

**Walking Worthy Of The Gospel:
A Call To Live In Congruence With Our New Identity**

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Introduction

The gospel is, by its own definition, “good news”.¹ The New Testament presents this good news as the gift of grace and the forgiveness of sin for all who trust in Christ. Not only is this gospel the proclamation of God’s saving grace for us, but it comes to us when we are least deserving of it, before we even know we need it.² While salvation is a gift of grace and Christ *is* our holiness, the Word of God repeatedly calls the children of God to “walk worthy” of this grace and endeavour to live lives of holiness. In this paper, we will explore one such instruction from Paul’s letter to the church in Philippi.

“Μόνον ἀξίως τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ πολιτεύεσθε, ἵνα εἴτε ἐλθὼν καὶ ἰδὼν ὑμᾶς εἴτε ἀπὼν ἀκούω τὰ περὶ ὑμῶν, ὅτι στήκετε ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι, μιᾷ ψυχῇ συναθροῦντες τῇ πίστει τοῦ εὐαγγελίου”

“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.”

Philippians 1:18b-27

Salvation is a gift of grace (χάρις) and the Scriptures explicitly teach that this gift is unmerited.³ If we are saved by Christ *alone*, through the perfectly obedient work that could only be accomplished by Him - how is it possible to walk “worthy” of such an otherworldly gift of grace and mercy?

In this paper, the premise God gives for calling us to walk worthy of the gospel, the power God gives to walk worthy of the gospel and the purpose God has in calling us to walk worthy of the gospel will be explored. The aim of examining the premise, power and purpose of the gospel will be to demonstrate that the call to walk worthy is not a command to meet a requirement and thus earn or solidify ones salvation, but rather, a call for Christians to walk in congruence with their true identity, which exemplifies their salvation.

¹ Genesis 3:15, Ephesians 1:7, 2:8-9, 1 Timothy 1:15-16, Acts 4:12, Colossians 1:13-14

² Romans 5:6-8

³ Galatians 1:1-9, 15-21, 3:10-14, 4:1-6, 5:1

The Premise for walking worthy of the Gospel

Before calling the church to walk worthy of the gospel, the apostle Paul passionately expresses his joy in the gospel and the unfathomable goodness of the gospel. He does this earlier in 1:20 by saying that the gospel is so good, he desires to honour Christ in both his life and his death. The word for honour is *μεγαλυνθήσεται* meaning that the good news of being forgiven, received and adopted as a child of God is something Paul wants to “magnify, make obvious and draw attention to”. Consider how quick we are to magnify things that make impressions on us - a restaurant, an artform, a good read, a new form of technology - we immediately magnify them, drawing others attention to them in order that they may experience what we have experienced. For Paul, God’s grace in the gospel is worth sharing, worth his reputation, worth going to prison for, worth dying for. Paul’s passion is to make the grace of Jesus obvious and he is so convinced of Christ’s goodness, the apostle speaks about living and dying as though he is in a win-win situation.

God’s premise for calling us to walk worthy of the gospel is found in the apostle’s well known exclamation in 1:21, “to live is Christ and to die is gain”. Gain is *κέρδος* meaning profitable and advantageous. Death is advantageous - *not* because God’s goal is for us to escape the material world, but because in the end, God will *restore* the material world.⁴ The apostle describes death as gain because death does not mark the end of his hope but instead, unites him to the source of his hope - Christ alone.

God’s premise for calling us to walk worthy of the gospel is that we are His children, He is our Father, and those Christ justifies He also sanctifies so that increasingly, we bear the family resemblance.

The Power to walk worthy of the Gospel

The apostle calls us to “walk” worthy of the gospel. Walk is *πολιτεύεσθε* which is to conduct one’s life or live one’s life in a very particular way. Properly understood, this term is speaking to life “as a citizen” of a particular state.⁵ As a citizen, one then must avail themselves of the laws of that state or recognize the laws of the state. The apostle is not instructing the church in matters of their behaviour *only*, but in the great matter of their identity.

⁴ Revelation 21

⁵ Thayers Greek Lexicon: *πολιτεύεσθε*, from Thucydides down; in Hellenistic writings “to conduct oneself as pledged to some law of life.”

The apostle describes the “walking” of πολιτεύεσθε as “worthy” using the word ἀξίως which is to say, the children of God are called to live in a way that is “suitable so as to match the value” of our citizenship. If it were not for the gracious implications of Christ’s perfect work, this call would not be encouraging, but utterly crushing - who lives in such a way that their very life is ἀξίως of what Christ gave?

Properly understood, Μόνον ἀξίως τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ πολιτεύεσθε is not a statement intended to provoke divine levels of guilt, but exhortation. This citizenship is not earned through our work, it has already been gifted through Christ’s work. Our citizenship comes via adoption. Therefore, the believer’s motivation for walking in a way that is ἀξίως is fueled by the desire for imitation. Contrary to Aristotelian logic, which would naturally conclude that one must “do this in order to become that”, the apostle’s gospel logic asserts that the believer is to “do this because united to Christ you are already *that*.”

For example, a refugee in exile who is granted citizenship of a new country receives the governing laws of that country with the gift of their new citizenship. There are 78 countries and territories in which one drives on the left hand side of the road. If a refugee is given asylum in a country that drives on the right, then being “called” to drive on the right is a discipline that will enable them to enjoy their newfound freedom in greater measure. While the struggle against their old patterns of driving on the left would be expected, the joy of their newfound citizenship and freedom would serve as their motivation for living in congruence with their new reality. The history of redemption teaches us that we were exiles on an exodus who, by the grace of Christ, have been given a new citizenship with the assurance of a tremendous homecoming. “Μόνον ἀξίως τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ πολιτεύεσθε” is a bold call for us to live our life in congruence with our citizenship.

The power to walk worthily is not self wrought. The apostle expresses his hope that the church would be standing firm in one mind and in one spirit. The word πνεύματι on it’s own would mean nothing more than “breath”, “wind” or “spirit” in the sense of human spirit. However, the “oneness” that the apostle calls for points us to a deeper reality. It is the very Spirit of Christ who makes the dead alive, re-animating our hearts to walk in the ways of Christ.⁶ As Calvin put it succinctly, those who Christ justifies, He also sanctifies. The call to walk worthy of Christ is a call to walk in congruence with a new citizenship and a new nature. This discipline is, in itself, a gift because it cannot be done by the power of our will but increasingly by the power of Christ’s Spirit.⁷

⁶ Ephesians 2:1-10

⁷ Galatians 5:22

The Purpose for walking worthy of the Gospel

The pattern of Christ's life was that His suffering and humiliation was, in the end, vindicated by the Father as Christ ascended in tremendous exaltation.⁸ The passion we see in Christ for the redeeming work of the gospel is later seen in the lives of the apostles. The humiliation/exaltation pattern of Christ's life, was also the pattern of the apostles lives. Paul gives us the purpose for walking worthy of the gospel in the verses that follow, telling us that it has been granted to us that for the sake of Christ we should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.⁹

This is not a broad-brushed call for Christians to live arbitrarily hard lives. The apostle knew both abundance and lack¹⁰. This is a very specific sort of suffering and it comes to us in a very specific way. The word suffer is *πάσχω*, which is where we get our english word "passion." Furthermore, the apostle says that this passion for Jesus has been *granted* to us. The word here is *χαρίσ*, which is to say, to have a passion for Jesus is granted by grace.

To answer the call to the suffering of Christ, is to endeavour to have your *πάσχω* for Him drive your life. This *πάσχω* is to serve as the driving force, constantly re-tuning our hearts like a musician consistently re-tunes a guitar that if left on it's own, would slowly go out of tune. Christ alone is our hope in life and death - and therefore the preeminent source of meaning for our life, and a worthy of our praise - even in the face of death. Our *πάσχω* was given to us to both live in light of the gospel and compel us to share the gospel, even if doing so results in harsh circumstances, even to the point of death.

The passion of Christ was to declare & demonstrate the good news of the gospel, so that through Him, whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

The passion of the apostles was to declare & demonstrate the good news of the gospel, so that through their witness, whoever called upon the name of the Lord would be saved.

We are called to walk worthy of the gospel, to passionately declare & demonstrate the good news of the gospel, so through us, the reconciled, God will continue to reconcile others so that whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.¹¹

⁸ Philippians 2:6-11

⁹ Philippians 1:29-30

¹⁰ Philippians 4:12-13

¹¹ II Corinthians 5:17-21