

Live Worthy of the Gospel?

(P. Peterson)

Every great team has something deeper than talent alone. The way they play that creates a distinct culture based on a shared conviction.

Great teams are committed to a culture that demands the relentless pursuit of fundamentals, which, when everyone brings their best, results in success.

Now we live in a world of competing teams, who are all convinced that their way, their fundamentals, is how to win at the game of life.

Team Success says live for achievement, or

Team Pleasure says live for comfort, or

Team Religion says live for perfection.

What does it look like to live on Team Jesus Christ? How does Coach Paul develop a winning culture to encourage each team member to embrace Jesus Christ's distinct culture at winning in the game life by bringing others onto the team and changing the world?

Let's see what we can learn from Coach Paul as he develops the culture at Philippi for Team Jesus Christ:

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, 28) 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. 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, 30) engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have. (Phil 1:27-30)

Background (Phil 1:1-26)

While under house arrest in Rome, the apostle Paul writes fondly in appreciation of the saints of Philippi, who partnered with him from the very beginning, in his ministry of the Good News in Philippi and now supporting him during this Roman imprisonment.

Paul's attitude that his imprisonment "really served to advance the gospel" encouraged Philippian Believers to spread the Good News. Instead of causing fear among those identified as Christian, many gained confidence in their faith in Jesus Christ and embolden them to preach without fear.

However, while some proclaimed Christ out of good will, others were motivated by pride and envy and used Paul's circumstances to selfishly grow their own following and authority. Amidst the confusion and disunity of competing Christian leaders, Paul sets up to redirect the focus of the Philippian church - whatever the motive, it doesn't matter; Paul rejoices because Christ is proclaimed.

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Paul directs the Philippians to focus on "let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ!" To succeed in life, master living in a manner consistent with the gospel. Proclaim the gospel in both words and deeds! It is more than making godly decisions; it is a life lived in obligation to Jesus Christ.

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By placing an emphasis on Jesus Christ as the highest authority in all aspects of life, Coach Paul creates a winning culture for the church by establishing the gospel as the standard of success and playbook to perpetuate this culture and outreach to the world. This standard is the unifying basis for the team to rally around, for the church to stand firm on and its members to work together on.

Using the gospel as our pattern to live by causes us to focus on Jesus Christ's humility and sacrificial love for us. More than a belief that saves us from sin, Jesus Christ's example and winning culture means that we must embrace His humility and sacrificial love, which is not easy.

To "stand firm" is to have an unshakeable determination to hold to Jesus Christ's humility and sacrificial love even as life gets hard. Adversity is not an excuse to give up; instead, it strengthens us as we rely more on Jesus Christ to "die to self" and live for God just as Coach Paul is doing.

As a kid, football was a fun game, because I could show up to play if wanted, or skip practice if I didn't feel like it. When I joined a college team, everything changed; football was no longer a game, it was a way of life.

To develop the team's culture, the coach had standards that required sacrifice, discipline, and resolve. Practices were strict and no public contact was allowed two days before each game.

The irony I learned is that the more it cost, the more joy I experienced, because the commitment built a culture of winning that enabled us to pursue football greatness. As we sacrificed for one cause, we gained far more than we gave, and it was life-giving.

Likewise, to create a winning culture at church, we must be tenacious in living like Jesus Christ by dying to self in humility with the Holy Spirit. By writing "live worthy of the gospel," Coach Paul places an emphasis on three points:

1. Gospel clarity. Understanding the gospel clearly redefines winning in life. It is a contrast from self-fulfillment to self-denial.
2. Gospel conduct. The gospel means that living is intentional and not impulsive.
3. Gospel conviction. The gospel is our standard and drives our consistency in thought and behavior without excuse.

Coach Paul wants to develop a winning culture for the church in Philippi (and us!) to show the world that living for Jesus Christ is the best way to live. Through a genuine belief in the gospel that results in clarity, conduct and conviction, we are enabled to be the good news of Jesus Christ to the world.

Coach Paul's exhortation to live worthy of the gospel also applies to today. In a society of relative moral values, the fight to establish moral authority takes place in the political arena to determine law, and the cultural arena to sway the voter and can cause disunity of our churches. Amid these wars about moral standards, Coach Paul desires that we don't get distracted and focus on what is most important; with spiritual tenacity, live a life with gospel clarity, conduct and conviction.

Winning isn't by beating the world at their game or other Believers within the church. By reflecting humility and sacrificial love in our life during contentious times, the world sees Jesus Christ. Disagree without arguing to win, but share the truth of your beliefs. Overlook any offenses you may receive. Sacrifice what you want for benefit of others (your time, talent, treasure, etc) who may be undeserving.

Stand firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel!

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Coach Paul's call to "stand in one spirit and strive without fear" implies to compete as a team without distraction and disunity. Don't lose sight of the gospel and allow adversity within the team!

Greater than local issues; the conflict is between God and the evil forces of this world, and the church will suffer. But with the gospel's winning culture, God's salvation is with you and the team; remember to live worthy of the gospel. Just like training for any team sport, pain and sacrifice deepens bonds within the team and beneficial for the team's growth. For our church, the gospel deepens our personal relationships with Jesus Christ and fellow Believers, and results in a more effective testimony of Jesus Christ to our world.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

When I joined a rowing team in college, I learned a new sport that was hard. There were no crowds or cheers, and training was during cold early mornings and painful.

As I pulled the oar through the water, rowing gave me a mindset that football couldn't. Victory only happened when you embraced pain rowing together. Individual talent was meaningless unless you deliberately rowed each stroke in cadence together as one unit.

As a church pastor, I see the same analogy promoted by Coach Paul. The church is like a team sport that requires us to have the same mindset so that we strive and suffer together.

If we lose sight of the gospel, we will start fighting within our church and competing on personal mission priorities.

Proclaiming and living the gospel with humility and agape love is already difficult and challenging. Living a life worthy of the gospel costs us everything (and emotionally) in denying our self and giving ourselves to others.

Pushing ourselves to do what's hard does cause personal suffering; but, we are not alone if our church works with the same team mindset for God is with us.

Jump in the boat and get the team spirit. Don't rely on your own strength; but share in the deep trust in the Spirit of God's work through us so that the gospel we believe becomes the gospel we display. Live worth of the gospel:

1. Live like Jesus Chris in humility and spiritual tenacity of gospel clarity, conduct, and conviction.
2. United in one Spirit, strive and suffer together proclaiming the gospel in words and deed.