

Manner of Life

Philippians 1:21-30

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A young airman just out of basic training, already disgruntled with military life, wrote the Secretary of Defense about it.

Dear Sir, I strongly believe in reincarnation, & in a previous life I fought & died with Davy Crockett at the Alamo. I don't mind serving, but I don't feel that anyone should have to do anything more after giving his life for his country. I should be discharged.

In a short time, the man got a letter from a top Pentagon general who wrote:

Dear Airman, I do not question the sincerity of your beliefs. Nor do I doubt that you fought alongside Col. Crockett, if you remember it. I agree with you that no man should be asked to do more than give his life for his country. However, when you died at the Alamo, Texas was not a part of the U.S. You have yet to serve your country.

I would write back to this airman:

I don't question your beliefs, either, though I don't believe in reincarnation.

I do believe that you are right in seriously considering what it is you want to give your life for. St. Paul agonized as you do, only he was in prison, not the Air Force, and his conclusion was different.

He decided he was in the service of God for good, & whatever his orders were was right for him. He was serving his God, dead or alive, not his choice to make, but he thought God wanted him alive. HOW to live, now, that was what he wrote this letter to the Philippians about, only he wrote, not to a general, but to people on the fighting line. You would do well to read this letter about JOY in Christian living even while facing death.

²⁷Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel.

His chief concerns here are: manner of life, being worthy of the gospel, and standing firm in one spirit.

'Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.' For Paul, MANNER OF LIFE means imitating Christ.

That's because Paul believes we are baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ, who is the first born of a new race which has as its unique claim among races, the inheritance of eternal life. All of life is illumined by this expectation. If you have all eternity, anything in this world is pale by comparison. Being one with God is the highest value. Our troubles come from ignoring it.

I think Hurricanes show us how quickly we can lose our civilization. Without water, power, sanitation, gas, refrigeration, phone service, even the internet, our manner of life rapidly deteriorates. Look at how the disaster brings out the best and the worst in people. Texans helping Texans. But also looters and most of all complainers. Which do disasters bring out in you? Are you part of the problem or part of the solution?

The manner of life Paul lives is Christ. He says, "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain." He describes this life fully in 1 Corinthians 13, & Romans 12, great chapters on the life of love.

At an airport, a young bridegroom starting on his honeymoon asked the man at the desk for one ticket: When he turned to his wife, she said, "Why, Tom, you've bought only one ticket! Without hesitation, he said, "You're right, dear! I'd forgotten myself completely!" Fun Fare, p. 268

Love means to forget yourself, as Christ forgot himself in going to the cross for the sins of the world. Not for himself, but for us. He is all love.

You can compare the way people love with the way they give. Someone once said there are 3 kinds of givers - the flint, the sponge, & the honeycomb.

To get anything out of the flint you hammer and hammer it, and then you only get chips and sparks.

To get water out of a sponge you squeeze it, and the more you squeeze the more you get, until there's nothing left.

To get honey out of a honeycomb, you take care of the bees, and the bees naturally make more.

Some people are stingy and hard; they give nothing away if they can help it. Others are good natured; they yield to pressure, and the more they get pressed; the more they will give. A few delight in giving without being asked at all, and of this the Bible says, the Lord loves a cheerful giver.

The gospel for Paul is not only the **message**, but the **power** within, that bursts forth in proclaiming -- you can't keep it in. If you've got good news, you want to run home right away and share it with someone. You can't keep it in. Same with the gospel.

Some have said that they declare their faith by living good lives and being good examples in the world. They don't have to say, "I'm a Christian", their lives show it. But when was the last time someone asked your faith?

I saw a sign in a garage: "We the willing, led by the unknowing, are doing the impossible for the ungrateful. We have done so much for so long with so little that we are now qualified to do anything with nothing."

The church should be that way, willing, doing the impossible with nothing visible, for the world, the ungrateful.

We wouldn't need FEMA, or insurance, or welfare, if the church would just be the church.

We could believe that we were fighting side by side with Crockett at the Alamo. But that's not as good as wanting to be striving side by side with the saints of the ages, Paul, Peter, Luther, Thomas of Assisi, Bernard of Clairvaux, and our brothers and sisters of the faith today.

MARTIN KING: "The end of life is not to achieve pleasure or avoid pain, but to do the will of God, come what may."

God's will for us is that we dedicate our lives or deaths, to the imitation of Christ, to be willing to proclaim his love to the world.

Lord help us to forget ourselves and think only of you, making our manner of life one that says no to whatever makes it more difficult to say yes to you.