

“An Evident Token Of Perdition”

“... and in nothing affrighted by the adversaries; which is for them an evident token of perdition, but of your salvation and that from God; because to you it hath been granted in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer in his behalf: having the same conflict which ye saw in me and now hear to be in me” (Phil. 1:28f). Paul asked these brethren to let their manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ -- standing fast in one spirit, with one soul striving for the faith of the gospel. Further, as our reading reveals, he urged that they not be affrighted by their adversaries.

The Philippians were experiencing tribulation, the nature of which Paul did not precisely “spell out.” A mutual appreciation for each other existed: The Philippians experiencing what they had seen in Paul when he was in their city; he presently was experiencing the same trials in Rome. Paul and Barnabas exhorted churches which they had begun to know that through *“much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God”* (Acts 14:22). We are to rejoice when persecutions come because we are Christians. Early apostles rejoiced they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name (Acts 5:41). When tribulations come we must bear them patiently and be confident that tribulations worketh approvedness (Rom. 12:12). Likely we do not view trials as Paul advised them: a gift they were privileged to experience on the behalf of Christ! Thus Paul teaches these brethren not to be frightened by whatever injuries their adversaries should hurl at them. Then Paul adds, *“which is for them an evident token of perdition, but of our salvation.”* What did the apostle mean when he wrote this?

Various explanations abound. The statement seems to be elliptical -- something needs to be supplied to have the significance of his words. “Something” is for one an *“evident token of perdition”* but that “something” is for the other a token of their salvation. What is this “something”?

“In nothing affrighted by your adversaries” is the key. The Philippians were to exhibit steadfastness and calmness in face of the threats of their adversaries. To the adversary (who regarded Christians as those who were God’s and the State’s enemy) the determined stand of Christians was a sign of willful rebellion, one doomed to perdition -- destruction. But on the other hand, the steadfastness of the Christian in the face of adversity was a token of his salvation, a salvation from God. There are other explanations but the one presented here is true, whether it is precisely the thought which Paul had in mind or not.

The apostles were unanimous in urging Christians to regard tribulation a source of joy and blessing. The Hebrew writer recorded, "*all chastening seemeth for the present to be not joyous but grievous, but afterwards it yieldeth peaceable fruit unto them that have been exercised thereby*" (Heb. 12:11). Admittedly, it is "*chastening,*" not "*tribulation*" of which the writer spoke, but remember, while chastening may come because we have sinned, it may sometimes come as a test of the fiber of our faith -- in which instance it may prove both a joy and blessing. In such circumstances, we should "*count it all joy when ye fall into manifest trials, knowing that the proving of your faith worketh patience*" (James 1:3). It is this steadfastness which is a token of perdition to the adversary but a token of salvation to the Christian!

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