

Study 11

“But our citizenship is in heaven”

Philippians 3:17-4:1



Dwelling in the Word

1. Prayerfully read through Philippians 3:17-4:1 and ask: 1) What words, phrases, or images stood out to you? 2) What does this say about what God desires to accomplish in you? 3) How could you respond to what God says in this passage?

Beginning the Conversation

1. Is there anyone in your life that you've looked up to as someone to imitate in your Christian walk? Share with the group.
2. What comes to mind when you think of “citizenship”? Make a list of what it means to be a “good citizen” of your own country (Canada), province (Alberta), and city (Edmonton). How does that compare to how Paul describes being a “citizen of heaven”?

Digging Deeper

1. Paul begins this chapter with a call to imitate his way of life, as well as any others who “live in this way.” Based on your reading of Philippians, make a list of the dispositions and characteristics of Paul's life, and what he says about Timothy and Epaphroditus, that you think we are to imitate.
2. The description of those who are walking as “enemies of the cross of Christ” (3:18) is pretty harsh. These enemies were already mentioned by Paul in 1:15-18 and 3:2. Read through the description of these “enemies” again; in what way does their “earthly disposition” (3:19) contrast with Paul's emphasis on a “heavenly” one?
3. In his sermon, Pastor Tyler noted that, “cross represents humble service, suffering, and sacrifice.” To reverse Paul's description in 3:18, what do you think living as “friends of the cross” would look like?
4. The word Paul uses for “citizenship” is one that was often used to describe “a colony of foreigners” living together in a place, while at the same time identifying with and conforming to the values and virtues of their homeland, the city of God, heaven. This is similar to the Apostle Peter referring to us as “temporary residents and foreigners” in this world (1Pet 2:11) How does such an attitude relativize or temper our attitudes and actions as citizens of Canada?
5. In this passage Paul does not call heaven their home, but rather that their citizenship is in heaven at the same time as we live on earth. The second-century AD Letter to Diognetus (printed on the back) unpacked some of the ways Christ followers at that time understood this idea. Discuss the excerpt from the letter and brainstorm what are some other ways that Christ followers today should live differently from the world around them.
6. Phil 3:21 expresses the Christian hope that when Christ returns in glory our transformation into his image and likeness will be complete. How does this hope help you endure suffering in the present?

Living it Out

1. Do you have someone in your life that is serving as a model to imitate in the Christian way? Are you serving as a model for others? I would encourage you to have such relationships as it is always better to follow Jesus together.
2. What are some practical ways you can live different as a “citizen of heaven” and be a blessing to others, or seek the welfare of others, this week?

The Epistle to Diognetus, a second-century (around 120 AD) Christian writing:

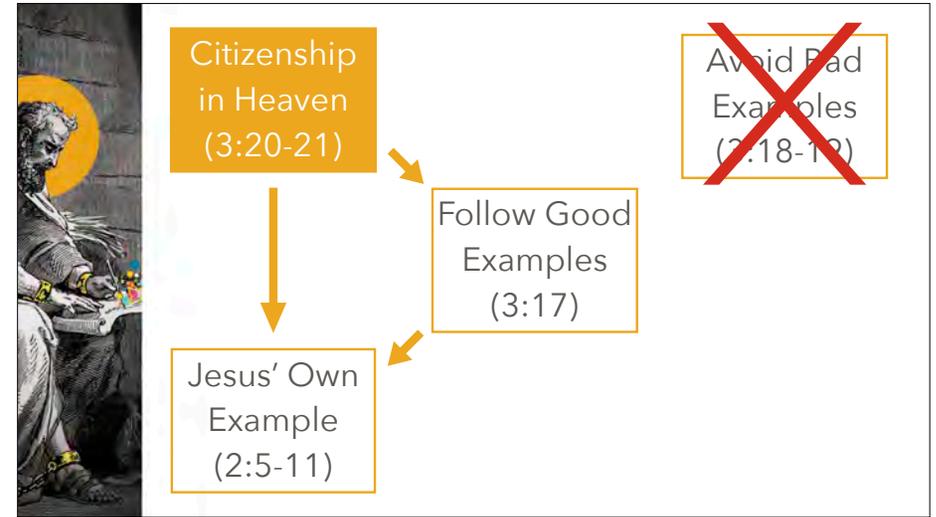
“But while they dwell in both Greek and barbarian cities, each as his lot was cast, and follow the customs of the land in dress and food and other matters of living, they show forth the remarkable and admittedly strange order of their own citizenship. ⁵They dwell in their own countries, but as sojourners. They share all things as citizens, and suffer all things as strangers. Every foreign land is their homeland, and every homeland a foreign land. ⁶They marry, like all others; they have children, but they do not cast out their offspring. ⁷They share their homes, but not their beds. ⁸They are ‘in the flesh,’ but they do not live ‘after the flesh.’ ⁹They pass their days on earth, but ‘their citizenship is in heaven’ [Phil 3:20]” (Epistle to Diognetus, 5.4-9).



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Imitate Good Examples (3:17)

“Join together in imitating me, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, continue to take note of those who walk in this way” (3:17).

- Imitation in ancient times was simply good pedagogy.
- Imitate Paul (3:4-16); Timothy (2:19-24); Epaphroditus (2:25-30); and anyone who “walks in this way.”
- Implicit behind the to imitate is example of Jesus Christ, who is at the heart of the letter (2:5-11; cf. 1Cor 11:1).



Avoid Bad Examples (3:18-19)

“For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many are walking as enemies of the cross of Christ, whose destiny is destruction, whose god is their stomach and glory is their shame. Their disposition is earthly” (3:18-19).

- Libertarians (1Cor 6-8), or more likely, Judaizers (3:2-3).
- Whoever they are, their walk makes them “enemies of the cross of Christ” because they have an “earthly disposition.”
- The cross represents humble service, suffering, and sacrifice.



Heavenly Citizenship

“But our citizenship is in heaven...” (3:20a).

- “Citizenship” (*politeuma* πολιτευμα; cf. 1:27) – “a colony of foreigners or relocated veterans” (BDAG).
- Though they reside in Philippi, they are actually “citizens of heaven” and should walk accordingly (cf. 3:14).
- Christ followers are to “colonize earth with the life of heaven” (NT Wright), or the church is to be “a colony of heaven in the country of death” (Eugene Peterson).



Heavenly Citizenship

“But while they dwell in both Greek and barbarian cities, each as his lot was cast, and follow the customs of the land in dress and food and other matters of living, they show forth the remarkable and admittedly strange order of their own citizenship. ⁵They dwell in their own countries, but as sojourners. They share all things as citizens, and suffer all things as strangers. Every foreign land is their homeland, and every homeland a foreign land. ⁶They marry, like all others; they have children, but they do not cast out their offspring. ⁷They share their homes, but not their beds. ⁸They are ‘in the flesh,’ but they do not live ‘after the flesh.’ ⁹They pass their days on earth, but ‘*their citizenship is in heaven*’ [Phil 3:20]” (*Epistle to Diognetus*, 5.4-9).



Heavenly Citizenship

“... And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus the Messiah, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (3:20b-21).

- For Paul, Christ followers have only one “Saviour” and one “Lord”: Jesus the Messiah.
- And when Christ comes again in glory, he will fully transform our humble mortal bodies into his likeness and image – our destiny is an embodied, resurrected life in a renewed creation.



Conclusion

“Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord *in this way*, dear friends!” (4:1).

- How we “stand firm” is important...
- Paul calls us to stand firm “in this way” (3:17); the way of Paul, the way of Timothy, the way of Epaphroditus, *the way of Jesus*.



Invitation

An invitation as Christ followers who are “temporary residents and foreigners” in this world (1Pet 2:11), to continue walk humbly as “citizens of heaven” (3:20), always looking back to and imitating the loving and selfless way of life of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus the Messiah, as well as others who live in this way.