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## Citizens of Heaven Philippians 1:27-30

**Intro:** Last time, we looked at Paul's statement in vs21. Far from denying or even ignoring his present difficult circumstances, Paul declares that no matter what the outcome is, if he lives it is Christ and if he dies – even better. Paul has lived his life in such a way that continued life means continued opportunity for ministry, ministry that was still necessary for Philippian believers as it was for all others. But, if he were to give his life for the gospel, then that would be a net gain for him. Life insurance policies all come with death benefits but these benefits will only be given to the survivors, by design – that's what life insurance is for. But the death benefits that are associated with faith in Jesus Christ can only be received and enjoyed by the individual who has placed their faith in Jesus Christ.

The death benefits Christians will enjoy are freedom from evil, likeness to Christ and eternal union with Him. Now, we all may look forward with great longing for that eventual union but for now, like Paul, we must live our lives for the benefit of others. True, death holds benefits for believers but they were never intended to allow us to cop out on the duties of this life. Noticed how practical considerations always follow the mention of this subject in Scripture. John concludes his amazing promise that we will be like Jesus by stating that “everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:2-3). The great chapter on the resurrection, 1 Cor 15, closes with these words: (58). It's the same in our text. No sooner has Paul declared that death is gain than he turns back to those who are still in his charge. In a few brief words he acknowledges that if in God's wisdom he remains in this life, then that is more needful for others (25-26).

So it must be with us. We must lift our minds to consider the joys of heaven, but if we see them correctly then we will also turn back again to those who still need to see our life in Christ and hear our witness for Him. If you were ever a fan of comic books and/or the movies they have produced, you may be familiar with a principle that old Uncle Ben relayed to his nephew Peter Parker before he died: “With great power comes great responsibility.” It is a wonderful sentiment that is, sadly, so rarely seen in society today. Of course, we're not here to promote comic book theology but there is a similar

principle that is seen in Scripture, most notably in our text today. The principle is not actually stated as much as it is implied. The idea is that privilege comes with responsibility.

**27** – The principle Paul’s stating here is that Christians are to live worthy of their spiritual possessions. This doesn’t mean that we are to live in such a way that we are worthy to receive these spiritual blessings because that would be impossible. Christians do not hold their spiritual possessions in Christ through any virtue of our own. What we have received in Christ we have received from Him who is the King of kings. But having received it, we must now live worthy of our calling. Old things from the old life are to be put away; all things are to be new.

Paul has mentioned the privileges Christians have in Christ. Now he speaks of their obligations. Are they fulfilling their duties as Christians? Do they stand together against increasing opposition? Are they faithful in prayer? Do they draw together in love, their fellowship being enriched by the Holy Spirit? Are they one in mind and purpose? If these things are so, then Paul has cause for rejoicing. They are mature Christians, their conduct is worthy of their calling.

How much do we need this emphasis on Christian conduct! There’s probably never been a time in history when true Christians have lived more like the world and have demonstrated so little of the high standards of the Christian faith. This is unbiblical and inexcusable. It must be resisted in the only way possible to resist it—in the way you live your life. Privilege implies responsibilities. If we’ve been called by Christ, we must now live worthy of that calling.

Paul teaches this by using a word that is difficult to properly translate into English. It’s the Greek word *politeuo*, from the root noun *polis*: city. In the classical age the polis was the largest political unit; the Greek belonged to it like we belong to a country. So, the noun refers to citizenship; the verb means “to conduct oneself worthily as a citizen of the city-state.” But, even city-state falls short of the true meaning of what Paul’s saying.

In Greek eyes the polis was more than a state. Today, you can live in a city and feel no attachment to it. You can be a citizen of a country and not participate in its government or public life. This wasn’t possible for citizens

of a Greek polis. The polis was his life. Its laws and customs were part of his being. He knew all about the city, and knew practically all its inhabitants. The polis demanded his complete loyalty, and he gave it willingly. It was the best thing in life. It defined his life! And, although the polis was made up of individuals – it didn't belong to just one person. The idea that governed the polis was that of community: the affairs of one member are the affairs of all. It was this very concept of the city-state that led to the uproar against Paul at Ephesus and in other cities of the empire.

All of this directly points to the responsibility of Christians. When Paul says the Philippian believers are to conduct themselves worthily as citizens, he's not thinking of the literal city where they live. He's talking about the church and his challenge points to their mutual responsibilities as members of that local Christian community. Is the polis a state? So is the church. Thus, Christians are to work within the organization. Is the polis people? So is the church. Thus, we're to respect individual contributions. Is the polis a living community? The church is too. Thus, Christians should share a common life and contribute to each other's well-being as living members of Christ's body.

Of course, there are always problems when Christians forget any of these aspects. When Christians forget they're part of a Christian state, however loosely it may be structured, then the right of the individual conscience reigns supreme and each person does what is right in their own eyes (**Judges**). When the organization dominates, the individual is ignored, and it takes a Reformation to reestablish the direct relationship between a believer and God. When the community aspect is obscured, believers lose concern for one another and neglect the insights other Christians have. Paul didn't want the Philippians to forget any of these aspects of church and neither should we. Knowing we are members of a living community of which Jesus Christ is head and being conscious of our common life together, we are to live lives worthy of our calling. We're to live as members of Christ's body.

Remember, Philippi enjoyed a privileged relationship to Rome. After the final battle of Roman civil war in 31.B.C. a number of Roman soldiers were settled there. So, Philippi obtained special recognition as a Roman colony. Citizens became Romans. Roman law guided the local administration. Philippi adopted Roman customs. Any city in the empire would give their right arm to achieve this status. So, the Philippians were proud of their identity as Romans.

This is why the phrase let your conduct be worthy of the gospel is so significant. Paul knew how proud the Philippians were of their earthly citizenship. He knew they allowed it to affect not only the laws of their city but also their social customs and the daily conduct of their lives. How much more then were they to be proud of their citizenship in heaven! This was the greater citizenship. They were to cherish and live by its laws and customs. Plus, they were to extend the influence of this commonwealth in the midst of a pagan and spiritually hostile environment (franchise).

We are to do the same. None of us have ever been members of a Greek city-state, or anything like it. We've never known Roman citizenship. But, we do have a citizenship...in heaven (3:20). We were like Abraham, a foreigner in a distant land. But God called us to be citizens of heaven. Now, we travel in a strange land but we're a citizen of a city whose builder and maker is God (Heb 11:10). Being citizens of heaven, we're to live by the laws of that citizenship. We are to adopt the customs and culture of heaven in preference over those of the world around us.

Here, Paul points to 2 practical expressions of proper Christian conduct; expressions that logically result from our heavenly citizenship. How do you live as a citizen of heaven? 1<sup>st</sup>, Paul says that we're to stand fast in one spirit; 2<sup>nd</sup>, with one mind we're to strive together for the advancement of the gospel.

The first distinguishing mark of Christian conduct is unity. We're to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:3). Christians are not to divide along doctrinal or sociological lines. They are to be one. Sadly, evangelical churches aren't known for standing together, hardly. Instead of honestly attempting to join hands across all barriers (denominational, racial, cultural) for the furtherance of the gospel, Christians all too often seek to tear down those who don't agree with them even on the most insignificant matters. Not only does this dishonor Christ, it hinders the spread of the gospel. Instead of division, Christians should practice a unity that's visible and has practical results.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> practical expression of true Christian conduct flows naturally from the 1<sup>st</sup>. If believers conduct themselves in a way that leads to Christian unity, then this will also lead them to strive together to advance the gospel.

The result will be an aggressive Christianity. The Philippian Christians knew what it meant to stand fast as Romans at the frontiers of the Roman world. They knew it was their obligation to advance Roman rule in the face of barbarism. In a similar but greater way, Paul would have them united for an aggressive advancement of the faith.

Oh, how we need to grab hold of an aggressive faith today! In too many places in western society, Christians have retreated into spiritual ghettos, content so long as they're safe and their children never wander beyond the borders. Some wash their hands of all involvement in community and national life. Some rejoice in the rise of lawlessness and immorality, believing that all these things must happen before the Lord returns. But, no one anticipated the Lord's quick return more than Paul, and yet, no one did more than he did to claim the world for Christ. So must we and do so more and more as we see the hour of His return coming. We must carry the battle for human souls beyond the confines of the churches into the world around us.

The early Christians didn't look around in dismay and say: 'Look what the world has come to.' They looked around in delight and said, 'Look what has come to the world.' They didn't just see the ruin of society; they saw the resources for rebuilding that ruin. They didn't just see that sin abounded; they saw that grace did much more abound. On this truth the pivot of history swung from despair and fatalism to faith and confidence that finally sin had met its match, that something new had come into the world, not just here and there, but on a wide scale, humanity could attain to what had always been impossible before—goodness. Is this possible today? Every Christian should believe that it is and should unite to affect an aggressive proclamation of the gospel. This is 1 aspect of proper Christian conduct.

**28-30** – In his discussion of Christian conduct, a thought (or sequence) inserted itself into Paul's thought process. Now, while it's true that life is just a long sequence of events, there are certain sequences that happen so regularly in life that it's impossible to think of one without thinking of the other. In the area of finance: if your outgo exceeds your income then your upkeep will become your downfall. In relationships: 1<sup>st</sup> comes love; then comes marriage... In the same way, sequences are found in spiritual truths. Sin brings death. Blessing follows obedience. Faithfulness in small things leads to faithfulness in many things, etc. Another important sequence is

seen in the conclusion of **ch1**. Paul launches into a parenthetical statement in **28-30** and doesn't return to the theme of Christian conduct until **ch2**.

The sequence is simply this: Wherever Christians live as they ought to live in this world, where they live righteous lives and aggressively seek to spread the gospel, when that occurs, there will be persecution. This is true for all Christians. If you bear a proper witness for Jesus as God intends for you to, there will be persecution. It won't always be physical persecution but you will suffer persecution of some sort. It's just the natural result of your confession.

Sometimes it will be ridicule by the crowd. In the area of morality, we should always seek to do what is right by God's standard, not what's popular or acceptable by the world's standard. Christians must stand up and be counted when there's a clear-cut moral issue but, be advised, the world will hate you for it. Sometimes our Christian conduct will lead to persecution in business or employment. It could be something as mild as being shunned by potential customers, business partners or co-workers or as bad as losing a job or a business.

Of course, the greatest example of persecution suffered for the sake of righteousness is Jesus. He came into the world as the Light of the world. But the world was in darkness. Where there's darkness, people do the works of darkness and they don't want their deeds to be brought to light because they are evil. When Jesus appeared, His life cut like a knife into the human conscience. People could get along with hypocrisy between one another, because they're similar in their hypocrisy; but when Jesus stood in their midst, He exposed the hypocrisy and they hated Him for it. People could get away with pride, dishonesty, sexual perversion and legalism among themselves, but they couldn't do it in Jesus' presence. In the end, those who adamantly rejected His standards eventually crucified Him.

It's often the same with Christians today. Christ is the Light of the world and in a way those who follow Him are to be lights *in* the world. Jesus said, He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life (**Jn 8:12**). If you have believed in Christ, if you've committed your life to Him, then that light and life should be manifested in you. The world should see it. And where it shines out the brightest, there will be persecution. Have you experienced ridicule or prejudice for Christ's sake? If so, realize that God

knows it and permits it. Plus, you're to receive the persecution as a gift from God and know that God is accomplishing His purposes in it. That's one aspect of God's sovereignty.

Now here, you may be asking: Why does God allow persecution? What is its purpose? Paul gives 2 good reasons. 1) It's a proof of salvation for the Christian. 2) It's a proof of destruction to the one who fails to believe. This word is shown as token, omen or sign in other translations. In each case the idea is of an undeniable manifestation of reality. It's not possible for a Christian to stand firm under persecution and for the world to dismiss it as nothing. It is evidence of a supernatural power. Consequently, it's as much a token of salvation to the Christian as it is a token of destruction to those who refuse to believe. We see this in several areas of Scripture.

In [Mt 27:54](#), at the moment Jesus died, the earth quaked and the rocks were rent and the attending centurion in charge of the execution detail exclaimed, "Truly, this was the Son of God." It wasn't just the earthquake that prompted this response, it was the way Jesus endured His suffering. In [Acts 4](#), when John and Peter were first arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin, the Jews believed the threat of harsh punishment would be enough to shut them up but the courage and boldness of these 2 Apostles caused them to realize that they had been with Jesus ([13b](#)).

In the face of persecution, Christians are to believe that they are indestructible because, in fact, they are. Human character by itself can dissolve under the persecution of life. That is why many today are disheartened and even ruined by life. Christians are to be made of sterner stuff. They're to endure in the face of temptation and persevere in the face of persecution. Besides, the very fact that they endure is evidence that God has done a supernatural work in their hearts. It's evidence to the Christian as well as to the unbelievers. The Christian who endures will be rewarded by God for their submission to His will but the unbeliever who refused to believe in spite of the divine power evident in the persecuted believer will be judged more harshly for what they saw and knew to be true.

Maybe God will call you to bear a testimony of Him that will result in persecution. You may do it quietly and no one may hear of your witness. No one will know of your courage. God will know and your witness will go down in the books of eternity as evidence that you were a Christian who lived as

God called you to live and who bore the testimony God called you to bear. History will bear out that the things spoken by you were true, and your conduct will be vindicated.

If you will see persecution from that perspective then you'll see it for what it really is: a gift from the hand of God. Paul refers to persecution as a gift twice in these last verses of [ch1](#). He says it's a sign of salvation and that from God ([28](#)), and he says that for to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ . . . to suffer for His sake ([29](#)). Given by God as proof or a token of His grace! This is how persecution should be received by Christians.

Paul seems to have painted us into a corner. As believers, we're to live up to our positions as citizens of heaven and, if we do, we'll not only be united in spreading the gospel but aggressive in it as well. But, an aggressive witness for Christ will result in persecution of some sort. Never fear, this persecution will be undeniable proof of your salvation and convicting evidence for the unsaved. The persecution will be real but so is our limited opportunity to share the gospel. The age of God's grace being extended to the world is rapidly coming to an end. We don't have as much time as we like to think. The Lord will be returning soon. Let's not be caught standing around with our hands in our pockets. We must diligently and earnestly be about our Father's business. 😊