



By Drew McHolm 4/25/2023

Well, last week was pretty eventful. Missed Sundays service (ended up in ER) Sunday afternoon (bacterial URI) – on antibiotics, prednisone, inhaler, cough meds for the last week. Then had my **US Naturalization interview** on Thursday at the Federal Building in Des Moines– and to my surprise they held the Oath Ceremony the same day. So, after 30 years of living in the US I am now an American Citizen. The UCSIS officer wanted to verify my address – ***“Nashua...that’s where the Little Brown Church is located?”*** ***“Funny you should mention that...”***. Had to go through a bunch of questions including the time she asked me ***“Do you have a criminal record?”*** I said, ***“Sorry, I didn’t know that was required!”***

Citizenship is a hot topic of discussion in our country right now. There’s talk about how to keep non-citizens from entering our country and talk about what to do with immigrants who are already here. Some are born as citizens of the US. Others, like me, are granted the awesome privilege to become citizens of the US. I never had any entitlement to live in this country...I was allowed to stay here for 30+ years and received my citizenship through the gracious decision of our government.

In the passage that Pastor Sam read earlier **Philippians 3:20**, Paul writes, *“Our citizenship is in heaven.”*

This topic of citizenship is an important subject for those of us who are Christians. But the important thing for us is not whether we are citizens of the United States or the United Kingdom, but whether we are citizens of heaven.

Unlike the US...no one is born a citizen of heaven...we are granted that honor purely by divine grace...and we receive it through faith in Christ.

Citizenship was a very big deal in the city of **Philippi**. That city 600 miles from Rome, but it was a **Roman colony**. So, there were a large number of Roman citizens living in Philippi, especially retired military. Philippi was governed by Roman law. They practiced Roman customs. They dressed like Romans, they had Roman architecture. A Roman could go to Philippi and feel right at home. They did everything they could to bring a little bit of Rome into Philippi, because even while they lived in Philippi, their citizenship was in Rome.

The believers in Philippi took great pride in their Roman citizenship. But Paul tells them that it is not Roman citizenship that is so important, or any other earthly citizenship, for that matter. What really matters is that our citizenship is in heaven. He goes on to tell them that just as your Roman citizenship should affect the way you live from day to day, your heavenly citizenship should also affect the way you live, BUT to a much greater degree.

During the Oath Ceremony, the 30 or so folks who were about to be welcomed as citizens of the US had to take **The Oath of Allegiance** which details the conditions and responsibilities of a US citizen. Here's what it says

"I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen; ...that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; ...that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; ...that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law; ...that I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by the law; ...that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law; and ...that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God."

You can break down this oath into its component parts:

1. I must renounce all other allegiances

"I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen; - a change in loyalty

2. I must live by the Constitution

"that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; ...that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same;

- a change in beliefs (new code to live by)

3. I must be ready to defend the Constitution

that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law; - a change in leaders (new C.I.C)

4. I must be willing to serve the US

that I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by the law; ...that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law; - a change in service

5. I need God's help to be a good citizen

"...so help me God." - a change in supply

When we become Christians...become "citizens of heaven"... **a number of things should change in our lives.** We take a solemn oath to follow Christ and to live out our lives under His Lordship and according to the precepts contained in His Word. What Paul does in Philippians 3 is to draw a series of contrasts between those who follow the example of Jesus Christ – and to contrast them those whom Paul refers to as **"the enemies of the cross of Christ."** Here's what Paul says,

"Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained. Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. "For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself." (Philippians 3:15-21)

Philippians 3: 15-30 talks to us about what it means to be citizens of heaven. It gives us a clear contrast between two different kinds of people: The first group he mentions are those people whose minds are centered on the things of this world; and secondly, those people whose minds are centered on Jesus Christ and spiritual things.

What are the contrasts / differences he makes. First of all, there should be a difference in...

I. The Way We Live

In verse 17, Paul says to “*join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.*” And then, on the other hand, in verse 18, Paul talks about those who “*walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.*”

There are a couple of ways that we view those who Paul says are “enemies of the cross.”

These people are enemies of **the message of the cross**

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” 1 Cor 1:8 These are people offended by, and are in opposition to the Gospel itself.

I think there is a better understanding...and that is that

These people are enemies of **the way of the cross**

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

It’s not just that they are enemies to the **message** of the cross, but they were also enemies to the **way** of the cross, which is the way of discipleship.

Paul’s whole point in this passage is not just to give us the message of the cross, although he certainly does that, but it is to say, “**This is the way that we need to live.** Jesus Christ set the example. He gave us the example by going to the cross.” It’s the way of **humility**, it’s the way of **self-denial**, it’s the way of **service**, it’s the way of **sacrifice**. That’s the way of the cross, and Paul is saying that we are enemies to the cross of Christ if we reject that way of living, if we refuse the terms of discipleship, if we do not walk after the pattern of humility and servanthood and self-denial.

If the cross doesn’t change how we live, if it doesn’t change us, then we may be living as enemies of the cross. And so, the question this morning for all of us is this –What is your walk like? Are you walking **with** the cross, or walking **against** the cross?

Secondly, there should be a difference in...

II. The Way We Think?

Or maybe the better question is, what do you think about? And again, I want you to see the key words here in our text. In **verse 15**, *“Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.”*

In Philippians 2:5, Paul says, *“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.”* Have the mind of Christ, the mindset of Christ. Think about things the way Jesus thought about things.

In verse 19 he contrasts this with the mindset of the enemies of the cross of Christ. He says, *“Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.”*

On one hand you have a mind that is set on giving up everything for Christ. It's a mind **set on spiritual realities, eternal realities**. It's a spiritual mind. In contrast to that, there is this mind that is set on earthly things. **It's a worldly mindset. What does it mean to have our mind set on earthly things? It means that our absorbing, consuming thoughts are about temporary, this-world concerns: work, money, pleasure.**

But, he says, a spiritually-minded person is just the opposite of that. A spiritually-minded person is able to approach even earthly things with a spiritual mind. He does his work not just for the sake of the bottom dollar; he's doing it in obedience to God, he's doing it for the good of others, he's doing it to glorify and honor Jesus Christ.

Again, as Paul said in Colossians 3, *“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”* **(Colossians 3:1-2)**

So, is our mind focused on the things of this earth, or is our mind focused on things of an eternal nature?

So, first, there is the question of lifestyle (how do you live?), and second, there is the question of mindset (how do you think?). **The third difference Paul sees between these two groups has to do with....**

3. The Things We Prioritize?

Again, look at verse 19, Paul's description of the enemies of the cross of Christ. *"Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things."*

What does Paul mean when he says "Their god is their belly."? It means that they worship their appetites. It means they live to fulfill their every desire. These are people who are living for self. They are *"lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God."* And it's not just that they're living this way, they're proud of it. Paul said, *"They glory in their shame."* They ought to be ashamed of their behavior, but instead, they're proud of how they're living. **(What a picture of what is going on today...)**

In contrast to that, in verse 20, Paul says, *"Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ."* Because we are citizens of heaven, we walk differently, we conduct our lives differently, we have higher things to set our minds on. And the deepest desire we have is to be with Jesus Christ, the King of heaven, the King of glory. That's who we worship.

There is a final comparison we need to look consider...and that is

4. The Way We're Going?

In verse 19, Paul says of the enemies of the cross of Christ. *"Their end is destruction."* What is significant to me here, though, is what Paul says in verse 18, *"[I] tell you even with tears."* I don't think Paul was exaggerating. I think he truly was brought to tears knowing there were some who were headed for destruction. He took no joy in that fact...and neither should we!

But, if all our focus is on this world, living for self, living with shame or repentance, then there can't be any other end result, because this whole world is bound for destruction.

But there is something different that waits for those who live for God and His Kingdom. In verses 20. Paul says, *"Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself."*

For those who choose to follow the way of the Cross it's not destruction that waits for us, but **transformation**. God will transform us. He will make us completely new. As long as we live here on this earth, we have to deal with the problems associated with this body. But Paul says there is coming a day when that's no longer going to be the case. **You're going to be changed, you're going to be transformed.**

