

E. The Marks of the Great Christian Church, (Philippians 1:27-

Intro: (Setting) Paul was in prison. He was facing a capital crime.

- There was a big chance he might be executed. He did not think so, but there was a possibility.
- He was not sure if he would ever see the Philippian church again, so he sat down and began to write to them.

What would you say if you were writing to a group of God's people for the last time?

- One of the subjects that concerned Paul was the subject of this passage: **The marks of a great church.** The Philippian church was a great church, and Paul wanted it to remain great.
- Therefore, he reviewed with them the marks of a great Christian church.

1. Mark 1 for a Great Church: Christian conduct/Heavenly Citizenship

Philippians 1:27 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;

A/V... Only one thing concerns me: **Be sure that you live in a way that brings honor** to the Good News of Christ. Then whether I come and visit you or am away from you, I will hear that you are standing strong with one purpose, that you work together as one for the faith of the Good News,

- The word "*conversation*" or "*conduct*" is significant.
- Usually, when the NT refers to behavior/conduct, it uses a word meaning how a person should walk about day by day.

But Paul switches the word in writing to the Philippians. Why? The reason is significant.

- As stated in the introductory material, Philippi was a proud Roman colony.
- In fact, it was famous as a miniature Rome. A city became a Roman colony by one of two ways.
- At first Rome founded colonies throughout the outer reaches of the Empire to keep the peace and to guard against invasions from barbaric hordes.
- Veteran soldiers, ready for retirement, were usually granted citizenship if they would go out and settle these colonies.
- The distinctive thing about these colonies was their fanatic loyalty to Rome.
- The citizens kept all their Roman ties: The Roman language, titles, customs, affairs, and dress.
- They refused to allow any infiltration of local influence whatsoever.
- They totally rejected the influence of the world around them.
- They were Roman colonists within an alien environment.

This is the reason Paul uses the Greek word "politeuesthe" for conversation.

- It means conduct and behavior, but more accurately it means the conduct and behavior of citizenship, of a person who is the citizen of a great nation.
- The Philippian church knew exactly what Paul was saying: they were citizens of heaven.

Therefore, they must...keep their close ties with heaven.

- Speak the clean and pure language of heaven.
- Bear the title of heaven, Christian, and do so proudly.
- Bear witness to the customs of heaven. Carry on the affairs of heaven.
- Dress as a citizen of heaven. Allow no infiltration of worldly influence whatsoever.

- Live and conduct themselves as a heavenly colony within a polluted and dying environment.

1 Timothy 4:12 Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

2. Mark 2 for a Great Church: Honoring the Gospel.

Philippians 1:27 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;

A/V... Only one thing concerns me: Be sure that you live in a way **that brings honor to the Good News of Christ**. Then whether I come and visit you or am away from you, I will hear that you are standing strong with one purpose, that you work together as one for the faith of the Good News,

- The word "becometh" or worthy means to fit, correspond, be suitable, be worthy.

The believer's behavior is to... fit the gospel he professes.

- Correspond to the gospel he professes.
- Be suitable to the gospel he professes.
- Be worthy of the gospel he professes.

No church and no believer within the church is to bring dishonor to the gospel.

- If a person professes the gospel, he is to live worthy of the gospel.
- His conduct and behavior is to fit and correspond to the gospel he professes.

Illus: We often say that some piece of clothing is becoming to a person.

- What we mean is that the clothing matches and enhances the person's looks and personality.
- The same with the gospel of Christ. If we put on the gospel, we are to wear the gospel.

Scripture declares:

Titus 2:10 Not purloining (stealing), but shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

Colossians 3:8-10 But now ye also put off (like clothing) all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. ⁹ Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; ¹⁰ And have put on the new *man*, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:

Colossians 3:12-14 Put on (like clothes) therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; ¹³ Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also *do ye*. ¹⁴ And above all these things *put on* charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

3. Mark 3 for a Great Church: Standing Fast

Philippians 1:27 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;

- Remember that Paul was in prison, awaiting trial on a false capital charge.
- He thought he would be released, but he was not absolutely sure.
- Paul knew that there was a needed exhortation... **the exhortation to stand fast.**

1. The church must stand fast in unity: "**in one spirit, with one mind.**"

- One spirit means that all the members of a church must be born again by the Spirit of Christ.
- All members must have a renewed spirit from the same source, from the same Person.
- They must all be committed to the Lord Jesus Christ. They must all have a heart given to Him.
- One mind means that all members must be set upon the same purpose; they must all be focused upon the purpose of Jesus Christ.

The point is this: the world—its people, families, and nations—may be split and divided, arguing and differing, fussing and feuding, fighting and divorcing, warring and killing, seeking and grasping; but the church is not to live that way.

- The church is to be unified; it is to be one in spirit and one in mind; one in heart and one in purpose.

1 Corinthians 1:10 Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

1 Peter 3:8 Finally, *be* ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, *be* pitiful, *be* courteous:

2. The church must stand fast in striving together for the faith of the gospel.

Phil 1:17...that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind **striving together** for the faith of the gospel;

- The word "striving together" is the word taken from an athletic contest.
- It is the picture of a team working and struggling together against strong opposition (compare a football team).
- The church—every member of it—is to strive for the faith of the gospel: strive, work, struggle, push, exert all the energy possible; everyone cooperating together, not a single person letting up or turning aside or walking off the field.
- The opposition is difficult; therefore, the faith of the gospel needs every member working and struggling together.

4. Mark 4 of a Great Church: Courage and Fearlessness

Philippians 1:28-30 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. 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; ³⁰ Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear *to be* in me.

A/V... and that you are not afraid of those who are against you. All of this is proof that your enemies will be destroyed but that you will be saved by God. ²⁹ God gave you the honor not only of believing in Christ but also of suffering for him, both of which bring glory to Christ.

- Being a Christian believer in a corrupt world is hard.
- People oppose our stand for Christ and righteousness.

It may be next door, in the office, at school or a hundred other places—the Christian believer is sometimes...

- Avoided, ignored, ridiculed, mocked, neglected, overlooked, isolated, by-passed, cursed, slandered, persecuted, abused, mistreated, imprisoned and even killed.

Note the exhortation: We are not to be terrified by our adversaries. There are four reasons why.

1. **Persecution is a sign that the persecutors are doomed.** And note: it is a sign to them.
 - The Spirit of God is able to take their persecution of us and convict their hearts of the evil they are doing.
 - Their persecution of a fellow human being strikes the fact of doom and judgment to their hearts: it convicts them, and by that conviction they stand a better chance of being saved.
2. **Persecution is a sign of salvation for us.** Of course, it is not the only sign, but it is one sign.
 - If a believer stands fast in persecution, it is a clear sign that he is being strengthened by the Spirit of God and is a true believer.
3. **Persecution is a privilege, not a terror.**
 - When we are persecuted, we are suffering for Christ, the Sovereign Majesty of the universe.
 - Christ is not some insignificant rebel, some leader of men hiding out in some remote spot who embarrasses us and of whom we should be ashamed.
 - Christ is the Son of God, the Lord of lords, the God of the universe, the Sovereign Majesty of all.
 - It is a privilege to be numbered among His followers and to represent Him.
 - If we happen to be cornered by some who oppose and rebel against Him, we are not to deny Him, nor be ashamed to own His name.
4. **Paul (and others) had left the church a dynamic example to follow in bearing persecution.**
 - Paul had been arrested, beaten, and jailed when he was in Philippi; and the church had witnessed the whole scene.
 - He bore it all for Christ.
 - Therefore, we are to follow in his steps and bear whatever persecution is launched against us—all for Christ.
 - The great Christian soldier can bear it—through the presence and power of Christ—bear it as a great Christian soldier for Christ.

John 15:20 Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.

1 Peter 4:12-14 Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: ¹³ But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. ¹⁴ f ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy *are* ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.