warns unbelievers.

[31 : 29] Let's look at this. Our stand for Christ will also be a sign of assurance for Christians. He says this is a clear sign of your salvation and that from God. Standing firm in our faith is something that God will use to give us assurance.

If you're truly a Christian, you truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, when you make those hard decisions to stand firm against the crowd, God's going to affirm you.

He's going to give you real assurance, not only that you're His, but you're doing the right thing. Our faithfulness also encourages some of our Christian brothers and sisters to stand firm, to be faithful, and to trust God.

You know, there could be somebody in your life right now, and they need for you where you work, or at school, or somewhere out away from church. There may be some people in your life right now, they really need for you to stand strong as a Christian.

Not be afraid, not back down. Right now, they're timid, they're sort of reserved, they're afraid, but they would be encouraged by your strong example.

[32 : 42] Be that person. Now, one thing the Bible never promises is that living a faithful Christian life will be easy. It is not.

The Bible says this is going to be hard. Look at the last point here. We will suffer as we seek to live for Christ. Paul speaks of this as, think about this, a privilege, a gift from God.

Verse 29, for it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ, you should not only believe in Him, but also suffer for His sake. Suffering for the Lord is not something Paul made up because he did it so much.

Paul learned it from experience for sure, but that's what Jesus taught. Look at this. Jesus said, if anyone will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross. That's an instrument of death.

Let him deny himself. Die to himself even. To follow me. The commitment we've got to make. And then after the apostles experienced their first beating for preaching the gospel when they were told not to, look at what they said.

[33 : 55] They left the court rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name. The idea of suffering as Christians, it does sound strange to us because thankfully in this country Christians have not suffered physically like in some countries where they're imprisoned, they're beaten today, killed for their faith.

We should be thankful that we have not experienced that in our country, in our lifetimes, in the history of our country. But sometimes we all are, we are called to suffer for doing the right thing in difficult circumstances.

You know, it may be that if you refuse to lie or be dishonest in performing your job, it will cost you something.

It'll cost you advancement. Or it could cost you a demotion. It could cost you even your job. It sometimes costs us to be faithful in serving the Lord in our church.

Sometimes it costs us time. I mean, we sacrifice time. Money. We sacrifice our energy when we're tired.

[35 : 18] Sacrifice sleep sometimes maybe even. These things are not much compared to the suffering Paul's talking about, I know. But what I want us to know in this room today, suffering for Christ doesn't always mean life-threatening danger.

Here's what we've got to understand. If we live our lives worthy of the gospel, it will require some degree of suffering at times.

The Christian life, live faithfully, cannot be just a cakewalk seven days a week, 365 days a year, year in and year out.

It cannot be. The New Testament says it won't be. The Christian life, I want us to understand, it's not about knowing the right things, just believing the right truths.

It involves acting on what we know and what we believe. Final thought. The gospel makes a difference in the lives of everyone who believes it.

[36 : 32] As you look at your life, is it obvious that you believe the gospel? Let's pray. Dear God, help us to see the truth about ourselves.

Help us to understand from what we're seeing in this passage this morning, dear God, that it will show if we're Christians. It will show in our unity.

It will show in our willing to stand firm, tough, difficult situations. Help us to see that we will not shrink before our enemies, the enemies of yours.

Help us just to see, Father, some of the things that we've looked at in this passage or things you bring to mind right now to a Christian in this room. Help them to understand what it means to be a Christian.

The cost involved, the suffering that sometimes comes. Lord, don't let anyone in this room who is a church member, been baptized, just professed to be a Christian for many years.

[37 : 51] Don't let anyone leave here deceived that they're a Christian when they're not. Help us to see, dear God, that there will be evidence in every one of our lives if we've been born again by the Spirit of God.

Make it clear that we've just seen a few of the things that will be true about real Christians. Father, if there are people in this room who've been convicted that they are not true believers, help them to admit that totally, humbly to you right now.

Turn from their sin. Truly repent. Change their mind. Hate their sin and turn from it. Help them to truly understand that when Jesus died on the cross, He paid the penalty for their sins.

Help them, dear God, to trust Jesus this way, to call upon Him to save them now. Let's just, in an attitude of prayer, listen to the Lord, respond to Him personally, individually, as you know you need to do.

Amen.