

Behavior becoming of Citizens

Philippians 1: 27-30

As Paul sought to conclude the first thoughts of his gracious letter, apparently he was reminded of the intense struggle the church in Philippi faced. Bear in mind that he and Silas had been beaten and imprisoned there. Philippi being a Roman colony was fiercely loyal to Rome and intolerant of any activity that bore the appearance of insurrection or disloyalty. Such a culture created a difficult environment for the devout believers. While they were subject to Roman authority, their loyalty was devoted to Christ alone. They were literally citizens of another country.

The Philippian Christians were citizens of two worlds. They were citizens of the Roman world and they were citizens of the world that ruled Paul's desires. The two worlds were at war. The Christians' heavenly citizenship had to take priority over their human citizenship, as the powers that be soon came to understand. The caesars could not tolerate this priority even though the Christians' heavenly citizenship made them better human citizens, better neighbors, better workers, better soldiers, better teachers, better parents, better children. At the height of the Neronic and other persecutions, the line between the two worlds was so clearly drawn that Christians refused to offer even a merely symbolic pinch of salt on a pagan altar. ⁱ

While our struggles are different, we too are forced to deal with this dilemma. Although I am thankful and proud to be an American citizen, my loyalties to Christ exceed my loyalty to America. Every believer is a citizen of another country, and our citizenship creates responsibilities to our Sovereign. As we examine the [characteristics](#) Paul discussed, I want to consider: [Behavior becoming of Citizens](#).

I. A Word about Christian Conduct (27) – [Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.](#) As we consider this powerful statement, we must understand that their conversation doesn't refer simply to their words or manner of speaking. This speaks of "*their citizenship and manner of conduct according to the laws and customs of a state.*" Keep that in mind as we consider this verse. Notice first:

A. The Exhortation (27a) – [Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ.](#) As Paul refers to their manner of conduct as citizens, he exhorts them to conduct themselves in an appropriate manner, worthy of the Gospel of Christ. Their thoughts and behaviors were not limited to, or dictated by what was acceptable in Philippi. They had a much higher and holier responsibility. Their actions were always expected to honor Christ and the Gospel.

- The western church needs to understand and embrace this biblical principle. There is much that is acceptable within society and according to the laws of the land, but they are contrary to the Word of God and certainly do not honor Christ. This must be the litmus test for every action and deed for the believer – does it honor Christ? If not, we must refrain from such activity.

B. The Expectation (27b) – *Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs.* While he longed to be present with them, Paul was currently hindered, and he had no way of knowing when he would see them again. Regardless of his physical presence in Philippi, he expected to hear of their faithfulness to the Lord and continued righteous living. Whether in his presence, or in his absence, he still expected the church to live in a way that brought honor to the Lord. There should never have been a question regarding their faith or loyalty to Christ.

- This expectation remains for every believer today. Paul has since gone on to be with the Lord, but the principle remains. Our lives should not be lived any differently within society than they are in the presence of those within the church. Our loyalty and devotion to Christ should be such that it dictates our actions and attitudes regardless of the cultural setting. We must bear in mind that the Spirit is with us wherever we are and observes every action, while knowing every thought. I pray we will always live in a way that honors Christ, regardless of those we are with.

C. The Determination (27b) – *Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit.* Paul also exhorted them to stand fast in one spirit, possessing an unshakeable faith and resolve for the Lord. This would not be easy while facing increased opposition and mounting pressure to conform to the standards adopted by society, but they were expected to remain determined in the faith. They could not straddle the fence. Their undivided loyalty belonged to Christ. In fact, some within the church may have been tempted to stray or compromise, but Paul urged them to remain committed to the Lord and the Gospel. Compromise was not an option for those who sought to serve the Lord.

- We desperately need such determination in our day. We face very little real persecution, but the attacks on our faith are relentless. Many are contemplating abandoning biblical principles in order to line up with the politically correct views of our day. We are not called to compromise the faith for the sake of acceptance or pleasing others. We too must stand for the Lord regardless of the opinions of others or accepted practices of our day!

D. The Cooperation (27b) – [Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.](#) Clearly there had been some division within the church, creating a lack of unity. This was detrimental on two fronts. First, they could not honor the Lord with their lives if there was division within the church. Discord among the church reflected negatively on the Lord and hindered the spreading of the Gospel. Second, they needed each other in order to overcome the struggles they currently faced. They were expected to stand fast in one spirit, having the same attitude as they labored together in the work of the Lord. The world would present enough difficulty and challenges without creating more due to discord. Cooperation among the church was essential to their mission.

- This principle has not changed and it never will. We cannot honor the Lord and be faithful witnesses for the Gospel if we lack unity. Folks have no desire to get involved in disputes and bickering. The modern church needs to learn who the real enemy is. We will never advance the Gospel or help the church through bickering and a lack of unity within the church. We all serve the same Lord, share the same vision, and we are all in this work together!

II. A Word about Christian Courage (28-30) – Paul concludes this thought by admonishing the church to remain courageous in the face of opposition. He spoke of:

A. Their Boldness (28a) – [And in nothing terrified by your adversaries.](#) Paul knew they would continue to face opposition and even persecution. The world did not embrace their faith and some would seek to bring them harm. Even so, there was no reason to fear the enemy. They needed to possess great boldness in the faith, even when faced with the possibility of persecution. He wanted them to get that settled prior to the persecution arriving.

- We have been blessed greatly in America, but we too must commit to boldness in the faith. The days of a majority embracing our faith are gone. Most would rather the Christian influence be reduced to such a level that we are no longer effective. They will continue to seek ways to silence our voice and hinder our work. As those days come, we must possess boldness for the Lord. We have nothing to fear from man. They may possess the ability to take our lives, but we are the recipients of eternal life. Settle your stand today, before the intense opposition comes!

B. Their Witness (28b) – [And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God.](#) Boldness in the face of their adversaries would create a great witness. God would not hold their enemies guiltless. Apart from saving grace, they would face their due reward, being judged and condemned of God. On the other hand, their

faithfulness would serve as a sure sign of their salvation. Mankind has never been able to explain or ignore the boldness of the faithful while facing intense persecution. Many have been saved through the witness of the faithful while suffering. I pray we too will have the courage to stand faithful if we face persecution for our faith.

C. Their Faithfulness (29) – *For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.* Here Paul shared a truth they probably didn't enjoy, but it was true nonetheless. While there were many great and precious promises for those in Christ, there was also the expectation of a willingness to suffer for Him. This was not to be considered strange or unusual. While they may never see the end result, they could rest knowing the Lord would be glorified through their faithfulness, even in suffering.

- Much teaching today focuses solely on the blessings associated with salvation. Many would have us believe suffering is due to a lack of faith or rebellion. These see no benefit in suffering for the cause of Christ. I wonder how they explain this particular passage. While I don't enjoy suffering or adversity, I do rest in the sovereignty of my Lord. Everything that comes my way has been allowed by Him, and He has a purpose for it. If my struggles bring glory to Christ my Lord, then they will be worth the difficulty they bring.

D. Their Likeness (30) – *Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.* Paul was not being arrogant: just honest. He reminded them of the great agony he suffered while in Philippi and the bonds he then endured in Rome. He had suffered greatly for the Lord, and he wanted them to know they were no better. God is not a respecter of persons, and suffering was not an immediate indication of his displeasure or punishment. Facing opposition was natural for the believer. He had suffered, and they likely would as well if they remained committed to Christ.

- I know our flesh doesn't like that, but this truth remains. As we consider those in Scripture and historical accounts of others who were faithful to the Lord, we discover the suffering of many of these. Our generation is not the first to face opposition. We don't enjoy it, but we know it comes with being a believer in Christ. I would rather suffer for Him in this life than to suffer without Him in the life to come. If we can maintain our faith, and a proper perspective, we can overcome in Christ.

Conclusion: These have been simple truths to consider, and yet they reveal profound truth. Are we faithful citizens of the heavenly land to which we belong? Do we possess the courage to stand for Christ and proclaim the Gospel? He was faithful to the sufferings of the cross for us. The least we can do is stand for Him while striving to present a positive witness. If there are needs,

particularly regarding salvation, I urge you to respond to the call of Christ.

ⁱ John Phillips Commentary Series, The - The John Phillips Commentary Series – Exploring Philippians: An Expository Commentary.