

“LIVING IN THIS WORLD AS THOSE WHOSE CITIZENSHIP IS IN HEAVEN”

I. Introduction

- A. One of the challenges that we face as Christians has to do with our calling to conduct ourselves as citizens of heaven while living in a world that is at war with heaven.
- B. The apostle Peter experienced that challenge in Gethsemane when the band of soldiers arrived to arrest Jesus.
- C. As Peter drew his sword and brought down a blow that cut off a man’s ear, he thought he was setting his mind on things that are above.
- D. But in reality, he was waging war according to the flesh, as Jesus made clear when he rebuked him.
- E. Even though we are called to live in this world, the Scriptures instruct us to do so as those who belong to another world.
- F. The Christian’s heavenly citizenship is at the heart of what the apostle Paul has to say in tonight’s text from Philippians.

II. Looking to the Right Examples (17-19)

- A. In the first part of this passage, Paul’s focus is upon the importance of looking to the right examples to see how Christians ought to live.
 - 1. Paul says, “Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.”
 - 2. This is one of several places in Paul’s letters where we see him instructing Christians to follow his example.
 - 3. Paul obviously had no qualms about doing this.

4. He understood that Christian growth comes as believers see and follow the godly example that is set for them by more mature Christians.
 5. We need to see examples of Christian piety if that same piety is going to be cultivated in our own lives.
 6. I often find myself imagining how Christians whom I admire would respond to a certain situation, or how they would think about a certain matter.
 7. I can also recall a number of occasions in my life when a one-time interaction with a particular Christian has left a lasting impression on me.
 8. There is something very powerful about seeing Christ formed in the life of a fellow believer.
- B. Who is there in your life that you can look to as an example of Christian faithfulness?
1. You should always be on the look-out for such people.
 2. Be watching for examples of godliness in this congregation.
 3. And get to know the exemplary believers of the past.
 4. Pay careful attention to the lives of Old and New Testament saints.
 5. Learn about Christians like Athanasius, John Calvin, and Lady Jane Grey.
 6. Of course, you shouldn't expect to find perfection in any of these people.
 7. They all have their faults.

8. But you can and you should look for examples of faith that you can strive to imitate.
- C. The importance of such examples underscores the communal nature of the Christian faith.
1. We need to have other Christians in our lives.
 2. Your life as a Christian is not merely a private matter between you and Jesus.
 3. Your own sanctification and growth as a Christian is not merely a matter of concern to you.
 4. It has an effect upon the Christians around you.
 5. Pray that your life would never be a cause of stumbling to other Christians.
 6. Live so that your example as a Christian is worthy of imitation.
 7. Parents should be especially mindful of this.
 8. As Charles Spurgeon writes, "If we walk before the Lord with integrity, we shall do more to bless our descendants than if we bequeathed to them large estates. A father's holy life is a rich legacy for his sons." [*Cheque Book of the Bank of Faith*, Apr. 25]
- D. After pointing the Philippians to the positive example that they have in him and in other mature believers, Paul then warns them of negative examples that have the potential to influence them.
1. These people are described by Paul as those who "walk as enemies of the cross of Christ."
 2. We don't know the specific identity of the people to whom Paul was originally referring when he wrote this.

3. Whoever they were, they might not have thought of themselves as enemies of the cross.
 4. Nevertheless, their true allegiance was exposed by the way they conducted their lives.
 5. The fact that Paul says they were enemies of the *cross* is telling.
 6. This suggests that, unlike Paul, they were not willing to share in Christ's sufferings.
 7. It also suggests that, unlike Paul, they boasted in their own accomplishments rather than in the cross of Christ.
- E. In verse 19, the destiny and character of these people is described with four expressions.
1. The first of these is, "Their end is destruction."
 2. This is a reference to the final judgment.
 3. We should always remember that the ultimate end for all who spurn the way of the Lord and persist in going their own way is eternal torment.
- F. Next, Paul says that the god of those who walk as enemies of the cross is their belly.
1. That is, they are controlled by their appetites, living lives of self-indulgence and self-affirmation.
 2. They recognize no authority beyond themselves.
 3. In our day, this is manifested in the therapeutic mindset that is such a vital component of the narrative-framing done by our propagandistic media.

4. According to this mindset, certain classes of people are to be seen as victims rather than as responsible moral agents.
 5. And because of their victim status, reality needs to be brought into conformity with their feelings and desires.
 6. The prevalence of this mindset is what makes it possible for a teen boy who identifies as a girl to claim that he is being oppressed if he is prohibited from competing in female sports.
 7. The standard line of argument nowadays is that such people will commit suicide if their feelings are not affirmed.
 8. The problem with this argument is that when favored groups of people are allowed to have their feelings and desires override reality, harm and injustice are done to those who live within the constraints of reality.
 9. To assert that your personal feelings and desires are more important than objective facts and realities is to deify your feelings and desires.
 10. The person who does this is either a tyrant or is psychologically disturbed.
 11. It should be obvious that it is not good for that person or society to let him have his way.
- G. The next thing that Paul says about those who walk as enemies of the cross is that they glory in their shame.
1. There are two ways in which this happens.
 2. It happens when people place their spiritual confidence in themselves and their accomplishments rather than in Christ.
 3. Note how this contrasts with what Paul said earlier in this chapter, deeming the things in which he used to glory to be rubbish with

respect to attaining a right standing with God.

4. The other way people glory in their shame is when they have an inverted sense of morality and take pride in things that are in reality vile.
 5. We see this happen in a blatant manner every June, the month that the LGBTQ movement claims as "Pride Month."
- H. Lastly, Paul says that the minds of those who walk as enemies of the cross are set on earthly things.
1. They are focused on that which is passing away instead of that which will endure forever.
 2. Such people might accuse Christians of being escapist because our ultimate orientation is heavenward.
 3. That accusation would only be true if there is no other world.
 4. If there really is another world, and there most certainly is, then having your mind set on earthly things is the real escapism.
 5. To be earthly-minded is to live in denial of eternal realities.

III. Awaiting a Savior from Heaven (20-21)

- A. This brings us to the second part of our passage, where Paul reminds us that we are awaiting a Savior from heaven.
1. In saying this, Paul shows how Christians stand in sharp contrast to the people he described in verses 18 and 19.
 2. While the enemies of the cross have their minds set on earthly things, we are to have our minds set on the fact that our ultimate citizenship is in heaven.

3. Because our homeland is not here, we live as exiles and sojourners in this world.
 4. Our ultimate focus is not to be upon any of the short-term satisfactions that can be found in this world, but upon the eternal joy that awaits us in the world to come.
 5. Our chief loyalty is not to any earthly cause or kingdom, but to Jesus Christ and his kingdom.
 6. This does not mean that we should live like monks, seeking to retreat from the world.
 7. Jesus himself made that clear when he prayed to his Father saying, "I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one." (Jn. 17:15)
 8. But the idea that we are awaiting a Savior from heaven reminds us that we should have a constrained view of the good that we will be able to accomplish in this world.
 9. As these verses make clear, the hope of transformation is bound up with the return of our Lord.
- B. How should our heavenly citizenship affect how we live as God's people in this world?
1. There are two basic principles that can guide us in this.
 2. First, we always need to remember that the Lord has made a distinction between us and the people of this world.
 3. Whereas the people of this world are under the domain of darkness, God has graciously transferred us into the kingdom of his Son.
 4. Because of this, we are called to be holy.

5. As Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians, "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them." (Eph. 5:11)
 6. This means you always need to be on guard against the many ways in which the unbelieving world seeks to absorb you into itself by pressing you into its mold.
- C. The second principle that guides us in how to live in this world as citizens of heaven is that our Lord has ordained that we share a broad cultural commonality with our non-Christian neighbors.
1. While God calls us to cultivate rich fellowship with other believers, he does not want us to isolate ourselves from the rest of the world.
 2. He calls us to live in the world and to take part in its cultural life.
 3. We should cooperate with our non-Christian neighbors in promoting the prosperity and good order of our society.
 4. But as we do this, we should always remain mindful of the temporary nature of the things of this world.
 5. And we should accept the fact that we will never succeed in transforming our earthly societies into something that they are not.
 6. As long as this present age lasts, the common sphere will remain common rather than holy.
- D. In verses 20 and 21, Paul says that "we await a Savior [from heaven], the Lord Jesus Christ."
1. This is referring to the day when Jesus will return to the earth, conquer his enemies, raise the dead from their graves, and preside over the final judgment.
 2. This second coming of Christ is a fundamental tenet of the Christian faith.

3. This is why it is included in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.
 4. It is at the heart of our hope as believers.
 5. The Christian life is lived in light of that great day.
 6. We are to live expectantly, looking forward to the day when our redemption will finally reach its goal.
 7. Paul referred to that day back in chapter 1, saying that he was confident that the one who began a good work in the lives of the Philippian Christians will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.
- E. Waiting upon the Lord is one of the key features of biblical faith.
1. As David says in Psalm 130, "I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning."
 2. We don't like to wait, especially in our culture of high speed internet and next day delivery.
 3. But the Bible tells us that the fundamental posture of Christians in this present age is one of patient waiting.
 4. Of course, this does not mean that we are to be idle.
 5. Being watchful in the biblical sense means living in a manner that is consistent with our belief that the Lord Jesus could return at any moment.
- F. As we live in anticipation of Christ's return, we look forward to what our Savior will do for us on that day.
1. We look forward to the transformation of our bodies.

2. Paul tells us that Jesus “will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body.”
 3. At present, our bodies are lowly.
 4. When we are young, this reality is driven home to us by the fact that our bodies are so difficult to learn how to control.
 5. When we are old, it is made clear by the many ways in which our bodily vitality declines.
 6. And the lowliness of our bodies is not merely a physical matter.
 7. Even as Christians, though sin is no longer our master, our bodies remain inhabited and influenced by sin.
 8. Our great hope is that on the day of Jesus’s return, these lowly bodies will be changed into glorious bodies.
 9. They will be made to conform to the body of our risen Lord.
- G. Obviously, a transformation of this nature requires a power that surpasses anything in this world.
1. Try as he might, man will never be able to transform his lowly body into a glorious body.
 2. But it is no trouble at all for Jesus to do so.
 3. He is the victorious last Adam.
 4. He is God in glorified human flesh.
 5. As such, he has complete and total power over everything that exists.
 6. He has the power to subject all things to himself.

IV. Conclusion

- A. No matter how good life in this world is, it can never compare to the immortal glory that lies in store for Christians.
- B. As one writer puts it, "Sin, suffering, death, and struggle against the rulers, authorities, and powers will characterize creation until God regenerates it and makes it incorruptible at the [return of Christ]... Our eschatological hope lies wholly beyond the timeline of this unresurrected world." [<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/postmillennialism-a-biblical-critique/>]
- C. As we have said, we should seek the welfare of the societies in which we live.
- D. But as we do so, we always need to exhibit humility, patience, and a willingness to bear the cross.
- E. This is all the more important for believers who live in a spiritually declining society like ours.
- F. We need to remember that nothing that is earthly has the power to save and transform souls.
- G. For that we need a Savior from heaven.
- H. So conduct your life in this world in a manner that bears witness to the fact that you are confidently awaiting the return of the One who really does have the power to subject all things to himself.