

Citizens of Heaven

Text: Phil. 3:15-21

Introduction:

1. Our outline for the messages from this chapter is as follows:
 - I. Paul's Admonition (Vs. 1-6)
 - II. Paul's Ambition (Vs. 7-11)
 - III. Paul's Attitude (Vs. 12-13a)
 - IV. Paul's Aim (Vs. 13b-14)
 - V. Paul's Appeal (Vs. 15-21)
2. In our last message we considered Paul's Ambition, Attitude and Aim. We will now consider His appeal as he turns to exhorting the Philippian believers on the basis of his testimony and example which he has just discussed with them.
3. In this chapter we have been on a salvation journey from justification in the past to sanctification in the present and now in these verses on to glorification in the future. We are challenged to walk on earth as citizens of heaven while we wait for Christ's return.
4. We will consider this appeal from the Apostle in three parts:

I. THE MINDSET OF A GODLY WALK (VS. 15-16)

The word 'mind' is the key word in these two verses. We are to have the right mindset as believers. There are two aspects to this mindset. We are to have:

A. A Growth Mindset (Vs. 15)

1. The Perfect have his Mindset (Vs. 15a)
 - a. 'therefore' = on the basis of what has just been taught.
 - b. 'perfect' = describes someone who is mature. The Greek word 'teleios' is translated "full age in Heb. 5:4. This does not describe everyone as the text says "**as many as** be perfect" indicating a select group of believers. One mark of a maturing believer is a passionate pursuit of God's will as demonstrated in Paul's life (See Vs. 10-14). Gromacki writes, "A mature believer knows where he is in the Divine order of spiritual progress and perceives that he can still develop further."
 - c. "thus minded" = a reference to the mindset of Paul described in the previous verses, namely, the goal of pressing towards the mark.
2. The Power of God influences this Mindset (Vs. 15b)
 - a. "and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded" = other mindsets are possible in the Christian life and sadly, many believers do not have this mindset for growth and progress in the Christian walk.
 - b. "God shall reveal even this unto you" = Paul's faith and confidence was in God to work in the Philippian believers to bring about this mindset. Paul knew that the convicting work of

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God in their lives was essential if they were to have the mindset to passionately pursue God in their lives as Paul did.

B. A Godly Mindset (Vs. 16)

1. The Standing we Adhere to (Vs. 16a) The word 'whereto' literally means "into which". They had arrived at an important position but not in the sense of attaining perfection. Paul had just made it clear that he hadn't attained everything yet. However, he didn't want them to go backwards from where they were now.
 - a. They had arrived at an understanding of some important truths such as salvation and Paul wanted them to retain that important position.
2. The Standard we Adhere to (Vs. 16b)
 - a. 'walk' = comes from the Greek word 'stoicheo' which is translated elsewhere to "walk orderly" (Acts 21:24) and means "to proceed in a row as the march of a soldier, go in order" (Strong).
 - b. "the same rule" = the word 'rule' is the word 'canon'. The Greek word was used to refer to "a rod or straight piece of rounded wood to which anything was fastened to keep it straight, a measuring rod, rule, a carpenter's line or measuring tape." (Strong) As believers the canon of Scripture is the measuring stick to keep us straight and in line. The Word of God is the standard of Christian conduct and is to be the basis for all faith and practice.
 - c. "the same thing" = the same word is translated 'likeminded' in Phil. 2:2. It again speaks of a walk that is unified. This has been a major concern of the Apostle in this Epistle. This kind of unity comes when the people of God all submit their lives wholeheartedly to the rule of Scripture.

II. THE MODEL OF A GODLY WALK (VS. 17-19)

A. The Right Examples to Follow (Vs. 17)

1. The People of Followership (Vs. 17a)
 - a. 'Brethren' = a direct appeal to get their attention.
 - b. "followers together" = means to be joint imitators. Our word 'mimic comes from this word.
 - c. "of me...have us for an ensample" = they were to follow the example of Paul and his associates. This is a frequent exhortation of the Apostle's (See 1 Cor. 4:11, 11:1; Phil. 4:9, 1 Thess. 1:6, 2 Thess. 3:7, 9). God had made him a model to follow. New Testament pastors are not examples on the same level of the Apostle Paul who had a special calling from God but they are still exhorted to be examples to the flock (1 Pet. 5:3; 1. Tim. 4:12). Follow your pastor so long as he is following Christ (1 Cor. 11:1).
2. The Process of Followership (Vs. 17b)

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- a. How do we know who to follow in the Christian life? There is a process God's Word gives us in this verse to help us.
- b. We are to 'mark' those who walk so as to ensure we are following the right examples. The word 'mark' means "to look at", "observe", "contemplate", "to fix one's eyes upon". The same word is also translated "take heed" (Lk. 11:35), "look at" (2 Cor. 4:18), "consider" (Gal. 6:1) and "look on" (Phil. 2:4). The English word 'scope' (e.g., microscope) comes from this Greek term. The word calls for a process of careful scrutiny. It describes a discerning, alert and watchful spirit rather than a blind followership of a man.
- c. Why is this testing mindset important? The answer is found in the next two verses.

B. The Wrong Examples to Follow (Vs. 18-19)

1. The Warning about False Teachers (Vs. 18a)

- a. A pertinent warning – "for many walk". The word 'for' introduces the reason for the commands just given. Why is this warning relevant and important? Because false teachers abound! There are 'many' who walk contrary to God's truth who profess to be followers of Christ. Truth has always been in the minority. We walk on a narrow way found by few (Matt. 7:14).
- b. A persistent warning – "told you often". Paul warned about false teachers at the opening of the chapter (Vs. 1-3) and now towards the end of the chapter he warns them again. The threat of false teaching is never far away! A preacher who does not frequently warn the flock is not fulfilling his calling! A good minister is one who warns God's people frequently about the dangers of apostasy (1 Tim. 4:6).
- c. A passionate warning – "now tell you even weeping". You can imagine tears running down Paul's cheeks as he dictates these words to his assistant. Why would Paul weep about this? Because he knew what was at stake in this matter. Don't underestimate the destructive influence of false teachers and false teaching and their ability to damage and ruin lives. William Macdonald writes, "But why the tears in the midst of such a stern denunciation? Because of the harm these men did among the churches of God. Because of the lives they ruined. Because of the reproach they brought on the name of Christ. Because they were obscuring the true meaning of the cross. Yes, but also because true love weeps, even when denouncing the enemies of the cross of Christ, just as the Lord Jesus wept over the murderous city of Jerusalem." (Believer's Bible Commentary)

2. The Ways of False Teachers (Vs. 18b-19)

Be careful who you follow! These false teachers are described in 5 ways:

1. They are enemies of the cross of Christ. While they may pay lip service to the cross, as many false teachers do, in reality they are enemies of the cross because they seek to add works to

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Christ's finished work. This is strong language. Christ and the Apostles did not warn of false teachers in soft terms. There is too much at stake to go soft on error!

2. Their end is destruction. These men are headed for eternal damnation and they lead others with them to eternal ruin. 2 Peter 2:1-3 warns, "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in **damnable heresies**, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves **swift destruction**. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose **judgment** now of a long time lingereth not, and their **damnation** slumbereth not."
3. Their god is their belly. They are focused on themselves and their own lusts. They use their position as "teachers" selfishly to further their own selfish ambitions. This certainly describes the so called "faith healers" and prosperity teachers of our day.
 - a. 2 Peter 2:3 "And through covetousness shall they with **feigned words make merchandise of you**: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not."
 - b. Jude 1:17-19 "But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should **walk after their own ungodly lusts**. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit."
4. They glory in their shame. The false doctrines they glory in and hold in high esteem in reality are shameful. They glory in things of which they should be ashamed. They speak "great swelling words of vanity" (2. Pet. 2:18). See also Jude 1:16. Many false teachers also glory in the depraved things of the world.
5. They mind earthly things. Their focus is on the things of this life, even if they appear to have a concern for spiritual things. This is because they are "natural" men (1 Cor. 2:14) under the domination of the Adamic nature.

III. THE MOTIVATION OF A GODLY WALK (VS. 20-21)

The Apostle now turns our eyes heavenward to motivate us to take these exhortations and admonitions to heart. He draws our attention to:

A. A Heavenly Citizenship (Vs. 20a)

1. The Linguistics of our Citizenship – 'conversation'.
 - a. The word 'conversation' is an old English word that in this context referred to one's behaviour as a citizen.

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- b. The Greek word is πολιτευμα (politeuma) and forms the basis of our English word 'politics'.
2. The Location of our Citizenship – “is in heaven”.
 - a. The Philippians would have been able to well relate to this illustration. They were Roman citizens of a Roman colony even though they were located far from Rome. They were under Caesar’s headship and were to conduct themselves as Roman citizens in a distant place. In like manner, they were to remember that their true citizenship was in heaven and were to live as heaven’s citizens on earth.
 - b. The local church is an outpost of heaven of earth and God’s people are citizens of the celestial city. Let’s live with our focus on things above! (Col. 3:1)
 - c. “**is** in heaven” = notice the present tense. This citizenship is a present possession.
 - d. John Phillips writes, “We Christians belong to the aristocracy of Heaven where our Lord reigns at the right hand of God, and we have a responsibility in this present world never to disgrace our homeland. And what a homeland it is! In our country the streets are paved with gold, the walls are built of jasper, and the gates are made of pearl. A rainbow-circled throne, a crystal stream, foundations ablaze with gems, many mansions and the tree of life are there. Sickness, death, and pain do not haunt our country’s streets, and no hospitals, prisons, asylums, or retirement homes can be found. This land of fadeless day is eternally bathed in the sunshine of God’s smile. No sobs or sighs are ever heard – just anthems of praise, doxologies of bliss, and songs expressing “joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Pet. 1:8). The citizens – all most gloriously fair – are served by angels commissioned by the throne to minister to salvation’s heirs. Right now, we are pilgrims and strangers in a foreign land. This world is not our final home. We are here as heaven’s ambassadors. Every night we pitch our tent a day’s march nearer home. We are never to forget even for a moment where our citizenship lies. The thought of that fair land and its all-glorious King will influence our dress and our deportment. It will help determine what we say, where we go, how we behave, what pleasures we permit, how we invest our talent, what we do with our money, how we treat other people, and the amount of time we spend in worship, service, Bible study, and prayer.”

B. A Heavenly Coming (Vs. 20b)

1. The location of the one who is coming – “from whence”.
2. The looking for the One who is coming – “we look for the Saviour”. The word ‘look’ is in the present tense indicating a continual practice of life. The word ‘look’ in this verse literally means “to thrust forward the head and neck as in anxious expectation of hearing or seeing something” (Macdonald). Wuest notes “the composite word speaks of an attitude of intense yearning and eager waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus into the air to take His Bride to heaven with Him, the attention being withdrawn from all else and concentrated upon the Lord Jesus.” The believer is looking for the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven not for the antichrist from Europe!

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This disposition of expectantly waiting for Christ's return in the spirit of New Testament Christianity. This is what we refer to as the doctrine of imminence and it is a major theme of the New Testament (See Rom. 13:12; Php. 4:5; 1 Thess. 1:9-10; 5:5-6; 2 Tim. 4:8; Tit. 2:13; James 5:8-9; Heb. 9:28; Rev. 1:3, 22:10).

- a. 1 Thess. 1:9-10 "For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; **And to wait for his Son from heaven**, whom he raised from the dead, *even* Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come."
- b. 1 Cor. 1:7 "So that ye come behind in no gift; **waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:**"
3. The Lordship of the One who is coming – "the Lord Jesus Christ". The Apostle gives Christ His full title in a spirit of reverence. High honour of Christ is essential in our Christian lives.

C. A Heavenly Change (Vs. 21)

1. The description of our body (Vs. 21a). The word 'vile' in Old English had the sense of 'base', 'lowly'. The Greek word means 'humiliation', "of low estate". This is a fit description of the human body with its fragility and weakness.
2. The transformation of our body (Vs. 21b)
 - a. The model for this transformation – "his glorious body". Our future, glorified body will be like the resurrection body of our Lord Jesus Christ. We get a glimpse of what that body looks like in the post resurrection appearances of Christ before His return to heaven. "The word 'changed' comes from the Greek word 'schematizo' and is the basis of the English word 'schematic', referring to a blue print or design. God has a perfect blueprint for our heavenly body." (Cloud)
 - b. The might behind this transformation – "according to the working". The word 'working' is from 'energeia' referring to energetic power, energy. The word 'able' is 'dunamis', dynamic, living power. The word 'subdue' means "to subjugate, place in submission". "It refers to God's complete control over the creation." (Cloud) This change will be wrought by the mighty power of God. The same power that is able to subdue all things. "The same divine power which enabled Christ to conquer death through His resurrection and which will enable Him to force all of His enemies into total submission is the same power which will change the bodies of believers." (Gromacki)
 - c. John Phillips writes, "Unbelief looks at the corpse; faith looks at the Creator. Unbelief sees a dead body in a coffin; faith sees a risen, triumphant, omnipotent Christ. He is the unconditional guarantee of our belief."

Conclusion: How much do you desire to grow? Do you have the mindset of spiritual growth? Whose example are you following? Where is your focus?