

"The Marks of God's People"

Philippians 1:27-30

Introduction:

We have been studying the letter that Paul wrote to the people of Phillippi while he was chained in a Roman prison.

Paul's letter is filled with a joy that is very unique and different.

In spite of his difficult circumstances Paul was joyful because, he saw rare opportunities to honor God in his difficulties

Because his focus was not on his honor and comfort but on God's glory and the furthering of the Gospel message.

Because he viewed death not as the enemy but as the doorway to eternal life and the reunion he has been longing for with His Savior Jesus Christ.

As Paul concludes this wonderful section about living in difficult circumstances he gives us a focus for living that is simple yet so very important.

And no matter where you are in your Christian journey you will be able to find some practical truth in Paul's words.

“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.”

[Philippians 1:27-30]

Paul's philosophy for joy is simple . . . ***"conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel"***.

The word used here is a word that refers to conducting yourself as a proper citizen.

You might hear this kind of thing when an Ambassador was being sent to another country.

They would be told to remember that they represented the United States so they should behave accordingly.

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Or perhaps you might hear these words from a principal or coach when they say, "you represent your school, or community . . . represent them well."

Or do you remember or did any one of your parents say when you went off from home, "Just remember who you are!"

What Does This Mean?

What does it mean to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel?

We could make a long list of what this might mean but let's look at what Paul says.

He tells the Philippians that if they live their lives focused on living consistently with the faith he will see or hear certain things about them.

1. First, Paul says he will hear that they Stand Fast.

They will be people who are well anchored.

The first thing we need to realize is that we are in a battle.

We will have to stand firm to hold our ground.

As believers we will face opposition from many fronts.

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We will be attacked by competing philosophies.

We will face opposition from the values and morals of the world.

Everywhere we turn we will face those who wish to weaken our foundations.

We will face the constant temptation that comes from the Devil and his army.

The person who lives consistent with the gospel, is a person who is standing firm in the midst of opposition.

But in order to stand, we must be anchored to the right place.

If you go to hang a heavy picture on the wall you can't just drive a nail into the wall.

You have to make sure it's well anchored.

If the nail is not anchored to a stud it might hold for a little while, but eventually it will come out of the wall.

Now, remember, I'm talking about "**Standing firm.**"

You can be determined to stand firm but if you are standing on the wrong doctrine of faith you'll eventually drift or fall away from your faith.

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Right living comes from right beliefs and not the other way around.

Paul speaks to us here about Christian conduct. It's the Greek word, ***Politeusesthe***.

It talks about our Christian behavior, but more accurately it means the behavior of Christian citizenship.

What this meant was: they must

- Keep their close ties with heaven.
- Speak the clean and pure language of heaven.
- They must bear the title of heaven, the title of being a Christian.
- They must witness about heaven to the unsaved.
- And they were not to allow an infiltration of worldly influence whatsoever.

Let me give a couple verses to show you what it means to us: In this chapter Phil 1

9-11 *"So this is my prayer: that your love will flourish and that you will not only love much but well. Learn to love appropriately. You need to use your head and test your feelings so that your love is sincere and intelligent, not sentimental gush. Live a lover's life, circumspect and exemplary, a life Jesus will be proud of: bountiful in fruits from the soul,*

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making Jesus Christ attractive to all, getting everyone involved in the glory and praise of God."

2 Peter 3:10-13

10 "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

11 since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives 12 as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. 13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness."

When we're talking about Christian conduct and behavior we must make sure we understand who Jesus is, what He did, how we find salvation, and what the Bible teaches.

Many people say they don't like, they don't need doctrine . . . but doctrine is the truth that we believe coming from His Word.

If we don't study doctrine we will be nailing our faith to a spot that will not hold.

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Second, Paul says that those who are conducting themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel will Contend as One.

The word for "**contend as one**" is the Greek word "**sun-athleo.**"

It is the word from which we get our word "**athletic**".

Just as a team must work together to be victorious, so Paul feels the church needs to work together to be successful in the world.

In a very good film, REMEMBER THE TITANS you see the true story of two coaches, one white and one black who are asked to coach a newly integrated team.

The head coach (Played by Denzel Washington) has to try to get this team to put aside their differences and focus on their common goal.

As they begin to do this they begin to play good football . . . and they begin to change.

It's a dynamic example of what unity in the church can cause.

And this change affects an entire community. All of us know in a community like ours what the opposite can do to affect the church also.

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In like manner we come from different backgrounds.

We have different tastes, styles and interests.

And we can let our differences divide us or we can let our common experience of Grace in Christ unite us.

Yes, in the quest for truth we may still debate issues . . . but our goal will not be to be "right", but to know Christ better.

Our differences will not be the cause for division . . . they will provide opportunities to grow.

I've said it before and will say it again . . . Christians fighting Christians only causes the world to turn away.

But when Christians work together, the world takes notice.

In the early church many people didn't understand the gospel, but what they did understand was that these people loved each other.

If we conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel we will gladly set aside our ego for the purpose of advancing the gospel.

We will overlook minor differences and discuss bigger differences in a spirit of love.

The third characteristic of people living in a manner worthy of the Gospel is that they will Live Without Fear.

Again the Greek word that Paul uses helps us understand.

The word for "**fear**" is the same word that would be used for a horse that was startled.

A startled horse takes off running.

Christians living in a manner worthy of the gospel will not run away out of fear.

Saying **we are afraid** is basically another way of saying we don't trust God.

When world events shake us the problem is that we really don't believe that God is in control.

When personal struggles make us churn, we show that we really don't believe that God is working in and through our circumstances.

When we cave in to the threats of others we show that we really don't believe that God will be our shield and our fortress.

The person who lives every moment of every day consciously as a child of God, will not be afraid.

They will be confident . . . not in their ability . . . but in His.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5 that God has made us His ambassadors . . . as if He was making His appeal through us (v. 20).

We represent our Savior,
 When we are at work
 When we are negotiating a contract
 When we are at the complaint desk of a store
 When we are having a frustrating day on the golf course
 When we are mad at our spouse or children
 When we are managing our personal finances
 When we are involved in our athletic event
 When we are going out for a night of entertainment

No matter where you are . . . you represent Jesus.

Paul's counsel is simple: **Represent Him Well.**

How We Do This?

It sounds so simple doesn't it? But it's not.

At the end of this passage Paul gives us some help.

I think he points out that much of this has to do with our attitude.

Paul points to two things we need to realize.

First, we are Privileged To Believe.

This week-end is Memorial Day. We want to remember those who have given their lives for our freedom.

I remember when I left Circleville, Ohio drafted into the Army.

We were bused to Ft. Jackson, S.C.

We were still in our civilian clothes. We still had hair.

When we arrived at the Fort, we were met by a Sergeant who yelled at us before we ever got off the bus.

We were new recruits. We didn't look like soldiers.

I remember getting into the barbers chair and they took those clippers and buzzed our hair starting right in the middle.

We then walked through a clothes line and got our uniforms and boots.

I recall how I first felt when I no longer looked civilian, but I was a soldier.

A soldier feels a special sense of pride when they don the uniform of their country. I was no exception!

I think if you talk to most who have served their country, they still have their uniforms somewhere.

I brought mine in to show you this morning. The only problem I have with this uniform is – it doesn't fit me any more and I'm not sure why.

Why not toss out your old uniform when you leave the service or can no longer fit into it?

You don't throw it away because it was a special honor to wear the uniform that so many have worn in defense of our country.

It is an honor to serve your country. And Yes, we knew there was a possibility we might lose our life.

In like manner, those of us who wear the name of Jesus Christ should realize what a privilege and honor it is to be called a child of God. Amen!

It is an honor to be given a gift as wonderful as this. It is an honor to be granted eternal access to the Heavenly Father.

It is an honor to trust and be associated with one who is so trustworthy.

It is an honor to commit our cares to this one who is so sufficient for our every need.

It is an honor to serve one who never takes us for granted

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We will live in a manner worthy of the gospel when we realize that to live this way is an honor.

It is a privilege that has been given us.

We must never take it lightly.

When a person begins thinking of an honor as a "duty" we begin to resist.

When you begin to think of an honor as "a right" you begin to be demanding.

So, we must remind ourselves over and over that we stand in a grace that we do not deserve.

We have been given a position that we will never be worthy of.

The honor we have been given should make us more determined than ever to live up to that honor.

The second attitude . . . the second privilege is much more difficult to accept.

Paul says we not only have the privilege to believe . . . but the Privilege To Suffer.

How foreign this is to our ears!

Many people flock to Christianity because they believe it will end their suffering.

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And indeed it does . . . on one level.

When we come to Christ we no longer have to fret about eternity.

When we come to Christ the torment in our soul is taken care of.

But our struggle with the world may just be beginning.

Try to understand how suffering could be seen as a privilege.

Suppose you have a child who is in desperate health.

As a parent, would you willingly endure personal suffering on their behalf?

I suspect you would.

You would go without sleep.

You would sacrifice a body part.

You would spend your life savings.

You would even give up your own life if it could save your child.

You would willingly and gladly suffer out of your love for your child.

And if someone asked you, you'd tell them that you would do it all again because of your love.

You know this is the way we should view Christ.

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We should love Him enough to suffer anything for the honor of His name.

It is not a curse . . . it is a privilege to be able to demonstrate our love for Him.

What an honor to think that others see Him in us.

Have you ever thought of it this way? What an honor that people see Jesus through us.

Paul could see the handwriting on the wall. He sensed that the Philippians might soon be persecuted for their faith.

Stephen had already been killed (with Paul's help) and James had also been put to death.

In Fox's Book of Martyrs it gives this account:

In AD 67, Nero ordered the burning of Rome.

The fire lasted for nine days and when the blame turned to Nero, Nero blamed the Christians.

And Nero came at the Christians with a new vengeance.

Nero contrived all manner of punishments for the Christians that the most infernal imagination could design.

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In particular, he had some sewed up in skins of wild beasts, and then they were attacked by dogs until they expired; and others dressed in shirts made stiff with wax, were fixed to stakes, and set on fire in his gardens, in order to illuminate them.

This persecution was general throughout the whole Roman Empire.

In the course of it Paul and Peter were both martyred.

In Hebrews 11 we read this account that early ***“believers were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them.”*** (Heb. 11:35-38)

In each of these cases, the people considered it an honor to suffer for His name.

We will hope that we are never called to suffer in these ways.

But even if we are, we pray that we might face those times as those who have gone before us.

It is more likely that you and I will face more subtle persecution for your faith.

We may lose our job

We may face lawsuits

We may be ostracized and verbally abused

We may be physically attacked

We may face business losses

We may be ignored by people we wish noticed us

We may be discriminated against because of our profession of faith.

Whatever the suffering that comes from being united with Christ, we should count it a privilege to stand up for Him.

What Happens When We Live This Way

Paul say two main things will happen if we live our lives seeking to live in a manner that is worthy of the gospel.

First, We will Verify Our Salvation.

The world looks at how we handle the tough times to find out whether or not our profession of faith is real or not.

Jesus told His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount that the way to distinguish true prophets from false prophets is by the way they live.

I think Jesus would say the same thing is true of believers.

A true believer shows they are a true believer by the way they live.

However, I must make two important clarifications.

First, we are admitted to Heaven on the basis of what Christ has done and not on the basis of what we do.

We don't have to "be good" in order to be saved.

HOWEVER, the person who has placed their trust in Christ is a person in whom the Holy Spirit of God dwells.

That person will change.

God will begin the process of building the character of Christ into all those who trust Him.

It is essential that we keep the order right in our head.

We are granted eternal life on the basis of our trust in Christ's work . . . THEN we are changed.

Second, it is important that you understand that no believer is going to live a perfect life.

Every believer will stumble on occasion.

We are people who are in the process of transformation.

We must give each other time and we must cut each other some slack.

When we look for the evidence (the fruit) of a genuine conversion we must look over a long period of time.

A person who lives consistently will show that their conversion was genuine.

We verify the truthfulness of our salvation when we live consistent with our profession.

If we say we believe we are forgiven, we should live as people who have been set free from our past.

If we say we are saved by God's undeserved grace, we should be gracious in our dealings with others.

If we say we believe in the dreadfulness of sin, then we should hate sin and work tirelessly to overcome it in our lives.

If we say we believe in the future glory of Heaven then we should show that our longing is not for this world, but the next.

We do that by the way we use our time, spend our money, and the attention we give to developing a relationship with Christ.

If we believe that God will supply all our needs we should stop churning.

If we believe that God is working in every situation, then we should show that by our joyful endurance even in the hard times.

If you don't see these kinds of changes in your life.

It is important that you ask whether you have really trusted Him at all.

Being saved is more than a prayer you say after a moving talk . . . being saved is a settled trust and commitment to what Christ has done on your behalf.

True commitment reveals itself in the way we live.

The second effect of Living in a manner worthy of the Gospel is that

We Will Draw Others to Christ.

There is nothing that helps a person see the lack in the own life . . . like seeing the blessing in the life of another.

People of the world take notice of the emptiness that is in their own lives when they see the peace, joy, and contentment that exists in the child of God.

Jesus told his disciples,

“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” [Matthew 5:14-16]

When we live consistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ, our light shines and others can see . . . and will be drawn to the truth.

CONCLUSIONS

So, having said all this, what do we do now? I have some suggestions.

First, we must take the time to reflect on the privilege and honor that is ours in being children of God.

Many of us have grown up in the church.

We take it for granted.

Others have been believers for a good long time and we have forgotten where we were and where we were headed when Jesus found us.

So, take some time to consider where you might be today if it weren't for His wonderful grace.

Think about what your future would hold.

Think about all the things you would have missed.

Focus on the blessing that is yours to know Christ personally.

Second, do a personal inventory of your life.

In your life what practices are inconsistent with the Gospel of Christ.

What things dishonor His name?

Be honest. It's going to hurt, but it is necessary.

Look at your vocabulary,
Look at your thought life,
Look at your passions,
Look at your priorities.

Look at the way you are at church and compare it to the way you are with your friends.

Look at whether you are allowing your job or the things you're doing affect your church attendance.

23

Check out your spiritual attitude or your apathy of spiritual things and see if you are drifting away from where you use to be in your spiritual walk with Him.

Is there inconsistency there?

Make the necessary changes.

When you do, your fellowship with God will be richer and your joy will be greater.

Third, find some way to remind yourself of who you represent.

Maybe it could be a Bible verse or plaque hung in strategic spots.

Maybe you could put a little sign on your mirror that says, "**Will people see Christ in me today?**"

Maybe it will be a pin you wear or a cross you carry in your pocket.

Maybe you could put a Bible on your desk or carry a key chain with a Christian symbol on it.

Whatever it is, consciously use it to remind yourself that your purpose is to live a life worthy of the gospel.

Finally, make this a matter of prayer.

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Ask God to help you live out the gospel wherever you are.

Ask Him to help you to reflect His goodness to others.

Ask Him to change your attitude.

Spend time thanking Him for His grace.

As you build your relationship with Him . . . it will be easier to be consistent in your other activities.

Before I end there is one more thing . . .

Perhaps you have come today because of the example of one of your friends or neighbors.

Perhaps you have seen something different in them and wanted to know more.

What you have seen is the difference that Jesus Christ can make.

And you can experience that same kind of transformation in your life.

The requirements aren't easy . . . but they are simple:

admit that you haven't lived the way you should, believe that Jesus has paid for your sin and makes it possible for you to go to Heaven, and then

commit yourself to trust what Christ has done for you.

And no matter what your past, God can make you whole again and will begin the work of making you into the person He created you to be.

If you have never made that decision to trust the One who has loved you since before you were born, the One who died in your place, and rose again so you might know hope . . . I hope you will turn to Him today.

And if you have made that decision in your life, I hope you will decide today to represent Him well . . . in everything you do.

Prayer of Invitation:

Father, I come to you just as I am. I acknowledge my sins and turn away from them. I believe that on the cross your Son, Jesus Christ took my blame and shame and atoned for these sins.

I accept your forgiveness and I in return forgive all others for whatever they have done against me. I give my entire self to you Lord Jesus, and put it under your protection. I ask you to come into my heart and make me a new creation. Take all anger, bitterness and selfishness out of my heart.

Fill me with your Holy Spirit and replace my old sinful nature with a new and right spirit. Live in me and love through me. I promise to live your way and ask you to empower me to live it. I shall follow you every day of my life.

In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.