

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (7-4-1991 Cleland Baptist Church)

Philippians 1:27

Additional Bible Reading: Psalms 15 & 19

Introduction

Now there is a change in the letter. So far Paul has been talking about himself – his circumstances, feelings towards his readers, prayers, what life means to him, and what death means to him. If he had his choice, he would prefer to be with Christ, for this is far better. But for the sake of the Christians at Philippi, it was necessary for him to stay to help and encourage them in their Christian work. But whatever happened, whether he went or stayed, whether he was put to death or spared, he wanted them to remember the supreme importance of this – **Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ** (Philippians 1:27). The quality of their Christian life was crucial and vital.

Paul states here two great principles of Christian living, which we are going to look at and then see why they are so important. It is the practice of the New Testament (and in this it is different from the Old Testament, where the laws given are more precise) to lay down basic principles and guidelines, which can be applied to all kinds of situations. Scripture does not prescribe detailed rules and regulations for every situation in which we may find ourselves. There are hundreds of situations we face each day for which we cannot quote chapter and verse with detailed rules. But there are basic guiding principles which we can apply. There is no “chapter and verse” for every word and action. We get into ridiculous situations if we expect to find them.

Guidelines are given for us to adapt to our situation. Use sanctified common sense and direction of the Holy Spirit in practising them.

Conduct yourselves

πολιτευεσθε is an important and interesting word. Normally when Paul is describing the Christian life he uses περι ποτεω, as in **walk worthy of the Gospel** (Ephesians 4:1), **Walk in newness of life** (Romans 6:4), **Walk by faith** (2 Corinthians 5:7), and **Walk in the Spirit** (Galatians 5:16). But here is another word for living the Christian life, and the emphasis here is to behave yourself as citizens. Live as citizens of God’s kingdom.

Philippi was a special place, a colony of the great city of Rome, a settlement of veterans, who tried to make their city like a little Rome, though it was a long way away. They dressed like Romans, spoke Latin like the Romans, and were governed by Roman laws. In other words, in the Roman colony of Philippi, they behaved as though they were actually in Rome, living like Roman citizens as much as they could.

So Paul’s argument was to Christians, whose real home was heaven. They belonged to God’s city, so they were to live on earth as citizens of heaven. Just as they lived and acted like Roman citizens, though they were in Philippi, so they must live and act like citizens of God’s kingdom, though they were on earth. They were to turn the

place where they lived into a little colony of heaven, acting as though they were in heaven.

Our conduct must befit our citizenship. We do not belong to this world, we are like colonists, for we actually belong to another kingdom. Christians are unique, distinct and separate people. **Jesus Christ gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good** (Titus 2:14). We are in a separate position, distinct from the world that does not believe in Christ. We are not just men of the world who have added a bit to our lives, with our church-going and good-living. We do not belong to the world. We are colonists, whose true home is heaven. We belong to a different order, with different loyalties, different society, different jurisdiction. We must behave in a way which will reflect this.

People travelling to foreign countries used to take a pride in their home country, felt that the honour of their country rested on them, and did not want to let the side down. (We see the reverse of this in soccer hooligans abroad – bringing shame on their country in the eyes of foreigners.) Horatio Nelson's quote "England expects every man to do his duty" is still the motto of some today.

So to Christians Paul urges them not to let the side down. They are God's people, members of His kingdom, under His laws, and their citizenship is to be borne in mind. This is the principle to remember in our behaviour on earth. The good name of God's kingdom is in our hands. Christ's reputation is in our hands. The guiding principle about Christian conduct is that when we go here or go there, do this or do that, we live as citizens of God's kingdom. **I urge you, as aliens and strangers** (A.V. "strangers and pilgrims") **in the world, to abstain from sinful desires which war against your soul** (1 Peter 2:11-12). "Aliens and strangers" – people who do not belong. So we should not speak, act, have values, standards, outlook and interests of this world.

This is most difficult to do. We are a tiny minority, and everywhere we face the pressure to conform to the standards of this world. But we must remind ourselves every day that we are Christians now, we do not belong to the world, we belong to God, we are citizens of His kingdom, and we must live as that.

In a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ

Our conduct is determined by our relationship to God and in the light of what He has done for us, as is set out in the Gospel. What has the Gospel done?

In our past – sins forgiven, and redemption through Christ's atonement. We are not our own, but have been bought at a price. Delivered from lost eternity, taken from the clutches of the Devil, placed firmly on a rock. This is all of God's grace and mercy, we have not earned or deserved it. It all flows from the Cross – the agony and suffering and sin-bearing death of Christ.

In the present – through the Gospel we are new men and women. **If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come** (2 Corinthians 5:17). As new men and women we have a new outlook, new loyalty, new standards and new values, new tastes and new interests. All this is possible because we are

indwelt by a new power – the Holy Spirit dwells in us, and He gives us the power to live above sin, to overcome and defy it.

In the future – the Gospel assures us of a new hope for the future. Most people do not have a clue about what will happen to the world, what changes will take place, and about God’s intervention. They assume all will carry on as it always does, and hope for the best. But the Christian has his mind and sight set on Christ’s return, which may happen at any time. This exerts immense influence on his life, for he does not want to be ashamed when his Master comes back. This motivates him to say “no” to ungodliness and worldly passions, to live self-controlled, upright and godly life, while he waits for **that blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our God and Saviour Christ Jesus** (Titus 12-13). **Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself just as He is pure** (1 John 3:3).

So the Gospel speaks of forgiveness of the past through Christ’s death, transformed life in the present through His indwelling, and a glorious future with Him because of His return. This must influence our behaviour.

This is the second crucial principle to guide us in our choices and our behaviour. Is this or that worthy of the Gospel and Christ who died, indwells and is coming back for me?

*“You are writing a Gospel,
A chapter each day,
By the deeds that you do
And the words that you say.
Men read what you write
Whether faithful or true.
Just what is the Gospel
According to you?”*

Reasons why these principles are important

These two guiding principles are so important. Why? For several reasons – God’s calling and election, God’s will for us, gratitude for our salvation – and others besides. But we are going to concentrate on one other consideration. The most important weapon in spreading the Gospel is the lives of believers – not great sermons or brilliant books. It has always been so. Nothing so perfectly commends the Gospel of Christ as a practical demonstration of Christian living.

This was true in the early days, and is still true today. Because of the persecution of Christians recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, Christians were scattered abroad, and wherever they went they spread the good news of the Gospel by their lives and their testimonies. After New Testament times, pagan historians show that nothing influenced the ancient world more than the quality of life lived by these people. John Wesley said of the early Methodists, “Our people die well”. They also lived well!

When lives stand out like this, it always causes questions to be asked. Why are these people so different? What enables them to so live and die? People are not interested in mere theory, theology or dogma – but they are interested in life and the living. People

today faced with problems and troubles, as their ideas and philosophies break down, may be searching for answers. Are they going to find the answer in the Christian Gospel? That may depend on the life you are living before them. **You yourselves are our letter written on our hearts, known and read by everybody** (2 Corinthians 3:2). The best tract or literature in the world is no substitute for your own life. Let them see Christ in your behaviour. This will open up opportunities to speak of the Gospel to them.

N.B. If your life does not count for the Gospel, then it counts against the Gospel. People may think, “If that’s what Christianity is, I don’t want anything to do with it.” The worst enemies of the church are inconsistent Christians. The hindrance to the Gospel in many homes is inconsistent Christian parents, “brought up on a Bible and a bad temper”.

Conclusion

Whatever happens, above everything else, at all costs – **Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel.** Live as citizens of God’s kingdom, and do so in a way which will be worthy of the Gospel.

The world we live in is largely non-Christian, and we may feel weak and frustrated. We seem to make little impact. It is clear that there are many things we need. Revival above all – that is in the sovereign hands of God. But in the day of small things, the one great need is for the world to see the difference the Gospel makes to people. It is a power. We are not mere theorists and philosophers. Rather, we are in touch with God’s power. It affects the way we live, our outlook and values, the way we face trials and problems, our reactions to world events, outlook on death and future life. The world needs to know there is power in the Gospel.

In our workplace, our business, our profession and our home – **Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God** (Colossians 3:1). Then we shall be able to conduct ourselves – live as God’s citizens – in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ.