

This year we, the elders, have been focusing on leadership development. We held a series of meetings earlier in 2018 that focused on mentoring men on the importance of elders and deacons. It was designed to bring some men into a place in which they would understand these biblical positions and be seeking the Lord's will for their life in terms of potentially filling one of the positions. One of the verses that we identified in the material is **Hebrews 13:17**. It is one of the most convicting verses to me personally about the relationship of church member and church leader. **It reads, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls as those will have to give an account."**

When I stop and think of the implications of this verse for a leader, it is challenging, motivating, and even a bit ominous in the personal responsibility. There are great responsibilities, and some important things for us to encourage you, the body, about in terms of our church development, helping you to fulfill your side of this idea. One of the ideas that we are considering is if together as a body are we reaching the maturity in our faith that God obviously wants for us.

Look at Philippians 1:27-28. As you are turning let me give you a bit of the context of the passage.

Paul has spoken of the **privileges** that the Christian has in Christ. He now speaks of the Christian's **obligations**. **It makes a leader consider questions like these:** *Are we fulfilling our duties as Christians? Do we stand together against increasing opposition? Are we faithful in prayer? Do we draw together in love, having our fellowship enriched by the Holy Spirit? Are we one in mind and purpose? **If these things are so, then Paul identifies that we ought to have great cause for rejoicing.** We will be maturing Christians, and our conduct will be worthy of our calling.*

So when we as leaders give an account, and you as the body, have been given the truth, there are opportunities that the Lord will bring to us that will exemplify how we have lived lives worthy of the gospel, A LIFE WORTH LIVING.

Read the Scripture Philippians 1:27-28

NEXT SLIDE: THE WORTHY LIFE

So these concepts might seem obvious but there is a challenge for us. **James Montgomery Boice, said this, “Perhaps there has never been a period in history when true Christians have lived more like those who are of the world and have demonstrated so little of the high standards of the Christian faith.”**

The english phrase, “Let your manner of life” is actually only one word in the Greek language, politeumai. It is a word derived from the concept of a person’s citizenship, emphasizing complete loyalty and devotion given willingly to the positive development of their environment. Now Paul is not concerned with the secular citizenship of his readers, but **instead with their sacred citizenship**, that is how they are relating rightly to the church body.

So let’s look at some of these key marks for us to consider as we start this year together to get things right in relationship with one another and with the Lord.

Paul begins by considering the importance of unity. Unity is described by two practical expressions of proper Christian conduct, expressions that follow logically upon his reference to citizenship. How do

you live as a citizen of heaven? **First, Paul says that we are to “stand firm in one spirit,” and, second, with “one mind.”**

Standing firm is a military term that identifies the willingness of a soldier to defend his position at all costs. This also identifies both a positive and negative. The positive is a position in favor of the city he is defending, from the negative advance of the enemy. This specifically means that we stand **for truth and against falsehood**, we **stand for righteousness and against sin**, we stand **for unity and against division**, we stand for hope against discouragement, we stand **for peace and against chaos**, we stand **together for the advancement of Christ’s kingdom, against the schemes of the enemy.**

We do this as we stand together **in the unity of mind, a mutual sharing of convictions and responsibilities in one spirit.** This is the description given in a number of places to the life of the church as we **minister together.** It is the practical outworking of that true spiritual oneness in loving care and ministry. We see things like this described in **Romans 12:4-5** “For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” (Romans 12:4–5 ESV) Sometimes we don’t have to be at odds against one another to be in sin.

Sin can happen if we neglect investing in one another’s lives.

NEXT SLIDE: STRIVE SIDE BY SIDE

We need to note something vital in this text. **Paul instructs his readers to “let the manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.” He also refers to the faith of the gospel.** I think that this is extremely significant. There is a **cultural norm to think that the gospel is only the good news of salvation**, that Jesus died, paying the penalty for our sins, and then rising from the dead to overcome, sin and death. Many Christians hear the term gospel and think, “Oh, I have already responded to that because I am saved - I have confessed that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised Jesus from the dead. I don’t need to hear about the gospel anymore.

However, Paul identifies that the gospel is relative for us on an ongoing basis. The gospel entails more than our moment of redemption, it impacts our maturation, mundane, and ministry. Let me briefly explain that.

Our maturation is the continued growth that we are to experience as the good news of Jesus’ message impacts us. It means that when we consider our **desires, the depths of our hearts, our motivations, our hurts, our insecurities, our needs, our priorities, our relationships, etc, they are all viewed through the lens of the cross of Christ.** We consider life according to the grace and mercy that we have been gifted by the work of God on our behalf and we conform to Christ.

When it comes to things that may seem mundane, the daily grind issues, getting the kids to school, performing our job, doing the laundry, or yard work, relating to friends, etc, we consider them with a **conscious understanding that we “walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving” (Col. 2:6–7).**

Finally, living worthy of the gospel means our ministry is impacted. In Colossians Paul wrote, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col. 3:16).

The gospel should be the heartbeat of our community. We want it to be the overflow in our worship, teaching, it should be threaded in our conversations and be found in our counsel to one another and encouragement. The gospel should be the guide to every prayer and we should find it **saturating every area of our lives.** Every area of personal ministry is to be grounded in the good news of the cross of Jesus and the empty tomb.

Let me ask a few rhetorical questions and give you my thoughts on the answer. Can you recall our mission? Perry reminds us each week, **Connecting Communities, Changing Lives.**

How are you participating in the unifying work of God in our body life? Are you invested in a small group? Are you building the personal community of your marriage and family? Are you leading your children in the involvement of our gospel centered programs so they are transformed by Christ? Are you investing in the ministry of the church to aid her growth? What kind of

relationships have you made with people in the church? Have you made relationships with people to help you answer life's questions and handle life struggles?

I read this recently, and it stirred my thoughts to every member's value in our body life, ***"There is someone who invested in you to help you read and understand the Bible, How are you returning that in the body's life?"***

I want to share something important, we are working not only to ask these questions but to **provide the environment** where these questions are answered as we strive together in unity. In a few weeks we are holding a **marriage enrichment weekend** to help you and give you new information and exercises to help your family. This is not just for you, this is for your friends who's marriage might be in jeopardy, pay their way and open up the gospel conversation so the tough questions of their life are answered by the grace, kindness, and truth of Scripture. We are having **Youth retreat** that is coming up in November to aid you parents in the spiritual maturation of your children and family. Our Youth are going to go serve our community on Halloween by giving every house we "Trick-or-Treat" a light bulb so they can be reminded of Jesus, the Light of the World.

These are just a few of the things that we are doing to foster an environment to provide the means to find answers to these questions and the millions more that come into our minds as we strive together for the glory of Jesus as we live lives worthy of Him.

NEXT SLIDE: QUOTE BY E. STANLEY JONES - METHODIST MISSIONARY TO INDIA

The following were really indicates that we should take a different perspective. We are not to be frightened by anything that the opponent brings against us. **E. Stanley Jones, Methodist Missionary to India**, wrote: “The early Christians did not say in dismay: ‘Look what the world has come to,’ but in delight, ‘Look what has come to the world.’ They saw not merely the ruin, but the resources for the reconstruction of that ruin. They saw not merely that sin did abound, but that grace did much more abound. On that assurance the pivot of history swung from blank despair, loss of moral nerve, and fatalism, to faith and confidence that at last sin had met its match, that something new had come into the world, that not only here and there, but on a wide scale, men could attain to that hitherto impossible thing—goodness.”

Next Slide: Full Theme Logo and Conclusion

So what does this mean in a very practical sense for us as a church body? Well, I believe we have a **variety of things before us that the Lord is going to call us to engage together in**. It may be prayer together, it may be service together, it might be worship together, it may be serving differently than we have, it may require some humility and sacrifice in relationships to accomplish what God is calling us to be.

I know that if we respond in faith we will experience a life worth living that is satisfying because we are fulfilling the good works that God is calling us to. So I challenge you this year to carefully consider how the Lord is calling us to be unified and strive together in an intentional proactive way for the gospel of Christ.

For someone here it might mean responding to this good news through faith in Jesus for the first time - we would love to talk to you about the

transformation and freedom you can gain in Christ as you surrender your life to Him.