

“THE CHRISTIAN MANNER OF LIFE”

I. Introduction

- A. One of the challenges we face in living the Christian life is remaining clear about who it is we should strive to please.
1. If we are not careful about this, we can easily slip into the error of seeking the approval of man rather than the approval of God.
 2. In our society, people are generally deemed worthy of approval as long as they avoid the one cardinal sin in our therapeutic age, the pseudo-sin of making someone feel bad about himself.
 3. I call this a “pseudo-sin” because the fact that someone is made to feel bad because of something we do or say does not necessarily mean that we have done something wrong.
 4. Nevertheless, it is widely regarded as wrong, even by many Christians.
- B. This explains why, when a Christian leader comes under legitimate criticism for something he has said, all that leader has to do to win in the court of public opinion is characterize his critics as mean-spirited.
1. He doesn't have to engage their criticisms.
 2. He merely has to portray them as eager to condemn.
 3. This tactic may be effective, but it is not biblical.
 4. When the apostle Paul confronted the apostle Peter for caving in to the false teaching of the Judaizers, Peter did not respond by accusing Paul of being judgmental.

5. Peter was open to correction because he knew that he was called to live his life in a manner that is worthy of the gospel, which is not always in line with what is worthy of approval in the eyes of man.
6. This call to live in a manner worthy of the gospel is the main idea in tonight's passage from Philippians.

II. An Exhortation to Live as Citizens of Heaven

- A. In the first half of our text, Paul issues an exhortation relating to how Christians should live.
 1. The importance of this matter is underscored by the very first word in the passage, the word "Only."
 2. By using this term, Paul is emphasizing that what he is about to say is of ultimate significance for the Philippians.
 3. This is the thing that they most need to hear.
 4. It is what Paul is most concerned about when he thinks about them and prays for them.
 5. The thing that matters most is that they conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel.
- B. As you can see by the footnote in the ESV, there is a different way to translate the verb in the first phrase of verse 27.
 1. The ESV text renders this verb as, "let your manner of life be"
 2. But as the footnote explains, a more literal reading of the Greek is, "Only *behave as citizens* worthy of the gospel of Christ."
 3. There are several reasons to prefer this more literal translation.

4. For one thing, Paul uses the noun that comes from the same root in Philippians 3:20, where he says, "But our *citizenship* is in heaven."
 5. For another, this is not the verb that Paul typically uses to talk about Christian conduct in the general sense.
 6. For another, Philippi was proud of its status as a Roman colony, and in the fact that Roman citizenship that was granted to those who lived there.
 7. These factors suggest that Paul is intentionally evoking the idea of citizenship here.
 8. He is instructing Christians to be faithful in living out our heavenly citizenship even as we live as temporary citizens in the nations and cities of this world.
- C. When a person becomes a Christian, he becomes a citizen of the kingdom of God.
1. As Paul says in one of his other letters, Christians have been delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of God's beloved Son.
 2. We have changed our citizenship.
 3. While the notion of citizenship has been degraded in our globalist age, it is still a significant thing to become a citizen of a new nation.
 4. Normally, you cannot keep living as if you were still a citizen of your former country.
 5. Your loyalties and responsibilities shift from your old country to the new one.
 6. Your life has to change too.

7. You have to speak the language of your new country, abide by its laws, and appreciate its customs and traditions.
 8. This is picture of what you are called to do as a Christian.
 9. Even though you live in this world, you are to conduct yourself as one who belongs to another country.
- D. There is tension between our ultimate heavenly citizenship and our temporary earthly citizenship.
1. This tension is becoming increasingly evident as our society moves further and further away from its historic connections to the Christian religion.
 2. While this does present challenges, we should note that it also provides opportunities for the church to present itself as a counterculture.
 3. To give one example, there are a number of people in the broader society who are beginning to see the damage done by feminism and the sexual revolution.
 4. This leads Aaron Renn to point out that, "The simple act of building healthy families in churches where marriage with children is the norm will be increasingly countercultural in [our world]. Yet doing this will demonstrate that it's not only possible but provides evidence of a different way for people to live their lives." [Renn, *Life in the Negative World*, 155-156]
 5. Renn also notes that, "In the early church, the attractiveness of the Christian lifestyle in contrast to the pagan one was, even by its pagan critics, cited as a factor in its spread." [157]
 6. There is good reason to believe that the same thing will happen in our cultural context.

- E. Our text has several things to say about what it looks like to behave as citizens worthy of the gospel.
1. First, it means being people of holy character.
 2. This is implied by Paul's allusion to our heavenly citizenship.
 3. We are to conduct ourselves as those who belong, not to this present evil age, but to the kingdom of God.
 4. When we do this we adorn the gospel, presenting Christ's kingdom in an attractive and desirable light.
- F. Second, behaving as citizens worthy of the gospel means being united with our fellow believers in standing firm for the gospel in the face of opposition.
1. Paul assumes that the world will oppose Christians.
 2. But he does not tell us to bend over backwards to maintain a winsome stance toward those who oppose us.
 3. He does not reason that perhaps if people see how inoffensive we are they will at some point be open to hearing about the gospel.
 4. No, Paul tells us to stand firm and strive for the Christian faith.
 5. While we should not go out of our way to be offensive, our first priority is to be faithful to Christ and not compromise our faith in any way.
- G. We should note, by the way, that Paul was not speaking about hypothetical opposition here.
1. He knew firsthand what it was like to be a Christian in the city of Philippi.

2. He was thrown in prison there after he cast a demon out of a female slave who was being used to tell people's fortunes.
 3. Paul was jailed for doing something good.
 4. The church in Philippi had to deal with that kind of hostility, and Paul wanted them to stand together for the sake of the gospel.
- H. This also teaches us something important about the nature of true Christian unity.
1. Some people pit Christian unity against a concern for sound doctrine.
 2. They contend that it is divisive to be too concerned about doctrine.
 3. But Paul says that we are to strive side by side for "the faith of the gospel."
 4. You cannot strive for the faith if you do not care about what you believe and why you believe it.
 5. As J. Gresham Machen once wrote, "Indifferentism about doctrine makes no heroes of the faith." [*Christianity and Liberalism*, 51]
 6. We are called to contend for the content of what we believe.

III. Encouragement to Live as Citizens of Heaven

- A. This brings us to the second half of our passage, which begins in verse 28.
1. Here Paul shifts from exhortation to encouragement.
 2. As Paul writes about the opposition that the church in Philippi is facing, he urges them not to be frightened.

3. Have you ever noticed how often you find statements like this in the Bible?
 4. The Lord told Joshua, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." (Josh. 1:9)
 5. Jesus told his disciples, "Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." (Jn. 14:27)
 6. Paul asked the Ephesians to pray that he would continue to proclaim the gospel boldly. (Eph. 6:20)
 7. He urged Timothy to "not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord." (2 Tim. 1:8)
 8. And in the book of Revelation, Jesus tells the church in Smyrna, "Do not fear what you are about to suffer." (Rev. 2:10)
 9. Our Lord knows that fear is a real temptation for us.
 10. He knows that we are tempted to let the world intimidate us into compromising or keeping quiet about our faith.
 11. We need to pray for boldness, trusting the Lord when he tells us that he "gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control." (2 Tim. 1:7)
- B. Paul also encourages the Philippians by telling them that their steadfastness in the face of opposition is a twofold sign.
1. On the one hand, it is a sign of destruction for those who set themselves against Christ's church.
 2. In opposing Christ's people, the world is opposing Christ.
 3. This was made clear at Paul's conversion, when Jesus confronted him by saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (Acts

9:4)

4. Even though it was Christians whom Paul was persecuting, Jesus said Paul was persecuting him.
 5. Jesus said this because he is united to his people.
 6. He is the head and we are the body.
 7. Those who oppose the church are opposing Christ.
 8. And those who persist in opposing Christ will experience eternal destruction.
 9. As it says in Psalm 2, such people will be broken with a rod of iron and dashed to pieces like a potter's vessel.
- C. The flip-side of the twofold sign that Paul mentions in verse 28 is that our faithfulness in the midst of opposition is a sign of our salvation.
1. The fact that we face such opposition testifies that we do not belong to the world, but to Christ.
 2. As Jesus said to his disciples in John 15, "If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." (Jn. 15:19)
 3. We need to remember those words.
 4. They will help us remember that it is an honor to suffer for Christ.
- D. This brings us to verse 29, where Paul offers further encouragement by speaking of two things that have been granted to us by God.
1. First, he says that it has been granted to us to believe in Christ.

2. This is one of the most explicit statements in all of Scripture that faith is not something that we produce but is a gift from God.
 3. Of course, we are the ones who do the believing when we trust in Christ for our salvation.
 4. God does not believe for us.
 5. But our ability to believe is something that is freely bestowed upon us by God's grace.
 6. We cannot generate faith by our own power.
 7. This is why a Christian has absolutely no grounds for boasting.
 8. You are not better than your non-Christian neighbors who have heard the gospel numerous times but have refused to respond to it with faith and repentance.
 9. The only reason why you believe and they don't is because God has granted it to you to believe.
- E. The second thing that Paul says God has granted us is that we should suffer for Christ's sake.
1. It might seem strange to think of suffering for our faith as a gift from God, but this is what the Bible tells us.
 2. We see this in the book of Acts, where Luke tells us that the apostles rejoiced "that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name." (Acts 5:41)
 3. Now, this does not mean that we should actively seek out opposition by being obnoxious in how we go about sharing our faith.
 4. Nor does it mean that we should lose sight of the fact that the hostility that Christians face in our culture pales in comparison

with what some of our fellow believers experience in other parts of the world.

5. It simply means we should not be surprised when our faith in Christ is looked upon with scorn by our unbelieving neighbors.
 6. It is an honor to suffer for Christ.
 7. And God has a good purpose in such suffering, as well as in all the forms of suffering that he ordains for his saints.
 8. As Sinclair Ferguson reminds us, "Suffering is the friction which polishes our graces. Without it we would be all the poorer as reflectors of the image of [God's] Son." [36]
- F. Our passage concludes with Paul giving one final word of encouragement, telling the Philippians that they are engaged in the same conflict that they saw he had.
1. They saw Paul being persecuted for Christ's sake when he was in Philippi.
 2. They saw how God used that persecution to bring a jailer and his entire household to saving faith in Christ.
 3. What an encouragement it was for them to hear Paul say that they are participating in the very same battle that he was fighting.
 4. As a Christian, you too are engaged in this conflict.
 5. It seems likely that there are going to be more and more instances where Christians in our culture experience opposition because of our faith.
 6. As we prepare ourselves for this, we need to remember that one of the signs that our true citizenship is in God's kingdom and not in the kingdoms of this world is our commitment to stand firm for the

gospel as we live in a world that is opposed to it.

IV. Conclusion

- A. In his classic book *Holiness*, J.C. Ryle reminds us that “true Christianity is a fight... The true Christian is called to be a soldier, and must behave as such from the day of his conversion to the day of his death. He is not meant to live a life of religious ease, indolence, and security.” [51-52]
- B. Make sure that there is some ‘fight’ in your religion.
- C. Remember that you are a citizen of a better country than any of the countries of this world.
- D. Don’t worry if the world does not find you worthy of its approval.
- E. Follow the example of the apostle Paul, who lived “not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.” (1 Thess. 2:4)