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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“A WORTHY MANNER”
Philippians 1:27-30

Our civilization is in flux. The rate of change is as fast as it has ever been. Problems we thought were solved decades ago have resurfaced. Convictions we assumed to be indisputable are being questioned, modified, discarded.

The institutional Church used to hold a favored place. Not anymore! Organized Christianity has lost much of its former prestige, privilege, and power.

Many believers are afraid. I hear them asking, *what will become of us?*

‡ I urge us to ponder a different question, one that is more fruitful and ultimately more important: *what will we become?*

Will we be a faithful presence in the world, or will we withdraw from it? Will we try to dominate, or will we seek to serve? Will we attempt to marginalize and dehumanize our opponents, or will we pray for them and reach out to them?

If only this was as easy as it sounds! Carrying the cross is neither simple nor safe.

‡ Then there is the challenge of discerning what is best in a given situation. How can we hear the Lord amidst the cacophony of competing voices? How can we see his path when there are so many alternate routes?

□ Please turn with me to Philippians 1:27-30.

■ Verse 27 begins, **“Whatever happens...”**

📖 That is how the NIV translates the Greek *μόνον* [mónon] here. A better rendering might be, **“Just one thing!”** or **“The important thing is this,”** or as the NRSV has it, **“Only.”**

Movov signifies that what comes next is of utmost concern. It supersedes all other priorities. It is our prime directive, the one thing every Christ Follower is called to do wherever we are, whenever we are, regardless of our circumstances.

■ And what are we called to do? Verse 27a: **“as citizens of heaven live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”**

The important thing is this: As those whose home is in the presence of the Living God, honor the Good News of his Son in word and deed.

{Rev 11:15} Just one thing! The kingdom of God is our home country. {MSG} **“Live in such a way that you are a credit to the Message of”** the Messiah.

‡ But what is **“the gospel of Christ”**?

📖 {Rev 11:15} The Gospel is the Good News that **“The kingdom of the world [is becoming] the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever.”**

📖 {II Co 5:29} It is the Good News that **“in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself ... not counting people’s sins against them.”**

📖 {Lk 7:22} It is the Good News that in Christ **“the blind [see], the lame walk, [the lepers] are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the [Gospel] is preached to the poor.”**

📖 {Rev 5:9-10} It is the Good News that Christ **“was slain, and with [his] blood [he] purchased... [some from] every tribe ... language ... people and nation ... to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God.”**

📖 {Eph 4:22-24} It is the Good News that **“in Christ”** we are empowered to **“put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”**

📖 {Mt 22:37; Mic 6:8} It is the Good News that in Christ we are equipped to **“love the Lord our God with all”** our being and **“our neighbor as”** ourselves, as we **“act justly ... love mercy, and ... walk humbly with [our] God.”**

📖 {Ro 6:5} It is the Good News that Jesus died and rose again and **“if we have been united with him in a death like his we will ... also be united with him in a resurrection like his.”**

📖 {Rev 21:4} It is the Good News that when Christ returns **“The old order of things [will pass] away”** and **“There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.”**

That – and more – is **“the Gospel of Christ”!**

■ **“The important thing is this:”** Think, speak, and relate in harmony with the spirit and substance of the Good News. Be conformed to the content and essence of the Gospel.

Be a living sign of the Son of God. Be a walking, talking revelation of who Jesus is and what he is about. **“Live in a manner worthy of [this] gospel.”**

? And what is a **“worthy” “manner”?**

★ {Mt 28:19-20} In general terms it is living out the Great Commandments of love and fulfilling the Great Commission to **“make disciples of all nations...”**

However, no one exists “in general terms.” We are specific individuals, in specific places, at specific times, in specific conditions. We need specific details!

★ The Savior meets our need with his teachings, above all the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters 5-7. His message there is an in-depth outline of the principles and practices of *αγαπη* [agapē] love.

★ Likewise, he demonstrates the essential qualities of love in his earthly relationships and actions, which are described in the Gospels. In addition, Paul lists some of those qualities in the Love Chapter, First Corinthians 13.

And that is not all! The apostle adds further detail in today’s text.

☆ First, a worthy manner is marked by steadfastness.

■ **“Only,” “live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then,”** verse 27b, **“I will know that you *stand firm* in the one Spirit...”**

{Mt 26:56} What did the other disciples do when Jesus was arrested? They **“all... deserted him and fled.”** None of them stood **“firm”!**

God is gracious! The apostles came back to the Lord and we can too. Still, to abandon him or give him lip service while acting against his gospel, is unworthy.

✎ How can we be steadfast when the ground shifts beneath our feet? We “**stand firm**” in Christ by faithfully hearing and doing his word.

{Mt 7:24-25} The Lord Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount with this parable:

“Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.”

☆ Second, a worthy manner is marked by active collaboration in the Gospel.

■ **“Only,” “live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ...”** verse 27c, **“*striving together with one accord*”** – literally, **“with one soul”** – **“for the faith of the gospel.”**

“Striving” and **“together[ness]”** are equally indispensable. Salvation is received individually, experienced communally. Discipleship is taken on personally, carried out publicly. Spiritual gifts are bestowed separately, exercised together.

{Php 2:12-13} As for striving, we **“work out [our] salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in [us] to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.”**

{Eph 4:4-6} As for **“together[ness],”** **“There is one body and one Spirit. Just as [we] were called to one**

hope when [we] were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all...”

✎ How can we be actively united for Christ? We **“[strive] together”** by making the Gospel the center of our shared life, ministry, and mission.

☆ Third, a worthy manner is marked by courage.

■ Verse 28a: **“Only, live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ...”** **“*without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.*”**

{NLT} **“Don’t be intimidated by your enemies,”** {Msg} don’t flinch and dodge before them. The emphasis here is on conduct. Feeling afraid might, or might not, be wrong; acting out of fear instead of faith is wrong.

✎ How can we be courageous? We grow bold by fearing God and loving our enemies.

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). Righteous fear of the LORD is humble awe. It is trembling reverence before his magnificence, beauty, power, eternity, and holiness.

Fear of the Living God dispels our fear of the enemy. So do words and deeds of $\alpha\gamma\alpha\pi\eta$ [agap $\acute{\epsilon}$] love, for **“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear”** (First John 4:18).

■ Verse 28b: All **“This”** (our worthy manner) **“is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved – and that by God.”**

{II Co 2:15-16, NLT} As Paul writes elsewhere, **“to those who are being saved we are a life-giving perfume”** but **“to those who are perishing we are a fearful smell of death and doom.”**

It should go without saying that we take no pleasure in anyone’s **“doom”** – not if the heart of Jesus beats within us. Just the opposite! We witness, pray, and live so that our enemies might turn and live.

■ Finally, verses 29-30: **“It has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, ³since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.”**

{Ro 8:17} **“It has been granted to you”** is the language of gift, of grace, of underserved kindness and mercy. In and of itself, suffering is not a gift (though the Lord often blesses us within it). Still suffering **“on behalf of Christ”** is always a gift, for if **“we share in his sufferings”** we will **“also share in his glory.”**

‽ These are perilous days! What will we become?

■ **“Whatever happens, as citizens of heaven”** let us **“live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”**

Philippians 1:27-30 is the word of the Lord.