

Normal Christian Living, p.2

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All right, I've entitled this exposition "Normal Christian Living." Uh, you could almost call it normal church life because, once again, while it certainly does address our individual lives and that's very important to God, he really narrows the focus in on acting normal as a family together, a church family, in your unity with one another and your relations to each other, but the context is how it's difficult in this antichrist world. It's difficult in a world where the Apostle Paul who, in effect, pastored this church, he's locked in prison and so he understands that to stand for the truth and to live for Christ has a cost and he's going to tell this church that's normal Christianity. Did you hear me, church? That's normal that your Christianity results in some opposition from the world. Sometimes it comes out of your marriage partner. Jesus said a man's enemies will be, uh, members of his own household. Sometimes it comes from that person you work with or in the neighborhood or young people at school. Young people, listen to me, if you live for Christ, people at school are going to be against you. But Paul's gonna say that's normal Christianity.

Um, let me give you this quick backdrop. Most of you know something of my testimony. I was converted at age 19 as a college freshman actually listening to a preacher on the radio driving back to college on a Sunday night. And, um, as I started to attend church, uh, I began to hear stuff like, um, "Well, boy, that person's really sold out. Now they're really committed. Now they're really faithful." And I thought, well, if they are, what's wrong with the rest of these people in the church? Why are they, are they, they just not committed or something? Then as time went on and as I studied the Bible more and read church history and read how good, solid, faithful churches of the past and pastors of the past conducted themselves, I realized that we had created an unbiblical dichotomy in the local congregation which said this, this big bunch over here, maybe 70%, they're Christians but they're carnal Christians, and this minority over here, maybe 15-20%, now they're, they're the really Spirit-filled dedicated Christians, but we need all of them. And I said I'm fine with that if it's biblical, but it's really not. There's, there's not divisions of Christianity, you follow Christ or you don't follow Christ. You honor Christ or you don't honor Christ. There's no levels other than, of course, offices of service, that didn't make you a higher level, it just makes your service different. But we're all to be true, my wording, normal Christians and we find out as time goes on, you know, a great percentage of those in Baptist and Evangelical churches are not truly Christians.

For generations we've developed a system that worked people through the motions, we had our own little sacramental system almost. Well, we really did. The Catholics have theirs, the Episcopalians have theirs, and Baptists got their own. Go through this motion, walk down the aisle, jump through this hoop we'll declare you safe for eternity. Now if you just go out there but just don't commit mass murder and you're okay. That's a little exaggeration but that's basically what it was. We find out that in Southern Baptist life, the denomination we are more, most closely connected to though we're not anymore officially, that they claim 12-15 million, I don't know how many million members and maybe 5 million show up at church on Sunday. That's not what the Bible teaches. Yes, a Christian can backslide but it shouldn't be 70-80% of our folks, maybe 10 or 20%. Folks find out that at least up until the pandemic that we will run 90%, we have run up to 94% of our worship attendance, faithful in small group attendance, and people are aghast at that. "How in the world, how do you do that? Y'all are special. Y'all are unique. Y'all are sold out." No, we're not, we're normal, barely normal I'd say at that.

So Paul writes here to talk about church at Philippi and, of course, it applies to all churches of all ages being part of sacred Scripture, here's what normal Christian living and normal church life looks like. Verse 27, chapter 1, Philippians,

27 Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; 28 in no way alarmed by your opponents which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. 29 For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, 30 experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.

We started off with I., this will be a brief review, our conduct that exemplifies our citizenship. The point Paul is, uh, speaking of here is that we're all citizens of a new, higher, true kingdom, the kingdom of God, and we are to conduct ourselves like we're a part of that kingdom and not conduct yourselves any longer like you're citizens of the world. We talked about how, I, I was just reading, uh, recently that, uh, that the region of Philippi when, when Rome conquered it, um, they, the emperor required many of the Roman soldiers to stay there and live and occupy it, and who encouraged those soldiers, he says, "We'll just consider Philippi soil as Italian soil, so you're a true Roman now. You're on Italian soil." So they were proud of their Roman citizenship in this community but now Paul says there's something far greater than that if you belong to Christ. You're not just a Roman citizen, you are a citizen of God's kingdom, now conduct yourselves properly as a citizen of God's kingdom.

Now we talked about the motivation for that conduct and he has that phrase in, uh, uh, verse 27, "live worthy of the gospel." Live like one that God's changed through his gospel. Live like one that's been transferred out of the kingdom of Satan, the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of Christ, the kingdom of light. Conduct yourself in consistency with who you are now. Now we all struggle, we all slip and we all fail.

Somebody gave the little illustration that a church was out and a little girl in her pretty little church dress runs out the door and she falls in a mud puddle. Well, stuff like that happens but you wouldn't expect to show up the next Sunday and she's still laying in the mud puddle. We repent and we go on and we keep striving to conduct ourselves worthy of the gospel. The motivation is this is Christ who saved us, and like the Apostle Paul we're ambassadors for God. We ought to be gospel-worthy Christians.

Now the second subpoint under the conduct that exemplifies our citizenship is the manner. The manner and here's where he points again at our unity together, our oneness. The last part of verse 27 he says, "for the faith of the gospel." Uh, and he uses the plural pronoun "you" referring to all of them. All be together in standing for those cardinal doctrines of the faith. Doctrine matters. We're, we're not to be so, uh, mildly biblical and have a gushy synchronizing of our doctrines with the other common teachings of the world. Absolutely not. If our doctrine happens to line up with some other teaching doctrine, fine, but we are not adjusting our doctrine to get along in this world. Period.

So united in doctrine, then we talked about the united in spirit. He says there in verse 27, "in one spirit," last part of the verse. In one spirit. Now this is not the Holy Spirit though it requires the Holy Spirit to do it. It means you are in camaraderie. You're part of a team. Different roles, different responsibilities, but we all agree together let's be of a united spirit to go forward for God's work. And here's what you've gotta understand: in the cultural context of the day, maybe the reason why there wasn't such a open, specific, uh, well, I should say repeated open specific commands about meeting with the church, was because if you named Christ, you were outcast immediately in that culture. You were considered the outscourings of the culture. You were considered, considered, as the Bible says, a sheep to be slaughtered. You needed one another is what I'm saying. So it wasn't the task that we have today to tell people you outta be faithful in your church, there was nowhere else to go. I mean, even members of your own household would hate you very readily if you became a committed member of Christ's church.

So they needed each other and as they're together they're to be like a, well-organized ball team. I, I heard, have you heard there's, I think there's an important ballgame tomorrow. Is that right? Do y'all know anything about that? Those players on those teams all have different roles but they're of one spirit. We know what our coaches told us, we know what our modus operandi is, we know how we do offense, we know how we do defense, we know how we do special teams etc. etc., and we're one in this thing. You're not gonna get to the championship game if you team's not one in spirit.

So Paul says and again, I've said this so many times to you and I'm gonna keep saying it because the Bible keeps saying it, the hallmark evidence that you know and love Christ is you know and love his local church. Now I have to give a little balancing addendum to that: if that local church has not been reformed and it's full of unsaved people, that's difficult. I get that. Many of us have been part of churches where a lot of folks in the church don't act like they know the Lord and so it's hard, you can't, it's hard to be one in spirit with somebody who don't have the Spirit. So that does happen but if a church is

decently, biblically, spiritually healthy, you're gonna be drawn to it and a passion for it and be one in spirit.

Well, united in truth, united in spirit, and then, thirdly, I said united in service, and Paul keeps using these metaphors from the gladiator games of the day, the gladiator contests and here's one of them at the end of verse 27, "striving together." Uh, it would be used as gladiators strive in their contest, fighting each other in the, in the Roman Coliseum. So he says, "Church, lock arms and the ways those gladiators fight to the death even most of the time, you're to strive with one another united in doctrine, united in spirit. Get the work of the church done. That's the manner of your conduct. That's the way it outta look." And I think Paul would say the church at Philippi was a pretty good example of that. Not perfect and we're certainly not perfect but they were, they were better than others at being on the right pace.

Now let's go to new material. II. In verses 28 through 30 let's notice the conflict that identifies our citizenship. The conflict that identifies our citizenship. Uh, verse 20, um, 8, "in no ways alarmed by your opponents." You're gonna have those who oppose you. You see, conflict is a regular part of the normal Christian's life, let's, let's talk now a little bit about this particular context, your church being in conflict with the world is a regular part of normal church life. "Well, pastor, people talk about us and people think we're this and people call us a cult." That's normal. That's normal. It's abnormal when your church just kinda goes with the flow and everybody thinks you're wonderful.

Can I remind you the flow is not toward heaven, the flow is not flowing toward God in this culture and I, I, we might start using this more formally and that's this phrase right here, Grace Life Church of Muscle Shoals, the oasis of sanity. You go to churches today and they're putting on shows that would rival Las Vegas Reviews. Nonsense. Either they're deliberately teaching false doctrine or they're keeping their orthodox statement of faith but they're actually functioning in false doctrine, trying to make sure the world still likes them. Sure, the world that nailed our Lord and Savior to the cross, we're gonna somehow massage our doctrine which is his doctrine so that they'll love us even though they crucified him. Now we don't go out trying to cause trouble but you just show up and love Jesus, you'll have trouble.

Conflict. It's normal. Well, A under this, kinda already gotten on this a little bit, I think: expectation of conflict. Paul says basically expect it. That's why he says don't be alarmed by it and he says something interesting...did y'all put A up there, brothers? Did they put that up there? Just now or a while ago? I'm sorry? A while ago? Okay, I'm sorry, didn't see it.

Expectation of conflict, verse 29, he says, "in no way alarmed by your opponents which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God." That was 28, 29, "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake." Interesting word "granted." The Greek word "granted" there is "do-ron" or "dor-on" the guy says on the computer, and it's the same Greek word for "gift." Ephesians 2:9 or 2:8 I think, Ephesians 2:8, "For by grace you've been saved through faith, that not of yourself it is the gift of God," the

same Greek word. God says, "I gave you grace that saves you as a gift and guess what? I've given you suffering now also as a gift." I would say that means we're to expect some conflict.

Now God's sovereign in this. It, it's interesting that in some ages and in some, uh, countries and cities, the church, there's always some personal conflict and some people who oppose you for your Christian faith, but there's not that organized cultural wrath and opposition. I would say in America up until about 50 years ago, generally the culture was with us on our values and our convictions. It's no longer so. Just read a little new clip this morning, I don't normally look at a news clip on Sunday morning but I came across it and they said there was a, a race, a swimming meet and a boy who now claims to be a girl was swimming in the meet and he was swimming against a girl who claims to be a boy but she hadn't transformed enough so she still gets to swim with the girls. Insanity. Bizarre. And brothers and sisters, what is this headed for? It's a spiritual problem at its root. At its root it is this, "I reject any Creator mandating anything to me. I don't care what He made me," and here's their phrase, "that's not my truth." Well, I've got something to tell you, you don't have truth. Truth is objective, it's outside of you. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." It's a rebellion against God our Creator, is what it is.

So as these things go on and you and I stand for what's right, we're gonna be, we're gonna be called the problem. You're gonna be called the malicious haters and on and on we could go but Paul said that's normal. Expect that. It can be on a personal level or it can come from a cultural level and this church experienced both of that and we are increasingly going to experience more of that in our culture. It's a gift from God to suffer for his sake. That's what he says in verse 29, suffer for his sake, literally in behalf of Christ. So therefore do not be alarmed about it, he says.

Now let's remind ourselves that suffering itself is not a privilege. We should not look for conflict. We should not have, um, a difficult personality and a confrontive nature but, trust me, if you live for Christ, it will find you. So we shouldn't court suffering but we should be willing always to suffer in behalf of Christ, the interest of our Lord, his gospel and his church. The Apostle Paul, of course, is a good example of that for sure.

Now it's one thing to resign ourselves to suffering, it's another to realize the privileges that come through suffering. So when Christ says, "I've given you suffering as a gift," listen to me now, some of the sweetest, most glorious blessing will come to you when you suffer for Christ. That's another one of the seeming paradoxes of our faith. Paul said, "When I'm weak, I'm strong." Paradox but true in Christ. So when you're placed in a spot that either deny the clear teachings of Scripture or deny your Lord or be faced with opposition and you choose to do what's right and be faithful to Christ, God's gonna give you gifts through that you can't see yet. Now here's what you want to do, "I want to see the gift first then let me figure out if it's right." No, the gift may be that you get to go to heaven quickly. That's what happened to Paul in prison. That might, now by the way, anything wrong with going to heaven and enjoying eternal bliss and pleasures forever? Nothing wrong with going to heaven but there are blessed gifts and one of the rich rich

gifts is sanctification. When we suffer for Christ, we're drawn closer to Christ. I like to say it this way, when you stand in the fire, your heart stays warm and now if you're God's child, you're never happier than when you're closest to him. So you can be like so many of our Baptist brethren of yesteryear whom the state churches of Europe persecuted them mercilessly because they would not accommodate the state religion, they stayed with the Bible, they wouldn't have their babies sprinkled in the false state church, they would only immerse true believers who were saved, and for rejecting the state church's sprinkling they were many of them drowned. They said, "You like baptism, you like going in the water, okay, we'll drown you." Many of them were burned at the stake and we have record after record after record after record after record that these martyrs sang with joy as the flames took their lives. You say, "How does that work?" You get grace when you need it. You'll get an extra dose of God's blessing and enablement when you need it.

I've told you this before, when you've preached to people 42 years you've told them everything before. Dr. Jerry Vines was on a plane and he was coming in for a landing and they hit some terrible turbulence and he said, "When we're shaken, all," you had to hold on or you'd fly out of your seat if you didn't have a seatbelt on for sure, he said, "And I was so scared. I thought we're gonna die. Sure enough, we popped out of the cloud and landed on the runway," and Dr. Vines said, "Lord, I've taught my people the whole time I've been their pastor when it's their time to die You'd give them grace and they would have peace. And here I is, I, I am, I was terrified and scared to death." He said, "The Lord said to me, yeah, but you didn't die either." So if God hadn't given you comfort and grace, you probably nothing really bad is gonna happen. But what I'm saying is there's a gift of God in suffering. He comes to you, he draws us near. It's special.

We were in Brazil. Now I can even say decades ago now, and, um, there were a couple of little twin girls in the church, 12-13 year old girls, and they just seemed to have a vibrant faith, very happy little girls, and the pastor said, "Do you know what those girls have to do?" And I said, "No, what?" He said, "Well, their momma's a devout Catholic and in the Third World, in the old world, the Catholics are more, shall we say, stringent maybe and they don't believe in you reading the Bible. You take your instructions from the priest only. So those little girls get up in the night and they go crack their door because there's a light in the hallway and they sit and open their Bibles by that little light coming through the hallway to read their Bibles in the night." Expect conflict. The expectation of conflict.

Well, number 2. Conflict that identifies our citizenship, we're to expect it, now notice the exposures resulting from the conflict. Exposures resulting. God's exposing. He's making some things manifest so he says in verse 28, "Don't be alarmed by your opponents." Now the scholars tell us the word "alarmed" was basically used in this day for a horse that was startled. You ever see the horse that was startled? I mean, they get really jumpy and nervosy and shaky. He said, "Don't let it mess you up that people are coming against you. Don't, now in other words, as if that's not to be expected."

The word "opponents" there, don't be alarmed, he says, by your opponents, the word "opponents" means "leaning against." He said, "You stand up for Christ and there's all these people that want to push back against you." You see, the world's leaning the wrong

way. The world's leaning toward hell and when we get saved, we start leaning toward heaven. Jesus said, "Choose the narrow way." You know what the narrow, narrow way, it didn't mean there's a wide way and there's a narrow way, the narrow way means you're going down a narrow passage against the people who are all going the wrong way. You're going against the current. Don't be surprised if you run into an employer, if you run into a, a work associate, if you run into a family member, if you run into a, a friend at school or wherever it is and they have snide remarks and cutting remarks and undermining remarks.

I was talking to one of our ladies this week, no, a couple, couple of weeks ago, three weeks ago, and, uh, she's been with us a long long time and she said, "Brother Jeff, it was really hard for a long time." Some of you haven't been here very long, I know this will shock you but people hadn't always loved us and they certainly didn't love you if you stayed in this church. And she said, "It was hard for a long time." Then she said, "But it's been worth it all," with a big smile. She said, "I faced opponents just by being a part of this church." And I think, I've been studying this, I think I said, "Yeah, that's normal. That's normal. That stuff's going to happen."

Now here's what he said, here I get to the exposures, notice what he says here in verse 28, "in no way alarmed," don't be startled, "by your opponents," those who are leaning against you, now here's, "which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you." In other words, it's evidence, it's evidence that they're not of God and it's evidence that you're saved and you are of God. That's what he means by a sign. Actually it's a legal term which means proof. It's proof that you're God's and they're not. So the fact that they oppose you proves or exposes that they are not of God, they are what he calls here children of destruction.

Now that's a powerful word and he's going to go on and say in verse 28, "and that too, from God." In other words, God is the agent that is coming to destroy and they are the children of destruction. Destruction doesn't just mean something bad happens along the way, destruction means it's, it's, it's an intentional thing. You're, you're set aside for ruin and wrath. Those who are God's through Christ are set aside for blessing and salvation. That's the point he's making so these things just prove, they're the evidences that come through conflict.

Now it gets challenging at times to deal with conflict and deal with opposition because of your Christian faith. For example, the early Christians were often tortured. Sometimes they were thrown to the lions and when these terrible things happened, false believers would say things like, "Well, see, they're not really God's or that wouldn't be happening to them." Here you are suffering and let me just talk to pastors for a minute now because a number of them watch our broadcast, here you are going through terrible things but you try to lead your church to be solid and then all of a sudden So-and-so Christian leaders or mature Christians rather say, "The reason you're going through that is because you're not right with God." And they did that to Paul all the time. "He's not a true apostle, that's why he's locked in prison," they would say.

And, and this whole thing and it, it's for me personally this was the toughest thing to deal with, constantly taking everything you say, bring it out of context, put a spin on it to put you in the worst possible light. "Oh, Jeff Noblit teaches this. Oh, Jeff Noblit believes that." And I wanna say, "No, I don't. Don't take one paragraph out of 42 years of preaching to form my convictions." And they will do that to you, "Oh, you believe that?" Just a snide, cutting, snarky opposition.

1 Corinthians 11:19 talking to the church at Corinth which had a lot of unbelievers in the church or at least meeting with the church, I should say, he says, "For there must also be factions among you," that's in among this local church, in order "that those who are approved," of God, "may become evident among you." Through the conflict, the factious conflict, God over time begins to show who really belongs to him and who really does not. He exposes.

So the Lord says there's some real exposures that result through conflict. When these people confront you for your Bible beliefs, your convictions to, about your church and about your Lord, it's a sign, it's an evidence they belong to Satan, they're children of destruction. It's a sign that you are a child of salvation and you belong to the Lord. Now you and I would say can we not have a different way to show this? A different approach than having to suffer? No, there's really not and I'll be honest thinking just about us here in America here in the Southeast, our suffering hasn't been a lot really. Now sometimes the emotional element of it is really tough but and I had a man tell me one time who really suffered on the mission field physically, he said in the average American church the emotional, psychological pain of how you're attacked for trying to be true to Christ is greater than the pain I felt physically by being persecuted on the mission field. So I don't want to belittle that if you're not locked in prison you're not really suffering yet because God gives grace for wherever we are. He gives prison grace. He gives emotional distress grace. He's faithful to us.

Oh, so much more I could say but let me go on to C here: encouragements in the conflict. Paul's going to say something here to encourage the church at Philippi to keep on keeping on, don't be knocked offtrack, don't be alarmed by this conflict and these opponents. He says in verse 30, "experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me." Now Paul's in prison at this time and they knew Paul's ministry well. He was just constantly berated and mocked, stoned, left for dead, shipwrecked, beaten with whips, imprisoned more than once, and, and he says, "And you'll experience the same kinds of things." He didn't mean every single Christian, he just means it's generally true they're gonna hate you like they hated me because they hate our Christ.

Can I say something to you, Christian, and this is a good word for Jeff Noblit? Are you listening? Don't miss this. It's not about you. You're not all that important. He is. They're attacking him. You just happen to be in the way. They're after him. And the ultimate climactic ending of their spirit is the antichrist himself who will take the throne of earth and bring in the great harlot church. Many Baptists are gonna be in that group and there'll be a tiny remnant of true believers and they'll crush them. But that's not about the

believers, it's about the Christ they hate. It's not about us. It's not about you. It's about him. That'll help you if you'll remember that. Come to church and be encouraged, huh?

Well, the Apostle Paul says this, this is encouragement because you've gotta know this is part of the schedule, this is part of the plan, and the Philippians faced the same type things. They had idol and emperor worship that dominated that city. Now are you listening to me? The moment you said Jesus is Lord, you became the enemy of the emperor who had the power of life and death in his hands. Think about that. Powerful. So Paul knew they were gonna face some real tough days. Of course, they had the legalistic Judaizers who would come into the church and try to undermine the doctrines of grace and teach that Christianity is just another type of keeping rules. Then, of course, there was the pagan sensualist who lived for their lust like our culture does today. Our culture today says any lust even below the animal kingdom ought to be celebrated. What a vile people we are. That's so wicked. God gave us our sexual desires to be governed and be guarded so they could be the most pleasure and bring him glory but we pervert everything as a people.

And by the way, Paul reminded the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians, I always forget that reference, 10:13, "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man." Paul says here, "You're gonna have the same type things." So when you say, "But my situation is special and unique." Oh, no, no, many many others have been through it too. "Yeah, but you don't know what they're saying about me." Oh, no, many others have gone through it too. And I just want to say this and I want to say it to our younger folks: it may be likely that you will lose at least one job before you get to retirement age, if you get to get there, for your faith in Christ. Our people in the public school system, and by the way, we've got some of the finest godliest people in the public school system and I thank God for their missionary work in the school system. Amen? But there may come a day when you cannot give pledge to the oaths they want you to take to work there. I don't know. I don't know. But nothing has seized you, Paul tells the Corinthians, except what is common to man. Others have gone through it, others are going through it.

One of the things that, again, keep coming out of this text is the metaphors Paul brings out of the Olympics but more specifically the gladiator contests of the old Roman empire. For example, that word "conflict" in verse 30, the word "opponents" in verse 28, "striving together" in verse 27, all would be used in, in a gladiatorial contest of the day. The word "conflict" also is a word that's translated as "fight." Paul will use it later in 2 Timothy as we get there in our exposition, "fight the good fight." It's also a word for a race where he says, "Run the race with endurance."

So here we are in our culture today, matter of fact, I just heard some politician the other day say that they are committed, they didn't say fight to the death but that's what they meant, fight to the death to avoid this Christian state that's trying to be raised back up in our country. Anything that reflects Bible teachings, we are against it. The new religion of progressivism is the religion of America. Woke-ism, what a horrible religion it is. It has no forgiveness and no redemption. If you're a certain skin color, you're just doomed as, as depraved and beneath the rest. It's an awful thing. Hillary Clinton runs for President

against Donald Trump and I'll never, I mean, these words just pierce my heart and I can't understand why more people didn't grab hold to it. She said emphatically the churches are gonna have to change their doctrines. Well, I'll tell you what, I got news for Hillary Clinton: we don't take orders from her. We're not changing our doctrines. We don't care what the culture thinks about it. We care what our Lord thinks about it.

So in the balance or in, in the context of encouragement, let me, let's read Revelation 6:9-11. Revelation 6:9-11, "When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God," of course, context is the great tribulation when persecution against the church will be at its very worst, "and because of the testimony which they had maintained." I think that's an interesting phrase because a lot of people professed Christ but as the pressure came on, they went with the antichrist and the great harlot church. But there's some who wouldn't, they maintained. They stayed true.

Verse 10, "and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?'" Now in balance of biblical truth, we're to be forgiving of everybody and have, be gracious toward everybody but here these saints already glorified in heaven are saying, "How long before You avenge our blood?" There's a righteous vengeance, brothers and sisters. There's a righteous revenge. There's a righteous retribution.

And here's Paul, Paul, the Lord encourages them in verse 11, "And there was given to each of them a white robe," that white robe speaks of, "You're My redeemed ones. You bear My righteousness," "and they were told that they should rest," and you have eternal rest, "for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also."

So Revelation says that God in his sovereignty has marked out only so many of his children that could be slain, martyred. Remember in my candlelight message, I said the darkness has a bound put on it, the darkness can only go so far. God controls the dark. He's Lord of the darkness. So we throw our, are you listening, we throw ourselves on our loving God who is absolutely sovereign and we say with Esther, "If I perish, I perish. But there's a God who's gonna avenge my blood too." So he encourages those in this scene from glory that were martyred.

Now at the end of the day, everything comes from the Lord's hands. Look at verse 28 again, the last phrase, "and that too from God." In other words, all that God's doing or all that is happening is God's doing, and we look to God, our reward is from God, our treasure is in God not in this world. We do not look to this world for our approval, we look only to God. The gladiators of this day in the arena, they would fight in battle and it was grotesque and bloody, awful. Sometimes they didn't fight to the death but many times they did, but at the end of the contest, the custom was that the gladiator would look up at the emperor and the emperor would decide, "Have you pleased me enough? Have you, have you been approved by me?" And there was a, a gesture, a thumb gesture. We don't know if it was up or down but we'll assume if it was life, the emperor himself, "I

approve. You live." You didn't fight well or right, the emperor could say, "I disapprove. You die."

I like what Lightfoot said in his commentary, "The Christian gladiator does not anxiously await the signal of life or death from the fickle crowd." We don't wait for this world to tell us. We labor on for God, we work in his church and we work without regard to the opposition for our approval comes from another. And as we end our striving together, we look up at our Father in heaven and we're looking for approval or the disapproval, and our Father in heaven looks at his Son Jesus to whom he's given all authority and if you're in Jesus, God the Son Jesus looks at God the Father and smiles and says, and then God our Father looks down at us and says, "You're approved." And that's all that matters.

So could I charge you this morning to keep on being a normal Christian. Keep on being a normal church in your conduct and in the conflict. I'll close with this, 1 Peter 5:10, and "After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you." Strive on, keep on being a normal Christian.